

DASH & S-DASH GUIDANCE NOTES

(Version 2 March 2024)

The guidance notes can support you to complete a DASH risk assessment when there is a disclosure of domestic abuse. The DASH should be used in line with the DA Act 2021 definition of domestic abuse including anyone aged 16yrs or over, regardless of age, gender identity, religion, ethnicity, sex or any background. Domestic abuse can include physical, psychological, sexual or economic abuse as well as stalking and harassment and the abuse is underpinned by coercive and controlling behaviour due to a need to gain power and control. Someone might experience one or all types of abuse; each situation is unique. It can occur both during a relationship or after it has ended and it can involve partners, ex partners, wider family members including children.

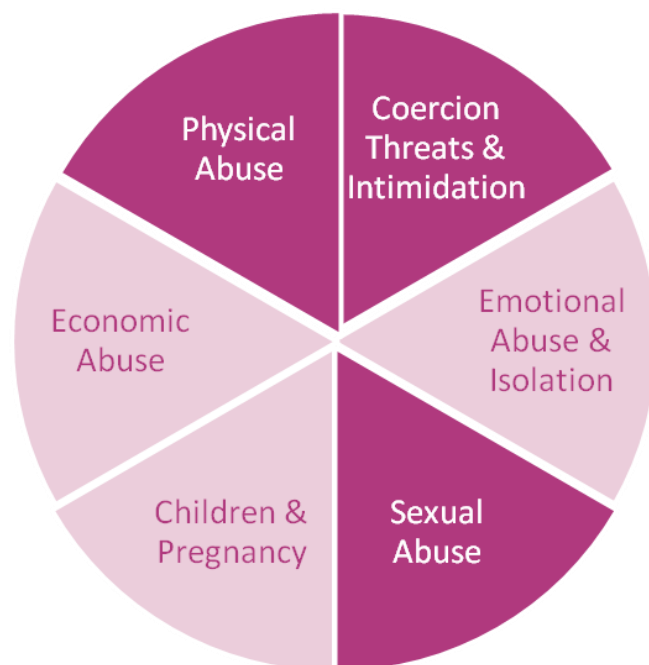
- ✓ The purpose of DASH is to give a consistent and simple tool for practitioners to complete with victims of domestic abuse, aged 16yrs and over.
- ✓ The DASH is a risk assessment tool for practitioners to look at current risk (*whilst still being aware of anything historical*) which helps you decipher which route to go down (*MARAC if high risk or outreach DA services if not*)
- ✓ DASH should be introduced to the victim within the framework of your agencies:
 - Confidentiality Policy
 - Information Sharing Policy and Protocols
 - MARAC Referral Policies and Protocols
- ✓ Before you begin to ask the questions:
 - Establish how much time/if its safe for the victim to talk to you now?
 - Establish the whereabouts and details of the perpetrator and any children;
 - Explain why you are asking these questions and what might happen after its completed.
- ✓ Whilst you are asking the questions:
 - Identify early on who the victim is frightened of – ex-partner/partner/family member
 - Use gender neutral terms such as partner/ex-partner to create a safe, accessible environment for all victims.
- ✓ Discussing the results of DASH with the victim: Telling someone that they are at high risk of serious harm or homicide may be frightening and overwhelming for them to hear. It is important that you state what your concerns are by using the answers they gave to you and your professional judgement. It is then important that you follow your area's protocols when referring to MARAC, outreach DA services and/or Children's/Adults Services.
- ✓ Identifying that someone is not currently high risk needs to be managed carefully to ensure that the person doesn't feel that their situation is being minimised and that they don't feel embarrassed about asking for help. Explain that these factors are linked to homicide and serious harm and that if s/he experiences any of them in future, that you would encourage them to disclose to a service and where safe to do so, call emergency services on 999 in an immediate crisis.
- ✓ Please pay particular attention to a practitioner's professional judgement in all cases. The results from a checklist are not a definitive assessment of risk. They should provide you with a structure to inform your judgement and act as prompts to further questioning, analysis and risk management whether via a MARAC or in another way.
- ✓ **Resources:** Be sure that you have an awareness of the safety planning measures you can offer, both within your own agency and other agencies. Be familiar with local and national resources to refer the victim to, including specialist services. The following websites and contact details may be useful to you:
 - ✓ LDASS – www.ldass.org.uk – 01522 510014
 - ✓ www.domesticabuselincsire.com

We ask about **PHYSICAL ABUSE** in questions 1, 11, 13, 14, 16, 18, 19, 21, 22 & 27

- ✓ Physical abuse can take many forms such as pushing, shoving, punching, use of weapons, strangulation, biting and suffocating to name a few.
- ✓ Ask if the abuse is getting worse, or happening more often. Ask if they know how many incidents there have been in the last year and if they have got worse. They should also consider keeping a diary marking when incidents take place to note any patterns.
- ✓ The incident that is currently being disclosed may not be the worst thing to have happened.
- ✓ The abuse might also be happening to other people in their household, such as their children or siblings or elderly relatives.
- ✓ They may have a history of being violent to 3rd parties, this is still relevant to risk.
- ✓ Violence can often be used against a family pet/animal.
- ✓ If an incident has just occurred the victim should call 999 for assistance from the police. If the victim has injuries they should try and get them seen and documented by a health professional such as GP or A&E Nurse.
- ✓ If historical information is being shared and it is not believed to have been reported, look to complete an Op Komoran form ([MARAC resources – Professional resources \(lincolnshire.gov.uk\)](#))

We ask about whether the victim is experiencing any form of **SEXUAL ABUSE** in question 19

- ✓ Sexual abuse can include the use of threats, force or intimidation. Deliberately inflicting pain during sex, or combining sex and violence and using weapons.
- ✓ It can be unwanted sexual touching and verbal abuse using sexualised terminology.
- ✓ If the victim has suffered sexual abuse you should encourage them to get medical attention and to report this to the police.



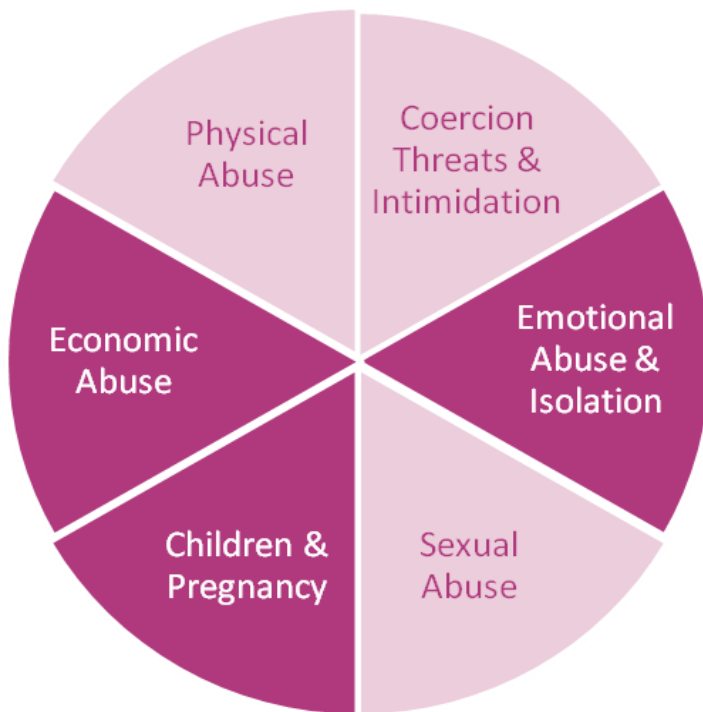
COERCION, THREATS AND INTIMIDATION can be covered in all questions. Please take extra note when it comes to Q 2,3,4,5,8,9,12,15,16,17,18,19,20,23,25,26.

- ✓ It is important to understand and establish: the fears of the victim in relation to what the perpetrator may do; who they are frightened of and who they are frightened for (i.e. children/siblings). Victims usually know the abuser's behaviour better than anyone else which is why this question is significant.
- ✓ Consider intersectionality - in cases of Honour Based Abuse there may be more than one abuser living in the home or in the wider family and community. This could also include female relatives.
- ✓ Stalking and harassment becomes more significant when the abuser is also making threats to harm themselves, the victim or others. They might use phrases such as "If I can't have you no one else can..." See *further guidance on SDASH below*.
- ✓ Other examples of behaviour that can indicate future harm include obsessive phone calls, texts or emails, uninvited visits to the victim's home, workplace etc, loitering and destroyed or vandalised property.
- ✓ Advise the victim to keep a diary of these threats, when and where they happen, if anyone else was with them and if the threats made them feel frightened.
- ✓ Separation is a dangerous time: establish if the victim has tried to separate from the abuser or has been threatened about the consequences of leaving. Being pursued after separation can be particularly dangerous. Please see 8 stages of homicide timeline [Domestic abuse resources – Professional resources \(lincolnshire.gov.uk\)](#)
- ✓ Victims can be in fear of the perpetrator without the need for them to be physical.
- ✓ Some perpetrators do not follow court orders or contact arrangements with children. This can show patterns of escalation in the abuse.
- ✓ It is important to remember that offenders with a history of violence are at increased risk of harming their current partner, even if the past violence was not directed towards intimate partners or family members. Discuss Clare's Law and offer support in applying/apply on victims behalf. Perpetrators can tell their victims a version of the truth regarding their criminal history.

ECONOMIC ABUSE – Question 23

- ✓ Victims of domestic abuse often tell us that they are financially controlled by their abuser. For example, they may rely on the abusers income, do not have access to benefits/their own bank account, or money is monitored at all times. This can impact a victims mental health and ability to leave/get support.

Please visit www.domesticabuselincolnshire.com for a list of support services.



EMOTIONAL ABUSE and **ISOLATION** can be present in all the questions. This can be experienced at the same time as the other types of abuse. It may be present on its own or it may have started long before any physical violence began. This can often result in victims blaming themselves, minimising and deny the abuse due to fear. Perpetrators often gaslight and love bomb victims so they have no safe breathing space to assess what is happening to them.

- ✓ The victim may be isolated from family or friends, have no support networks or access to money.
- ✓ Victims of honour based abuse talk about extreme levels of isolation and being 'policed' in and out of the home. This is a significant indicator of future harm/homicide.
- ✓ Due to the abuse and isolation, victims feel like they have no choice but to continue living with the abuser out of fear of what might happen if they try to leave. This can often have an impact on the victim's mental health and they might feel depressed or even suicidal.
- ✓ Equally the risk to the victim is greater if their partner/ex-partner has mental health problems such as depression and if they abuse drugs or alcohol. This can increase the level of isolation as victims can feel like agencies won't understand and will judge them. They may feel frightened that revealing this information will get them and their partner into trouble and, if they have children, they may worry that they will be removed.

CHILDREN & PREGNANCY – Questions 7, 9, 10, 11, 12 & 20 refer to being pregnant and children and whether there is conflict over child contact.

- ✓ The presence of children including step children can increase the risk of domestic abuse for the mother. They too can get caught up in the violence and suffer directly.
- ✓ Physical violence can occur for the first time or get worse during pregnancy or for the first few years of the child's life. There are usually lots of professionals involved during this time, such as health visitors or midwives, who need to be aware of the risks to the victim and children, including an unborn child.
- ✓ The perpetrator may use the children to have access to the victim, abusive incidents may occur during child contact visits or there may be a lot of fear and anxiety that the children may be harmed.
- ✓ Please follow your local Child Protection Procedures and Guidelines for identifying and making referrals to Children's Services.

Guidance notes for S-DASH.

Stalking is defined as (NPCC/CPS 2018): **A pattern of unwanted, fixated and obsessive behaviour** which is intrusive. It can include harassment that amounts to stalking or stalking that causes fear of violence or serious alarm or distress.

The S-DASH is not an assessment of the level risk like the DASH, however, it helps you to understand what risks there might be to your client regarding stalking, for example the duration of the stalking, the behaviours engaged in by the stalker, the details of the threats and/or violence, nature of unwanted 'gifts' left or sent to the client and the impact this may have on the client.

All of which allows you to be more informed and able to support them effectively.

National Stalking Helpline: Operated by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust, the National Stalking Helpline gives practical information, support, and advice on risk, safety planning and legislation to victims of stalking, their friends, family, and professionals working with victims.

Free phone: 0808 802 0300 E-mail: advice@stalkinghelpline.org www.stalkinghelpline.org

Paladin: National Stalking Advocacy Service - Paladin is a service for high-risk victims. High risk is defined as those who are at risk of serious harm and/or homicide.

Phone: 0203 866 4107 E-mail: info@paladinservice.co.uk www.paladinservice.co.uk

Professionals often refer to The 8 Stages of Homicide produced by Dr Jane Monkton Smith to understand the level of stalking, please visit [Domestic abuse resources – Professional resources \(lincolnshire.gov.uk\)](http://www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/domestic-abuse-resources-professional-resources)

Risk Factor Definitions – What the Research Tells Us

Q1. Are you very frightened?

Research demonstrates that the victim is frequently the best assessor of risk posed to them (Weisz et al. 2000). Stalking often consists of behaviours that, when taken at face value, may appear to be quite ordinary (e.g. walking past the victim's house, asking the victim to go out on dates). With repetition, however, these behaviours can become frightening leaving the victim can feel unsafe and threatened. In all cases (even those where no direct threat has been made or where the victim does not yet have a great deal of evidence) it is important that the extent of the victim's fear is recorded. Many victims state that it is the uncertainty of what the stalker will do next which causes them the most concern.

Q2. Is there a previous domestic abuse and/or stalking/harassment history? (involving you and/or anyone else that you know)

One of the best predictors of future behaviour is past behaviour and stalkers are no exception. Research shows that many victims will suffer more than 100 incidents before reporting to the police. Stalkers may also seem to stop stalking their victim (usually for reasons unclear to anyone but the stalker), only to suddenly resume it later to gain control.

Q3. Has (insert name of stalker(s).....) ever destroyed or vandalised any of your property?

Approximately 2/3 of stalker cause damage to property. Property damage may be associated with rage or frustration, revenge, a desire to harm something the victim cares about (i.e. destroying wedding photographs), to take away their feelings of a safe environment (i.e. by cutting brake cables).

Q4. Does (name of stalker(s).....) turn up at your workplace, home etc unannounced or uninvited more than three times per week?

Stalking rarely takes place at a distance. Some stalkers may appear or approach their victims regularly (i.e. on the victim's daily route to work). Others will appear in diverse places at unpredictable times. Often stalkers who turn up will end up attacking their victim, looking for an opportunity to do so.

Q5. Does (.....) follow you or loiter near your home, workplace etc?

Most stalkers, especially related to domestic abuse, will be seen by their victims. Such stalkers may be compiling victim-related information or tracking the victim's habits. Stalkers are a varied group and some will attempt to loiter secretly (even camping out on or in the victim's property), whilst others will make no attempt at concealment. Whether secretive or overt, whether mentally disordered or not, most stalkers will share a belief that their behaviour is an appropriate response to circumstances. If they do follow you or loiter near you, please keep a log of stalker sightings and behaviour.

Q6. Has (.....) made threats of physical or sexual violence?

Stalkers have been known to threaten violence months or even years into the future, and have indeed followed through on their threats. Stalkers frequently threaten their victim, either directly or indirectly. Examples of indirect threats include sending dead flowers or wreaths or violent images to the victim (often anonymously). Stalkers will often make specific written or verbal threats. **Research demonstrates that these should be taken particularly seriously:** 1 in 2 stalkers where there has been an intimate relationship, who make a threat, will act on it. Where there has been no relationship it is 1 in 10 (Mckenzie, McEwan, Pathé, James, Olgoff 2009).

Q7. Has (.....) stalked/harassed any third party since the stalking/harassment began? (e.g. your friends, family, children, colleagues, partners or neighbours of the victim)

On average, 21 people connected to the victim may be affected. Stalkers will involve third parties for a number of reasons. For example, to upset the victim (i.e. by harassing the victim's children), to obtain information on the victim (i.e. by approaching the victim's friends, this term is often called 'flying monkies'), to remove perceived obstacles between the stalker and victim (i.e. by harassing the victim's partner), and/or to punish those perceived as helping or shielding the victim (i.e. work colleagues who state that the victim is not available).

Q8. Has (.....) acted violently to anyone else during the stalking incident?

Secondary victims will be identified in a majority of stalking cases, and these can be a valuable source of evidential information. Persons perceived as preventing access to the victim or protecting the victim are at particular risk.

Q9. Has (.....) persuaded other people to help him/her? (wittingly or unwittingly)

The ability of a stalker to pose as other persons and/or to draw information out of third parties should never be underestimated. Technology, apps and social networking sites can facilitate harassment, enabling stalkers to impersonate another on-line; to send abusive material, misinformation and false messages and to trick other internet users into harassing or threatening a victim.

Q10. Is (.....) known to be abusing drugs and/or alcohol?

Often substance misuse by the stalker has been found to be associated with physical assault and escalation of behaviours.

Q11. Have they attempted/threatened suicide? (signs of finality and commitment)

Stalkers who threaten suicide – there is increased risk of murder to the victim. At the point they feel they are losing control, homicide is the ultimate act of control.

Q12. Do you know if (.....) has been violent in the past?

The abuse may not have always been physical towards the victim, but to others. Generally stalkers who have been violent before, whether as part of a stalking campaign or in relation to separate offences, are more likely to be violent again.

Dr Jane Monkton Smith has created the 8 Stages to Homicide Timeline [Domestic abuse resources – Professional resources \(lincolnshire.gov.uk\)](https://www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/domestic-abuse-resources-professional-resources) which professionals can use as a tool to identify levels of stalking as part of risk assessments.