

**THE
BIG
LiFE
GROUP**

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND
ABUSE POLICY**

Domestic Violence and Abuse Policy

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1. Aim

The Big Life Group is committed to heightening awareness of domestic violence and abuse by providing guidance for all staff and volunteers whose work brings them into contact with children or adults that may be at risk of domestic violence and abuse.

Big Life recognises that its employees and volunteers will be among those affected by domestic violence and abuse; for example, a person who is living with domestic abuse, someone who has been impacted upon by domestic abuse or as an individual who perpetrates domestic abuse.

The policy aims to:

- Promote that Big Life will not tolerate domestic violence and abuse.
- Outline assistance available to staff, volunteers and service users who may be affected personally by domestic violence and abuse.
- Outline the approach Big Life will take where there are concerns that an employee, volunteer or service user may be the perpetrator of domestic violence and abuse.
- Outline the approach Big Life staff or volunteers should take for ensuring the safeguarding of children and adults from exposure to domestic violence and abuse.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all staff and volunteers, who may come into contact with children and or adults or who themselves may be victims of domestic violence and abuse, and require advice or help. This policy should be read in conjunction with the group's Safeguarding Policy and local authority safeguarding reporting procedures.

3. Definition

For the purposes of this policy, domestic abuse is defined as: 'Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 years or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality'.

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This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse (Home Office, 2013):

- Psychological
- Physical
- Sexual
- Financial
- Emotional

Controlling behaviour: A range of acts designed to make a person subordinate or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape, and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour: An act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.

This definition, which is not a legal definition, includes so called 'honour' based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage, and is clear that victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group.

4. Impact of domestic violence and abuse on children

Exposure to domestic abuse is **always** abusive to children, although the impact on them may vary. Section 120 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 clarifies the definition of significant harm outlined in the Children Act 1989: "Any impairment of the child's health or development as a result of witnessing the ill-treatment of another person, such as domestic violence".

5. Domestic violence and abuse and the workplace

Everyone has the right to a life free from abuse in any form. Domestic abuse is wholly unacceptable and inexcusable behaviour, and responsibility for domestic abuse lies with the perpetrator.

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Big Life strives to create a working environment that promotes the view that abuse against people is unacceptable and that such abuse will not be condoned or made the subject of jokes or graphics. Employees should also be aware that conduct outside of work could lead to disciplinary action being taken.

Big Life will aim to create an environment where staff and volunteers feel safe to seek support if they are suffering Domestic Abuse. We will provide training to all staff and volunteers to spot signs of DV&A and specific training for managers to ensure concerns are dealt with in a supportive and non-judgemental way.

Big Life will take seriously any incidents of Domestic Abuse perpetrated by staff or volunteers. Domestic abuse perpetrated by employees or volunteers will not be condoned under any circumstances nor will it be treated as a purely private matter. Big Life recognises that it has a role in encouraging and supporting employees and volunteers to address violent and abusive behaviour of all kinds.

If an employee or volunteer approaches Big Life about their abusive behaviour, Big Life will provide information about the services and support available to them, including, if necessary, time off work to attend perpetrator programmes.

Big Life will treat any allegation, disclosure or conviction of domestic abuse related offence on a case-by-case basis with the aim of reducing risk and supporting change. Big Life views the use of violence and abusive behaviour by an employee, wherever this occurs, as a breach of the organisation's Code of Conduct for disciplinary purposes and may lead to termination of employment.

Confidentiality in the workplace

Employees and volunteers who disclose they are experiencing domestic abuse can be assured that the information they provide is confidential and will not ordinarily be shared without their permission. There are, however some circumstances in which confidentiality cannot be assured.

These occur when there are safeguarding concerns about children or vulnerable adults, or where the employer needs to act to protect the safety of employees and volunteers. For example, if an employee or volunteer discloses domestic abuse and are known to care for children or vulnerable adults, Big Life must contact the local authority safeguarding and vulnerable adults services.

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Big Life will inform the staff member or volunteer of any actions, unless by doing so we are potentially endangering people. Information will only be shared on a need-to-know basis. Please refer to the Safeguarding Policy for more details.

All records regarding domestic abuse will be kept strictly confidential. Improper disclosure of information, such as breaches of confidentiality by any member of staff, will be taken seriously and may be subject to disciplinary action.

Supporting employees affected by domestic violence and abuse

The group is aware that domestic abuse victims may have performance problems such as chronic absenteeism or lower productivity as a result of domestic abuse, and will make every effort to respond sympathetically. When addressing performance and safety issues, the organisation will make reasonable efforts to consider all aspects of the employee's situation and safety.

The organisation will make every effort to assist an employee who discloses they are experiencing domestic abuse. If an employee needs to be absent from work due to domestic abuse, the length of the absence will be determined by the individual's situation through collaboration with the employee and the team leader or manager, human resources, trade union representative, absence manager, wellbeing champion and so on.

Employees, managers, and team leaders are encouraged to first explore paid leave options to help the employee cope with the situation without having to take unpaid leave. Depending on circumstances, these options may include:

- Temporary or permanent changes to working times and patterns.
- Changes to specific duties
- Redeployment or relocation
- Measures to ensure a safe working environment, for example changing a phone number to avoid harassing calls.
- Flexible working
- Access to counselling or support services in paid time.
- Access to courses developed to support those affected by domestic abuse.

Managers will respect the right of staff to make their own decision on the course of action at every stage. Managers will complete a wellbeing passport and offer support services, including occupational health, independent counselling services, to staff (see Staff Wellbeing Policy).

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Safety planning in the workplace

Big Life will prioritise the safety of employees if they make it known that they are experiencing domestic abuse. When an employee discloses domestic abuse, Big Life will encourage its employees to contact a specialist support agency who can undertake a Domestic Abuse Stalking and Harassment (DASH) risk assessment (see Appendix One) and make appropriate referrals where necessary.

They will, if necessary and with the employees consent, work with the specialist agency to identify what actions can be taken to increase their personal safety at work and at home as well as address any risks there may be to colleagues.

As soon as the company is made aware of a safety issue, the employee's managers will carry out a risk assessment with the employee and identify measures to minimise risk in the workplace including:

- Work schedule adjustments
- Workplace relocation (if available)
- Additional security arrangements.

All workplace records are to be kept securely on the HR Database; however, if there is an identified safeguarding concern, refer to the employee flowchart (Appendix Two), which identifies the pathway if safeguarding is an identified concern with an employee or volunteer.

6. Domestic violence and abuse in service delivery

It is important to note that domestic violence and abuse affects everyone involved. If a person discloses domestic violence and abuse and they are either vulnerable, have a vulnerable adult staying with them or a child present and are at risk of harm, we would expect this to be escalated as a safeguarding concern or incident. Refer to the safeguarding policy for the reporting process.

Roles and Responsibilities

Alerter: You are an alerter if you work in a back-office role or if you work in a frontline role but are not responsible for conducting in-depth or holistic assessments. Examples include reception staff, school staff, GPs, back office staff, commissioning staff, project staff, officers who work in human resources and some managers. Refer to Appendix Three for the Alerter Flowchart.

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Assessor: You are an assessor if you work in any assessment or support role that requires you to complete assessments with people. You could also be an assessor if you are a designated person (for example, within a school). Examples of the job roles this would encompass are housing related support officers, social workers, specialist substance misuse workers, mental health practitioners, case workers, key workers, family support workers, and some managers. Please refer to Assessor flowchart in Appendix Four.

The key difference between the two roles is that an assessor is expected to safely enquire into domestic abuse with all people as good practice.

Regardless of your role you should:

- Listen to what you are being told and believe the person – don't patronise or assume you know the best course of action to follow.
- Prioritise the safety of the family – with the safety of a child and vulnerable adult being paramount. Acting on a concern is vital but **how** you do that is important, before you do anything, check: "will what I am about to do improve safety?"

Safe Enquiry

Routinely or selectively asking about whether someone is experiencing domestic abuse is known as safe enquiry.

Research shows that victims of domestic abuse will not usually voluntarily disclose domestic abuse to a professional unless they are directly asked. While women may be reluctant to disclose what is happening to them, they are often hoping someone will ask them if they are experiencing abuse. Repeated enquiry at multiple consultations increases the chance of disclosure.

We recognise that safe enquiry is an important domestic abuse intervention even where it does not result in disclosure. If a person is experiencing domestic abuse but chooses not to disclose they should be routinely offered information about domestic abuse services to take away and so are not required to disclose in order to be given information.

The person will also know that you, and your organisation, take the issue of domestic abuse very seriously and, if they take information away with them, it can allow them to become better advocates for their friends and family.

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Safety and confidentiality

- Always ensure you are alone with the person before enquiring into possible abuse – never ask in front of a partner, colleague, friend or child.
- Make sure you can't be interrupted and that you – and the person – have sufficient time.
- Only use professional interpreters, if required.
- Do not enquire if the person lacks the capacity to consent to the interview.
- Document the person's response. This should be in a secure database or your services agreed paper records. In both instances, data protection principles should be adhered to.

7. Reporting procedures when domestic violence and abuse is disclosed or identified

DASH form for assessing risk and making referrals to specialist domestic violence and abuse services

It is important to note that each local authority will have their own referral process. The most commonly used risk assessment is called the DASH risk assessment (Appendix One).

This form can be used by assessors for employees, volunteers or service users as it is designed to capture as much information about the disclosure as possible including:

- Their relationship to the perpetrator.
- How many children live at home.
- Any children who have a social worker, or is on a child in need or child protection plan.
- Any adults at risk (vulnerable adults) who live in the home.
- How safe do they feel.
- Any information offered or taken.
- Any referrals to statutory or voluntary services made.
- Any services already involved.
- Any injuries they disclose or show you.
- Any incidents described or emotional effects of the abuse on them.
- Their specific demographics such as ethnicity, gender, age and so on.
- Remember to safety plan – see [an online example from End the Fear](#).

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Enquiring and asking the questions

Make sure you fully explain your reasons for enquiring into domestic abuse AND the limits of your confidentiality. An example of how you could begin would be:

- One in four women are affected by domestic abuse and, because we know it's common, we ask women about domestic abuse (as a routine). Domestic abuse isn't just physical abuse. It can also be financial, sexual and emotional and it also includes forced marriage.
- The only time I would tell anyone anything you told me would be if a child was in danger or if I or another adult was in serious danger from someone's behaviour. Even then, I would always discuss it with you first if I could and we would do everything we could to support you.

Other helpful messages when talking about domestic violence and abuse:

- Domestic violence and abuse is totally unacceptable. Every person has the right to live their life free of violence, abuse, intimidation and fear.
- Nobody deserves to be abused, regardless of what they say or do.
- The abuser is 100 percent responsible for the abuse. Alcohol, culture or unemployment are not excuses.
- A person has the right to safety and respect, to put themselves and their children first and to focus on their needs.

Then, ask direct questions into their circumstances. For example:

- Does anyone close to you, for example a partner, ex-partner or family member, make you feel frightened?
- Has anyone close to you ever hurt you physically, for example, hit you, pushed you, slapped, choked you or threatened you in any way?
- Does anyone close to you bully you, control you or force you into things?

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If you work with **adults with additional needs** – for example, older people or people with serious physical impairments – questions that relate more specifically to their circumstances may help you to establish if abuse is present. Research suggests that the following questions may help in relation to these people:

- Has anyone prevented you from getting food, clothes, medication, glasses, hearing aids or medical care, or from being with people you wanted to be with?
- Has anyone tried to force you to sign papers or to use your money against your will?
- Have you been upset because someone talked to you in a way that made you feel shamed or threatened?

If you have completed a DASH assessment form and are considering making a referral you will need to contact your local authority MARAC team or contact centre for further advice and next steps.

Assessment questions for perpetrators

In some cases, for example where a perpetrator's abuse has been openly stated as an issue and the enquirer is either a professional supporting the adult or family and or a colleague or manager of the perpetrator, it may be appropriate to speak to the perpetrator directly about the abuse.

Your response to any disclosure, however indirect, could be significant for encouraging accountability and motivating perpetrators towards change. Information provided by the perpetrator could also enhance existing risk management plans.

Good practice requires that we are clear with abusers that the abuse is **always** unacceptable and that we affirm any accountability shown. Be respectful but **do not** collude and explain that there is no entitlement to confidentiality if others are at risk. In all cases be guided by child and adult safeguarding procedures.

Useful questions to ask include:

- It sounds like your behaviour can be frightening; does your partner say she is frightened of you?

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- How are the children affected?
- Have the police ever been called to the house because of your behaviour?
- Are you aware of any patterns – is the abuse getting worse or more frequent?
- How do you think alcohol or drugs affect your behaviour?
- What worries you most about your behaviour?
- How do you feel about your behaviour? What effect has it had on you?
- What effect has your behaviour had on your partner or children?
- What has been the worst occasion of violence?
- It sounds like you want to make some changes for your benefit and for your partner or children. What choices do you have? What can you do about it? What help would assist you to make these changes?

Big Life internal reporting process

Any domestic violence and abuse incident or concern relating to an employee should follow the flowchart in Appendix Two, with any records saved to their personal records on the HR Database. If the concern or incident relates to a service user, we would expect the assessor flowchart to be followed, which details external and internal reporting procedures.

It is important to note that if there are any safeguarding concerns that the reporting process for safeguarding must be followed.

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Appendix One: Safe lives DASH risk checklist

Aim of the form

- To help frontline practitioners identify high risk cases of domestic abuse, stalking and 'honour'-based violence.
- To decide which cases should be referred to Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (Marac) and what other support might be required. A completed form becomes an active record that can be referred to in future for case management.
- To offer a common tool to agencies that are part of the Marac process and provide a shared understanding of risk in relation to domestic abuse, stalking and 'honour'-based violence. For further information, refer to the [10 Principles of an Effective Marac](#).
- To enable agencies to make defensible decisions based on the evidence from extensive research of cases, including domestic homicides and 'near misses', which underpins most recognised models of risk assessment.

How to use the form

Before completing the form for the first time we recommend that you read the full practice guidance and FAQs. These can be downloaded at [Safe Lives](#). Risk is dynamic and can change very quickly. It is good practice to review the checklist after a new incident.

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.

The responsibility for identifying your local referral threshold rests with your local Marac.

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Recommended referral criteria to Marac

Professional judgement: If a professional has serious concerns about a victim's situation, they should refer the case to Marac. There will be occasions where the particular context of a case gives rise to serious concerns even if the victim has been unable to disclose the information that might highlight their risk more clearly.

This could reflect extreme levels of fear, cultural barriers to disclosure, immigration issues or language barriers particularly in cases of 'honour'-based violence. This judgement would be based on the professional's experience or the victim's perception of their risk even if they do not meet criteria 2 or 3 below.

'Visible High Risk': The number of 'ticks' on this checklist. If you have ticked 14 or more 'yes' boxes, the case would normally meet the Marac referral criteria.

Potential Escalation: the number of police callouts to the victim as a result of domestic violence in the past 12 months. This criterion can be used to identify cases where there is not a positive identification of a majority of the risk factors on the list, but where abuse appears to be escalating and where it is appropriate to assess the situation more fully by sharing information at Marac. It is common practice to start with 3 or more police callouts in a 12 month period but this will need to be reviewed depending on your local volume and your level of police reporting.

What this form is not

This form will provide valuable information about the risks that children are living with, but is not a full risk assessment for children. The presence of children increases the wider risks of domestic violence and stepchildren are particularly at risk. If risk towards children is highlighted, consider what referral you need to make to obtain a full assessment of the children's situation.

SafeLives Dash risk checklist for use by Idvas and other non-police agencies for identification of risks when domestic abuse, 'honour'- based violence and stalking are disclosed. This checklist is consistent with the ACPO endorsed risk assessment model DASH 2009 for the police service.

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Name of victim	
Date	
Restricted when complete	

Explain that the purpose of asking these questions is for the safety and protection of the individual concerned. Tick the box if the factor is present. Please use the comment box at the end of the form to expand on any answer. It is assumed that your main source of information is the victim. If not, please indicate in the righthand column.

Question	Yes	No	Don't know	State source if not the victim
1. Has the current incident resulted in injury? Please state what and whether this is the first injury. Comment:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2. Are you very frightened? Comment:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3. What are you afraid of? Is it further injury or violence? Please give an indication of what you think [name of abuser(s)] might do and to whom, including children. Comment:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
4. Do you feel isolated from family or friends? Does [name of abuser(s)] try to stop you from seeing friends, family, a doctor or others? Comment:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

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5. Are you feeling depressed or having suicidal thoughts?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
6. Have you separated or tried to separate from [name of abuser(s)] within the past year?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
7. Is there conflict over child contact?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
8. Does [name of abuser(s)] constantly text, call, contact, follow, stalk or harass you? Please expand to identify what and whether you believe that this is done deliberately to intimidate you? Consider the context and behaviour of what is being done.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
9. Are you pregnant or have you recently had a baby (within the last 18 months)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
10. Is the abuse happening more often?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
11. Is the abuse getting worse?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
12. Does [name of abuser(s)] try to control everything you do or are they excessively jealous? For example: in terms of relationships; who you see; being 'policed' at home; telling you what to wear. Consider 'honour'-based violence (HBV) and specify behaviour.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
13. Has [name of abuser(s)] ever used weapons or objects to hurt you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

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Tick the box if the factor is present. Please use the comment box at the end of the form to expand on any answer.

Question	Yes	No	Don't know	State source if not the victim
14.Has [name of abuser(s)] ever threatened to kill you or someone else and you believed them? If yes, tick who: You <input type="checkbox"/> Children <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
15.Has [name of abuser(s)] ever attempted to strangle, choke, suffocate or drown you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
16.Does [name of abuser(s)] do or say things of a sexual nature that make you feel bad or that physically hurt you or someone else? If someone else, specify who:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
17.Is there any other person who has threatened you or who you are afraid of? If yes, please specify whom and why. Consider extended family if HBV:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
18.Do you know if [name of abuser(s)] has hurt anyone else? Consider HBV. Please specify whom, including the children, siblings or elderly relatives: Children <input type="checkbox"/> Another family member <input type="checkbox"/> Someone from a previous relationship <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
19.Has [name of abuser(s)] ever mistreated an animal or the family pet?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

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20.Are there any financial issues? For example, are you dependent on [name of abuser(s)] for money, have they recently lost their job or are there other financial issues?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
21.Has [name of abuser(s)] had problems in the past year with drugs (prescription or other), alcohol or mental health leading to problems in leading a normal life? If yes, please specify which and give relevant details if known. Drugs <input type="checkbox"/> Alcohol <input type="checkbox"/> Mental health <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
22.Has [name of abuser(s)] ever threatened or attempted suicide?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
23.Has [name of abuser(s)] ever broken bail/an injunction and/or formal agreement for when they can see you and/or the children? You may wish to consider this in relation to an ex-partner of the perpetrator if relevant. Bail conditions <input type="checkbox"/> Non-molestation/Occupation Order <input type="checkbox"/> Child contact arrangements <input type="checkbox"/> Forced Marriage Protection Order <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
24.Do you know if [name of abuser(s)] has ever been in trouble with the police or has a criminal history? If yes, please specify: Domestic abuse <input type="checkbox"/> Sexual violence <input type="checkbox"/> Other violence <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Total 'yes' responses				

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For consideration by professional

Is there any other relevant information (from victim or professional) which may increase risk levels? Consider victim's situation in relation to disability, substance misuse, mental health issues, cultural and language barriers, 'honour'-based systems, geographic isolation and minimisation. Are they willing to engage with your service? Describe.	
Consider abuser's occupation and interests. Could this give them unique access to weapons? Describe.	
What are the victim's greatest priorities to address their safety?	

Do you believe that there are reasonable grounds for referring this case to Marac?		Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	
		No <input type="checkbox"/>	
If yes, have you made a referral?		Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	
		No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Signed		Date	
Do you believe that there are risks facing the children in the family?		Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	
		No <input type="checkbox"/>	
If yes, confirm if you have made a referral to safeguard the children?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	Date of referral	
	No <input type="checkbox"/>		
Signed		Date	
Name			

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Document Reference: BLG0020

Version Number: 5

Classification: Public

Revised: October 2023

To be reviewed: October 2026

Practitioner's notes

This document reflects work undertaken by SafeLives in partnership with Laura Richards, Consultant Violence Adviser to ACPO. We would like to thank Advance, Blackburn with Darwen Women's Aid and Berkshire East Family Safety Unit and all the partners of the Blackpool Marac for their contribution in piloting the revised checklist without which we could not have amended the original SafeLives risk identification checklist. We are very grateful to Elizabeth Hall of CAFCASS and Neil Blacklock of Respect for their advice and encouragement and for the expert input we received from Jan Pickles, Dr Amanda Robinson and Jasvinder Sanghera.

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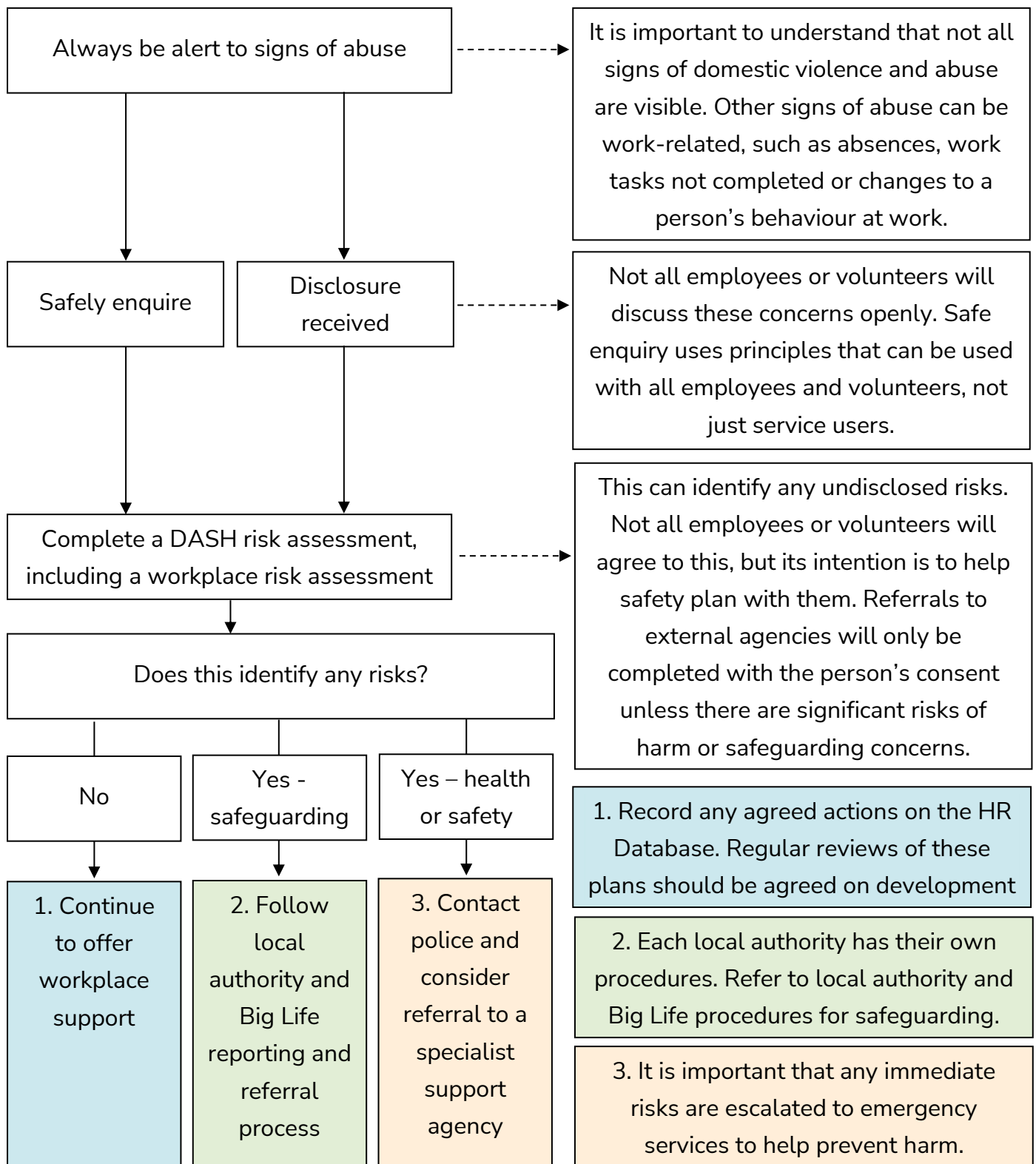
Version Number: 5

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Appendix Two: Employee or volunteer disclosure or concern flowchart



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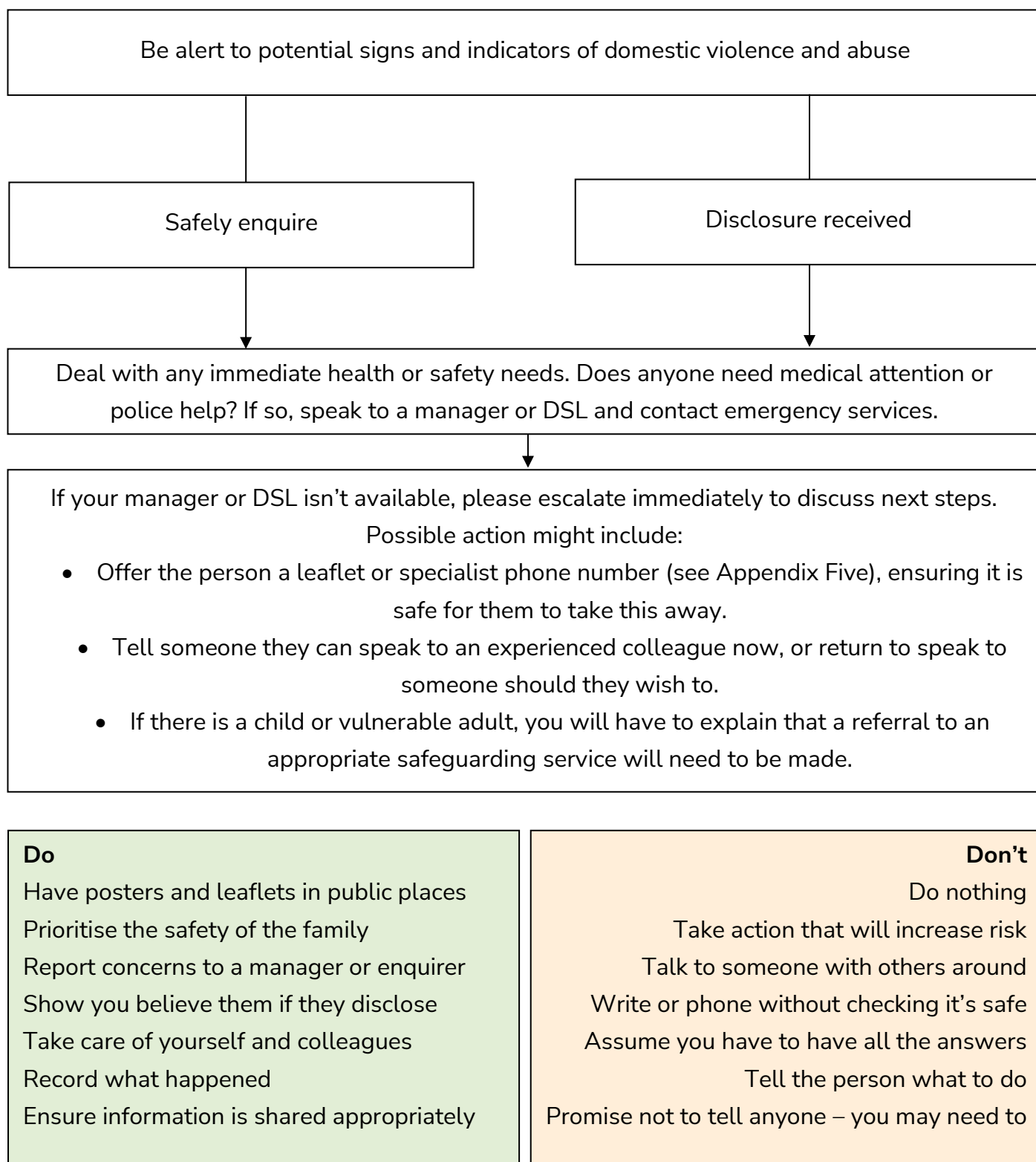
Version Number: 5

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Appendix Three: Alerter flowchart



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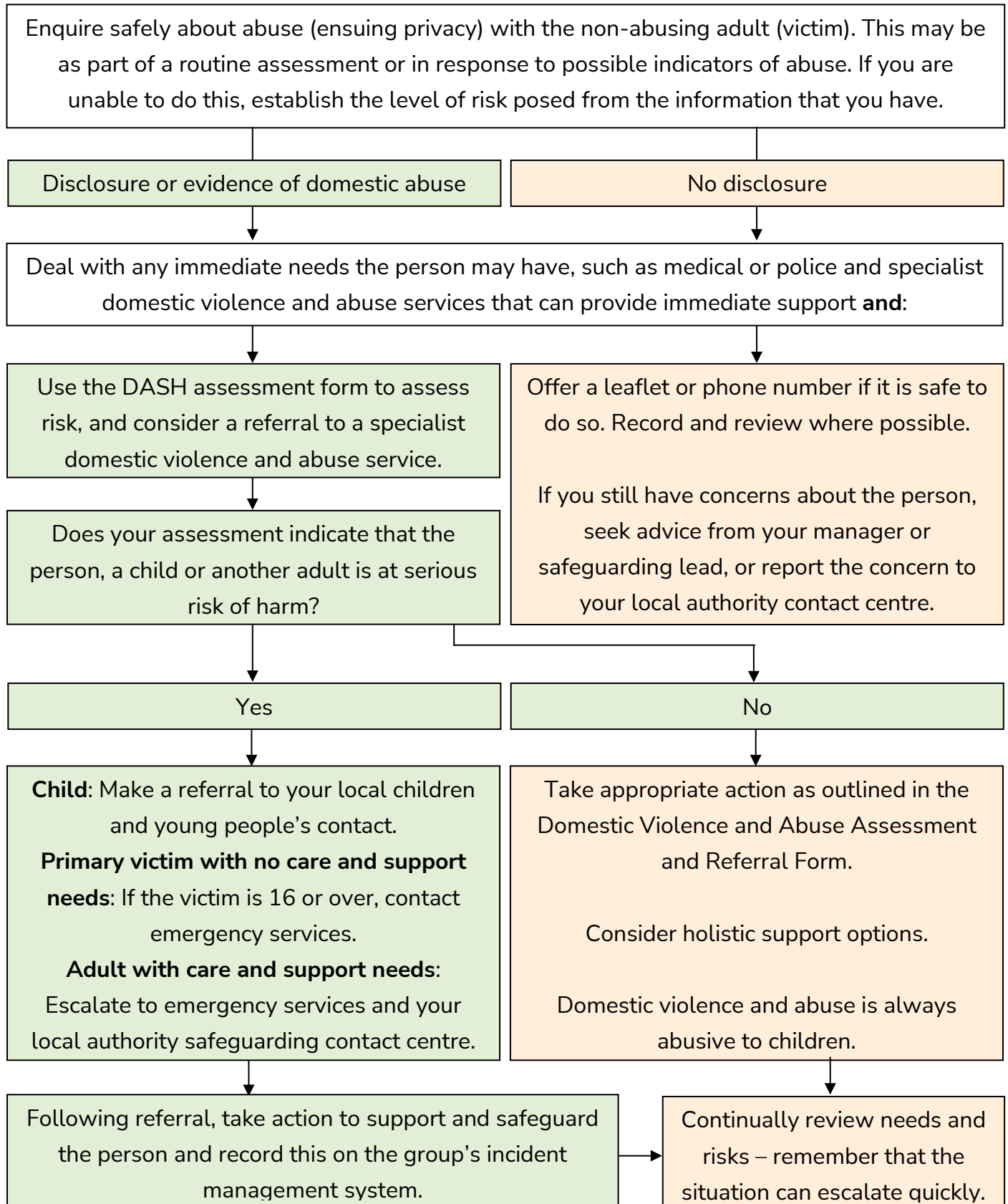
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Appendix Four: Enquiry and assessor flowchart



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Appendix Five: Useful contacts and resources

In an emergency phone 999 or the general police switchboard on 101

Women's 24-hour domestic violence helpline can be contacted on 0808 2000 247. Visit the [Women's Aid](#) website for more details.

MALE Men's advice line and enquiries can be contacted on 0808 801 0327. Visit the [Men's Advice Line](#) website for more details.

For comprehensive advice and guidance, visit the [Safe Lives](#) website.

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