

Domestic abuse is often hidden

Tackling domestic abuse is one of the priorities of The Sutton Plan. This includes ensuring that anyone experiencing abuse can access the help they need as early as possible.

The most severe and repeated abuse is usually experienced by women*, but anyone can face abuse. Taking the step of reporting abuse is difficult for everyone but certain groups can face additional barriers to seeking help. These include men, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME), LGBT+, older people and those with disabilities.

There are many reasons why people don't report abuse, for example: fear (of the abuser and/or of the authorities); not realising that what they're going through is abuse; anxiety about being 'judged' or seeing it as shameful or embarrassing. Some people might be dependant on their abuser, financially or in some other way.

Signs of potential abuse to look out for include:

- a partner (or carer / adult child / other) always accompanying someone, seeming overly protective, or not letting them speak with professionals alone
- missed appointments
- changes in mood / behaviour
- issues such as rent arrears, financial difficulties
- visible physical injuries, or wearing excessive clothing which might be hiding these

This list isn't exhaustive. The effects of abuse can manifest themselves in ways that aren't obvious. People may try to hide what is happening to them, or may be in denial that they're experiencing abuse.

Many people won't disclose abuse without prompting so it's important to create a safe, reassuring environment for them to feel comfortable enough to speak. An example of starting a conversation to help identify if somebody is experiencing abuse is:

'We know that many people in Sutton experience physical, emotional, or other forms of abuse, so we are asking everyone about this...Is there anyone at home or elsewhere that you're afraid of?'

If you're worried about someone you know personally, ask them if they're alright and tell them you are available if they want to talk about anything. Don't force them to talk if they don't want to. Listen and don't judge them, for instance if they're not ready to leave immediately. Make sure they are safe, but don't intervene, for example by talking to the abuser, as this can increase the risk to yourself and the victim.

If somebody does confide, reassure them that the abuse is not their fault, that help is available, and they can make decisions at their own pace. Encourage them to report the abuse and access appropriate help.

The **Domestic Violence One Stop Shop** offers a free drop-in on Wednesday, 9.30am -11.30am at Sutton Baptist Church, where advice and support is available.

Sutton Reach offers a specialist service for domestic abuse victims from the above mentioned marginalised groups, with a particular focus on housing and complex needs. You can contact them on **0203 823 2582**.

For general information, including other contacts and referral information, visit notaloneinsutton.org.uk

* Women are more likely than men to experience high risk or severe domestic abuse: 95% of those going to MARAC (multi agency risk assessment conference) or accessing IDVA (Independent Domestic Adviser / Advocate) services are women - SafeLives (2015), Insights Idva National Dataset 2013-14. Bristol: SafeLives. SafeLives (2014), Marac national dataset 2014. Bristol: SafeLives. See [Safelives](#) for more information.