

DOMESTIC ABUSE NO EXCUSE.

Wirral 2020-25

If you are a victim of domestic abuse it is not your fault. You are not to blame and you are not alone. There are many others in your situation and help is available.

If you are a child or young person reading this and you are living with violence at home, or have in the past, you are not alone. There are people you can trust to help you, and your loved ones.

If you are someone who is harming a family member or partner (current or ex) through violence, abuse or control, you need to stop. There are people who can help you to change.

If you are worried that a friend, colleague, family member, neighbour, or employee is affected by domestic abuse there are people you can talk to. It's normal to be worried about 'interfering' or what might happen but talking about it will help.

For everyone affected by domestic abuse, this document outlines a commitment from your local services and organisations to help end the abuse, support you to recover and go on to live the life you want.

If we can talk about it, we can start to make the change.

There are many different types of abuse

Domestic abuse is any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This includes honour-based violence, female genital mutilation and forced marriage.

Honour-based violence, female genital mutilation and forced marriage are known collectively as Harmful Practices. They are forms of violence which have been committed, mainly against women and girls, in certain communities and societies for so long that they are considered, or presented by perpetrators, as part of accepted cultural practice. Although they are forms of domestic abuse they often require a different response from services and communities, and to help ensure that we offer the right support, we will co-produce a separate Harmful Practices Strategy which will be linked with this one.

This strategy focuses on helping people affected by the following types of abuse:

- **Controlling behaviour:** This is a range of acts designed to make a person inferior or dependent by not allowing you to see family or friends; controlling your finances; making you feel trapped; someone monitoring where you go and what you do; tracking your mobile phone; making you feel that if you speak out no one will believe you; pressurising you to become pregnant; always having to abide by someone else's rules.
- **Coercive control:** This is an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten you.
- **Emotional/psychological abuse:** This type of abuse can be described as someone who constantly stalks you either at home, work or outside; makes constant threats to harm or punish you, your children, a family member or pet; threaten to 'out' you for people in intimate relationships that identify as LGBT+; constantly belittles you; mocking your disability; accusing you of lying or making you feel mentally confused.

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- **Sexual abuse:** This can include pressuring you to have sex; making unwanted sexual demands that degrade and humiliate you; threatening to post or share sexual images of you (including via social media); hurting you during sex; forcing you to have sex with others; forcing you to do anything sexual against your will, including watching or looking at sexual material; not taking no for an answer is rape, even if you are married.
- **Physical abuse:** Types of physical abuse can include: slapping; kicking; punching; pushing; biting; burning; strangulation/choking/suffocation; use of weapons; denying you your medication and essential aids or equipment; involving others in the abuse.
- **Financial abuse:** Financial abuse can be described as your partner or family member: taking all your money/benefits/income; giving you a small allowance to live on; forcing you to take out multiple loans in your name; taking control of the household income.

All of the above are forms of abuse. All are damaging.

What we know about domestic abuse in Wirral (2019-20)

2,037 women & 749 men

were the victim of a domestic abuse crime in Wirral

In almost 50% of domestic abuse crimes the **perpetrator was an ex-partner**

There were **997 high risk referrals** to the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)

Outcomes for children living with domestic abuse were 31-34% lower than their peers at Key Stage 4

There were 275 perpetrators with **multiple victims**

834 individuals were the victim of **more than one domestic abuse crime**

In only 20.2% of cases did the **victim & perpetrator** live at the same postcode

Repeat Victimization Rate was 29% in Wirral and 31% Nationally

2,780 children referred to Children's Services because of domestic abuse

705 women & 2,128 men were recorded as perpetrators of domestic abuse

It's time for change

Previously our partnership took a *zero tolerance* approach to domestic abuse. Our intentions were good, we wanted domestic abuse to end, however, we have learned that it made people feel as though we took an 'all or nothing' stance - if you told a professional about domestic abuse you had to be prepared to end the relationship, leave your home or risk being accused of collusion. This sometimes meant that people waited longer than they should've to reach out for help. We want anyone affected by domestic abuse to know that **it's ok to talk about it** - we will listen, we will give you choices, we will support you to be in control.

We are recognising that everyone's situation is different, and a *one-size-fits-all* approach does not work. It's time for our partnership to be flexible in how we work, and recognise that people are more than a victim or perpetrator, that they are a person, member of a family, part of a community, and we need to be more holistic in our approach. Supporting the wider family can make a big difference in achieving longer-term change and better outcomes for everyone.

We have learned from local people's experience and national studies that the riskiest time for any victim of domestic abuse is immediately after the perpetrator has left or the relationship has ended. Where we have previously ended our support because the perpetrator is out of the house, we will not leave until we are reassured by the victim, and their children if they are parents, that they feel safe and have a strong network of support.

We know we need to do more to challenge and change the behaviour of perpetrators, rather than just focus all of our efforts on dealing with the impact of the abuse. The gap in service provision for perpetrators impacts on victims and children every day.

The impact of domestic abuse is far-reaching, causing a ripple effect into all parts of a person's life, health, financial stability, education, and mental wellbeing. Public services, community and private sector organisations need to work together to make a change. Data, statistics, public spending and the voice of the people affected, all tell us that it is time for change - **no excuse**.

Our commitment to you

The people who work with you have a responsibility to safeguard children and adults at risk. It is our duty, and there are statutory guidelines we must follow to do this. By working together, we can meet our responsibilities, keeping you and other vulnerable people safe.

Occasionally we may need to take action that can be difficult for those involved to accept. In these cases, we ask for understanding and trust that what we do is in the best interest of protecting children or adults at risk. We will always endeavour to help people understand what is happening, what the process involves, to be included in decision-making and kept informed. We want to work together in every case.

For people who feel they need extra support to understand child or adult protection processes advocacy can be made available.

You can find more information about our statutory responsibilities at www.wirral safeguarding.co.uk for children and www.merseysidesafeguardingadultsboard.co.uk for adults at risk.

Our ambition

We want to Wirral to be a place where as few people as possible are affected by domestic abuse, but those who are can get help to end the abuse and go on to live the lives they want.

We hope to turn our ambition into a reality by focussing on five priorities:

- 1.** Be there when we're needed
- 2.** Increase safety for those at risk, without adding to their trauma
- 3.** Reduce opportunities for perpetrators to abuse
- 4.** Support people to live the lives they want after harm occurs
- 5.** A better, kinder future for the next generation

Priority 1: Be there when we're needed

We've listened to the experiences of local people and what we've learned is:

- Telling someone about domestic abuse can be really hard
- Timing is important- when people are ready to talk they need someone ready to listen, and not to pass them on to someone they've never met
- Too many victims feel that they are met with judgement and criticism, as though it's their fault
- Having a safe place to go, and people who know what you're going through makes a big difference

"I wish there had been somewhere like that (a hub) when I was going through it. I made so many doctors appointments to get help, but the appointment would come round and I'd never go. If I could've just walked in and been able to talk to someone straight away, I might have left sooner."

Being there when we are needed means:

- ✓ We will work together to provide help no matter who you are or what your circumstances might be, whether this is the first time it's happened or the twentieth, whether it happened today or months ago, whether you want to speak with someone face-to-face or anonymously
- ✓ We will introduce a 'no wrong door' approach across services and organisations in Wirral so that no matter who you ask for help you get it and are treated with respect and understanding
- ✓ We will work together to give you places to go and people to speak to who know what you're going through
- ✓ We will make greater efforts to wrap around children who have been affected by domestic abuse to ensure they can attend education, take part, learn and socialise, as well as get the emotional support they need for good mental wellbeing
- ✓ We will look harder and listen closer to those people who may be at an increased risk of abuse but are unable to speak out, including older people who may be abused by adult children or their care-givers

Priority 2: Increase safety for those at risk, without adding to their trauma

We've listened to the experience of local people and what we've learned is:

- Too often victims of domestic abuse feel revictimised by statutory services and processes- losing their homes, their jobs, support networks, and in some cases, custody of their children
- Small measures like new door and window locks can make a big difference
- Too few victims had worked with a professional to complete a domestic abuse risk assessment and safety plan
- Parents know that workers will prioritise protecting children, but too often feel that the responsibility to keep children safe sits entirely with the victim

“Keeping a victim in their children in their own home and feeling safe is a longer-term solution that gives them stability and resilience. Moving every time the perpetrator finds them raises risk, moving schools is not the solution for all cases. If you can help victims to feel safe, they can then act safe.”

Increasing safety for those at risk, without adding to their trauma means:

- ✓ We will involve those of you who wish to share your experience in the training of workers and wherever possible, the delivery of services
- ✓ We will work together to ensure that victims have the choice to stay at home or move, and where they wish to stay at home they are supported to do so safely
- ✓ We will establish a support network for your friends and family (victims, survivors and perpetrators) so that they can be there for you now and in the future
- ✓ We will provide specialist advice/advocacy and target hardening measures, such as new locks, to victims who believe it will help to make them safer
- ✓ We will work with all services in Wirral to ensure they have a domestic abuse champion in their team who can work with you to complete a risk assessment and safety plan

Priority 3: Reduce opportunities for perpetrators to abuse

We've listened to the experiences of local people and what we've learned is:

- Too many victims of domestic abuse feel that it never ends, especially when perpetrators use child contact as a means to continue controlling and manipulative behaviour
- Support for victims through criminal justice processes and Family Courts is inconsistent and can lead to them feeling exposed and revictimised
- Violence and abuse from ex-partners is increasing
- Lack of behaviour change programmes for perpetrators means that they are not effectively challenged to stop
- Clare's Law (Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme), which allows a member of the public to ask the Police if a partner poses a risk to them, is not widely known, understood or used

"I spent years of my life being dragged to court by a perpetrator who only wanted to have control over our life."

Reducing opportunities for perpetrators to abuse means:

- ✓ We will improve the lives of victims, and their children if they have them, by introducing an evidence-based programme for perpetrators of domestic abuse, available to anyone who wants help to stop abusing their partner (current or ex)
- ✓ We will work together to strengthen our offender management approach and keep you safe
- ✓ We will help your voice to be heard by the Criminal Justice System and Family Courts, by working alongside national organisations like Victim Support and Child and Family Court Advisory Support Service (CAFCASS)
- ✓ We will help you to know your rights and access support as described in The Victim's Code, helping you get Peer Support to help you through legal processes, and use schemes like Clare's Law
- ✓ We will listen to, and act on, the wishes and feelings of children and young people on their contact arrangements with parents

Priority 4: Support people to live the lives they want after harm occurs

We've listened to the experiences of local people and what we've learned is:

- Peer support on a 1:1 basis or in groups is valued
- Counselling and specialist programmes can make a big difference to how well people recover from their experience
- Rebuilding confidence, in yourself, other people, and 'the system' can be a major challenge
- Too many people feel let down, that they have to 'start over' with very little in terms of belongings, finances and support

"People say they understand but they don't, how can they unless they know what it feels like to be so scared you can't sleep and yet when someone asks you how you are you say you are fine. She (peer mentor) got it straight away and I knew it wasn't just me."

Supporting people to live the lives they want after harms occurs means:

- ✓ We will invest more in peer support and peer mentoring for all of you- victims, survivors, perpetrators, children and young people, friends and family
- ✓ We will work together to make sure where you have to 'start over' you are well supported to get the things you need for your home, your family and normal day to-day life
- ✓ We will work with our partners to provide you with tailored opportunities for lifelong learning and employment
- ✓ We will work together as a partnership to increase access to recovery programmes and counselling in a variety of ways and locations
- ✓ We will be grateful to learn from your experience and involve you in volunteering, supporting others, and/or contributing to service development

Priority 5: Create a brighter, kinder future for the next generation

We've listened to the experiences of local people and what we've learned is:

- Everyone involved wants domestic abuse to end
- People believe that education is key to a better future
- Those who are parents want their children to live safely and without stigma
- Many people are worried that young people are exposed to negative messages about sex, relationships and respect

“I grew up in a house where it was normal for my dad to hit my mum all the time and my mum would make excuses for him. I grew up thinking it was normal and I think that’s the reason I didn’t leave my abusive ex-partner sooner, I thought it was normal. I’m so glad my daughter did (a domestic abuse course for children) and understands that it’s not normal but not every child gets that, so it should be part of the curriculum just like maths or English.”

Creating a brighter, kinder future for the next generation means:

- ✓ We will work with ambition to remove the stigma attached to being a victim of domestic abuse
- ✓ We will use your experience and voices of local people to raise awareness, encourage people to talk about domestic abuse and to get help
- ✓ We will co-ordinate education programmes and learning for children, from pre school to adulthood, on healthy relationships, kindness and respect
- ✓ We will invite our local communities to work alongside us to understand domestic abuse and support our campaign to create a future free from violence and abuse
- ✓ We will provide learning opportunities for workers, services, organisations and partners to help them to better help you and future generations

How we will deliver this strategy

This is a 5-year partnership strategy, which we will deliver in 3 phases.

Phase 1 (Years 1 & 2) - Transformation Phase

In the first two years of this plan we will focus on improving your experience of support services, making it easier to access support and making sure there is help for everyone who needs it. We will invest in a large-scale workforce training on trauma informed practice to make sure that whomever you speak to, they respond in a helpful, non-judgemental way and have the information and tools at their fingertips to help.

We will do some more work to engage with underrepresented groups, such as elderly, LGBTQ, pregnant women, people with learning difficulties and disabilities and people living in more affluent areas, to understand how they are affected by domestic abuse and what help they need and make sure we have the necessary expertise within our workforce.

We will begin longer-term media campaigns and engagement with the Criminal Justice System and Family Courts.

We will pilot a number of new initiatives and co-ordinate education for children and young people.

Phase 2 (Year 3) - Adjustment Phase

In year 3 we will take stock of learning, evaluations of pilots, feedback, and service reviews from the transformation stage. We will reflect on our findings and make any necessary adjustments. We will support a transfer of leadership from services to Peers and Supporters.

Phase 3 (Years 4 & 5) - Embedding Phase

We expect to have confidence and assurance that we are doing the right things and have evidence that we're making a positive difference to people's lives and across communities. We will focus on making sure we're getting it right time after time. We will increase the pace and intensity of our media campaigns, working hard for a lasting cultural change in Wirral.

A delivery plan accompanies this strategy, giving further detail of activity and timescales.

Looking to the future

Some of the things we want you to see and experience 2 years from now:

- When someone asks for help (victim, survivor, perpetrator, child, friend or family member) they are met with a caring, understanding and informed response that gets them the help that they need
- Children who have been affected by domestic abuse receive the help they need to ensure that their experience doesn't have a long-term negative impact on their well-being or outcomes.
- Survivors and peer mentors are improving services for people affected by domestic abuse through co-production and joint delivery
- Support for victims of domestic abuse is victim-led, empowering and provides choice
- Every agency has at least one domestic abuse champion who is able to risk assess and co-produce safety plans
- All children and young people in the borough learn about domestic abuse, healthy relationships and respect
- Greater understanding of and ability to identify coercive control

Some of the things we want you to see and experience 5 years from now:

- Far less victims, far less perpetrators, and far less incidents of domestic abuse
- Less stigma attached to being the victim of domestic abuse
- People are comfortable talking about domestic abuse
- We feel assured that groups who are currently under-represented are able to be identified, access help and receive the support they need from people with the right expertise
- Victims of domestic abuse feel protected, have confidence in our management of perpetrators and do not get trapped in a cycle of abuse
- Through consistent public relation campaigns, residents and communities within Wirral stand together against domestic abuse
- The achievement gap, for children affected by domestic abuse and their peers, closes

Living up to our commitment to you

Your voice counts

This strategy is the product of many conversations with different groups of people across Wirral. It is the first part of a five-year conversation.

We ask all of you, regardless of who you are or what your experience is, to engage with us so that we can learn together and make strides towards a safer, healthier, happier Wirral for everyone.

We will be establishing:

- Voice Groups, led by Peers, to keep the conversations going
- An online forum to keep you updated our progress
- Membership on Wirral's Domestic Abuse Alliance for people to represent victims, perpetrators, and their families

At any time, you are welcome to share your views, experiences or information relating to domestic abuse services by emailing wecantalkaboutit@wirral.gov.uk

Making sure we do what we've committed to

We have a local Domestic Abuse Alliance, which has senior membership from across services and community groups, including the Children's Services, Adult Health & Care Services, NHS, Public Health, schools and education providers, housing, voluntary and community sector, Police, probation, substance and alcohol services, and others. This group meets every 2 months and is responsible for making sure that the commitments outlined in this strategy are delivered.

The Domestic Abuse Alliance is represented by an Assistant Director at the relevant Council Committees (the Children, Young People and Education Committee and the Adult Health and Care Committee), the Health and Wellbeing Board, and through the Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements for Children in Wirral and Adults in Merseyside.

Committee Chairs and the Elected Member Champion for Domestic Abuse will work on your behalf to ensure that we do what we've committed to.

**Concluding note from people affected
by domestic abuse:**

**“Thank you for letting us share
the voices of all in this.**

**It is truly a great platform for
good things to start taking place.”**

We're here to help

Family Safety Unit

To access support from an Independent Domestic Violence Advocate
Call: 0151 666 4914

Involve NW

To access support from a peer mentor or domestic abuse programme
Call: 0151 644 4500
Email: info@involenorthwest.org.uk

Tomorrow's Women

To access 1:1 support or domestic abuse programme
Call: 0151 647 7907
Or visit: @tomorrowswomen on twitter or Instagram

Wirral Women and Children's Aid (Wirral Refuge)

To access support and advice from the refuge
Call: 0151 643 9766 (24 hours)

Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre

For 1:1 support and advice
Call: 0151 558 1801
Email: westwirral@rasamerseyside.org

WEB Merseyside Men Too

To access support specifically for men
Call: 0151 653 3771

Paul Lavelle Foundation

For support to male victims of domestic abuse
Email: info@paullavellefoundation.co.uk

Wirral Ways to Recovery

To access support and recovery programmes for alcohol and substances
Call: 0151 556 1335
Email: wirral.services@cgl.org.uk

Wirral Multi-Cultural Centre

To access support, advice and advocacy for a range of issues
Call: 0151 792 5116
Email: wirral.services@cgl.org.uk

Support 4 Men

To access 1:1 advice and support specifically for men
Call: 0151 317 4333
Email: info@support4men.co.uk

Next Chapter Healthy Relationships Project

For domestic abuse programmes and 1:1 advice on legal issues
Call: 07368 601367

There's lots more information and advice on our partnership domestic abuse website, including contact information for National Charities and organisations www.itsneverokwirral.org

