



Domestic Abuse - Asking the question

It is now recognised good practice for many services to ask people about domestic abuse routinely or where other vulnerabilities indicate it would be appropriate. We know from talking to victims and survivors that it is hard for someone to disclose that they are experiencing domestic abuse. People need to feel that the person asking:

- is genuinely interested
- will be non-judgemental
- and will know how to respond if the answer is yes

Many victims may not use the label 'domestic abuse' for their experiences or they may not be familiar with the term (especially if they are speakers of other languages), or they may think that it only applies to physical violence. Therefore it is important to think about how to ask about domestic abuse before you do so.

Framing the Question

Where possible and appropriate, start with framing the question by explaining why you are asking.

For example:

"We know that many of our service users also have experiences of being hurt or frightened by a partner or family member so we ask everyone about these issues."

Or

"Because we care about your wellbeing, we also would like to find out if you have ever been hurt or frightened by your partner or a family member. We ask everyone this because we want everyone to be safe as possible. This will help us to provide the best support."

Explaining why you are asking is useful, particularly when talking to people who may be mistrustful and query the motives behind your questions.

Example introduction:

As part of our interview with everyone who comes to us for help, we always include questions about other issues besides [area of expertise of service]. We feel it is really important to help you with as many of your problems as we can. We understand that sometimes in order to help with one problem other problems must also be addressed. In homes where there is..., families often have other problems too. I'm going to ask some questions to see whether any of these things have

happened to you or your family. If we find that you need help, we will work with you to take whatever actions are necessary to ensure your safety.

Asking about Domestic Abuse

- *“How do you and your partner work out arguments / conflict / disagreements?”*
“Do arguments ever result in you feeling put down or bad about yourself?”
- *“Do you ever become frightened by what your partner says or does?”*
- *“Do arguments ever result in hitting, kicking or pushing?”*
- *“Has anyone ever been violent towards you? Who?”*
- *“Have you ever been forced to have unwanted sexual contact with your partner?”*
- *“Does your partner / someone at home control who you can and cannot see?”*
- *“Do you feel safe at home?”*

Further questions about Sexual Abuse

- *Has anyone ever made you do things sexually that you weren't comfortable with or hurt you?*
- *Do you feel like you have to have sex with your partner even when you don't want to?*

Further questions for **substance misuse** services:

- *“Has someone else who uses substances harmed or posed a threat to you or your children?”*
- *“What does your partner think about your substance use?”*
- *“Do you think there is a link between any of these problems and why you are here today?”*
- *“Does anyone make you it difficult for you to attend this service?”*