

Providing assistance to customers - The Domestic Abuse (DA) Plan

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You must follow the DA Plan when customers state that they are victims or survivors of domestic abuse.

Check to see if the customer is safe at the moment

It is important to establish whether the customer feels safe at this moment.

All reports of domestic abuse must be handled sensitively. Our customers often talk about domestic abuse when they speak to us and it is important to find out if they are still experiencing these issues.

Domestic abuse can be any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, 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. For further information, please see [What is domestic violence and abuse](#)

Ask the customer: **Are you safe at the moment?**

If the customer states that they **are not safe or will not be safe once the other parent is notified of the application or change**, see [Section A](#).

If the customer indicates that they are safe but you still have concerns about their immediate safety, see [Section B](#).

If the customer indicates that they **are safe**, see [Section C](#).

Section A – Customer states that they are not safe or will not be safe once the other parent is notified

Take the statement seriously – remain calm and listen carefully. Stop what you are doing and give the customer your full attention.

Summon a colleague for support - do not put the customer on hold but do summon help.

Office-based colleagues should do this by alerting your team leader if available or another colleague. Your team leader should discuss how this can be done locally.

Home-based colleagues should contact their real time support group (insert link to real time support group once it's available) for help. Someone within the group will answer you and will act as your support partner.

Your support partner will provide real time assistance by listening to the call as it unfolds and finding relevant guidance for you.

Role of the support partner

Handling calls where victim of Domestic Violence is in immediate danger can be distressing and challenging for the person taking the call. A support partner must be

summoned to assist you. The support partner will be aware of the DA plan and will assist by:

- unobtrusively monitoring the situation for the well-being of their colleague and the customer
- take notes of the conversation
- helping to assess the degree of risk to the customer
- organising action to be taken, such as finding contact numbers for local support services or speaking with the team leader/workgroup manager then calling emergency services
- the support partner must be able to hear or listen into the conversation as best they can.
- it is likely that the support partner will be the team leader of the person taking the call as they will be in the best position to assist. Whoever the support partner is they will be aware of action to be taken in such incidents, aware of procedures and be available to help.

Gather information to gauge level of risk

Talk to the customer to gather information. You may not feel comfortable doing this however, any details we can gather will help provide the best support possible for the customer's circumstances.

It is important that you listen. Don't be afraid to talk to customers about their situation. Encourage the customer to talk to you. This could include asking them questions such as:

- where are you and do you have someone with you
- why is it that you're in immediate danger
- are there children with you? Are your children in danger
- who is it that has threatened you or that you are frightened of
- what have they threatened
- do you intend to go anywhere.

Do not give advice or try and solve their problem for them. Remember to record key information such as location and plans.

If, based on what the customer tells you, it is deemed they **are safe** and not in an emergency situation, go to **Section B** of the DA plan.

Call the Emergency Services

The most important thing is the safety of our customers and their children. If the customer is at serious risk or in immediate danger a team leader or deputy manager will decide to call the emergency services.

1. Ask the customer to phone 999
2. Ask if they want CMG to phone the police on their behalf
3. Call the emergency services

In the first instance, you must ask the customer to phone 999 themselves and report to the police that they are in immediate danger. You must reassure the customer that a conversation about their Child Maintenance case can be picked up at a time and place when they are safe.

Where a customer has indicated that they are unable or unwilling to phone the police themselves, ask the customer whether they want you to phone the emergency services on their behalf.

Consent to contact the emergency services should be sought where possible. Where the customer refuses to give consent, or where a response cannot be obtained, a team leader or deputy manager will decide if it's necessary to call the emergency services. A decision will need to be taken on the facts of each case.

Information can be disclosed proactively where it is clear that a customer or child faces clear and significant danger to their welfare or safety

If the situation is urgent do not **delay** in contacting the emergency services. Team leaders must make sure that colleagues who are dealing with the situation have permission to act as they think best. In some circumstances this may mean calling the emergency service as soon as the customer indicates they are in immediate danger even if your team leaders is unavailable.

Make sure you know your local procedures for contacting the emergency services – for example you may have to dial '9' for an outside line before dialling '999'.

For further information on contacting emergency services, use this link <https://www.police.uk/contact/>(link is external)

You may need to call the emergency services on behalf of a customer who lives in another area. You should tell the emergency services operator that you are calling from a national centre and let them know the customer's location and other relevant details of the threat.

You must ask the customer whether they want you to phone the emergency services on their behalf. However, where you have grave concern over the immediate safety of the customer or their dependants, you do not need the client's consent to call the emergency services. In this instance, it is important to let the customer know what is happening and why, unless you consider it is unsafe or inappropriate to do so.

Disclosure of information

There are circumstances where information can be disclosed to the emergency services where it is clear that a customer or child faces clear and significant risk to their welfare or safety. DWP staff are explicitly empowered to take any reasonable

steps felt necessary in order to address these risks. This includes concerns about the:

- threat to life
- risk of injury.

These are examples and not a full list.

The [Handling threats of suicide or self-harm](#) also has relevant content on proactively contacting the police.

Where the customer refuses to give consent , or where a response cannot be obtained, a team leader or deputy manager will decide if it's necessary to call the emergency services. Information can be disclosed proactively where it is clear that a customer or child faces clear and significant danger to their welfare or safety.

Consider Referral to an Advanced Customer Support Senior Leader (ACSSL)

After considering support through the emergency services and all other appropriate signposting information has been provided, if your customer still requires further support, consider a referral to an Advanced Customer Support Senior Leader. Also, all cases are to be discussed with the CWs STL to identify if it should be referred on to the Consider Referral to an Advanced Customer Support Senior Leader (ACSSL).

Complete the [ACSSL Referral Form](#). The ACSSL will assess the situation and contact the referrer to advise on any further action they need to take. If the case is particularly complex, the ACSSL may make a decision to take over the case and make all necessary contacts with the customer and/or any support services.

If you are advised that there is no further action to take or that the ACSSL has taken over the case, record this in the contact notes for the customer.

For more information regarding Advanced Customer Support, refer to the [ACS guidance](#).

Review the situation and seek support

Review

Where it has been deemed necessary to phone the police and disclose information, the decision and reason for it must be fully documented. This is essential in case of any challenge or dispute over information that has been disclosed. It protects both staff and the Department.

Navigate to the **Security Questions** screen by accessing the **Menu 'Hamburger' icon** in the **Contact Summary Screen**.

Select the **Report Threat** button and record details of the incident in the notes pop up provided.

Select the **Report** button. This creates a Report Threat activity which is automatically

allocated to your team leader who can take the required action, e.g. notify authorities as per procedures outlined above if necessary.

Information you must include is:

- 01/01/2050 DOMESTIC ABUSE RISK
- the date and time you called the emergency services
- police reference number (if provided)
- brief overview of circumstances (if field has enough capacity)

Further information to be added to the contact notes.

Useful information to be added to the **contact notes** are:

- time and duration of your contact with the customer
- details of the customer's circumstances which led to you believing that they were in immediate danger
- the customer's behaviour, for example, fast or slow talking, not replying, talking incoherently
- key information you provided to the customer
- any actions the customer said they would take such as phoning the police
- any follow up actions to be taken, for example, phoning the customer back at a later time/date.
- Any other information about the call that you feel is relevant

Team Leader Action Required

- Review the activity at the contact level for the customer
- Update the owner MVG to include your staff number as the primary staff number if not already held
- Drilldown into the activity and view the notes included in the notes tab of the activity
- Copy and Paste these notes from the activity into the notes of the customer contact

For further information on how to update the system, go to [Recording system notes](#).

The system records must be kept for six years as they may be needed in future for legal and system review purposes.

Discuss the incident with your team leader. It is good practice to review the incident and record the review discussion within a day or two of the incident if possible. This is an opportunity for you to reflect on the incident, to discuss your feelings about it

and agree any support to help you deal with your reactions to the experience. The discussion will include:

- how you handled the incident
- whether the procedures in place for handling these situations worked effectively
- if there any lessons to be learned for future handling and responses
- whether you would benefit from a conversation with a [Mental Health First Aider](#)
- any support for you that has been agreed.

Support

CMG and DWP will support decisions that you make whilst dealing with incidents that arise. This type of experience can be upsetting and you need to take account of your own well-being and be reassured that you have done what you can to help the customer.

You are not expected to counsel customers and are not responsible for the actions of customers or the perpetrators of domestic violence. Individuals will be affected differently and you may feel the need to discuss your experience and seek support from your team leader and colleagues. You may also find it helpful to contact [PAM Assist](#), our Employee Assistance Programme.

Managers must make sure that anyone who has managed an incident in which a customer has declared that they are in immediate danger of Domestic Violence has opportunities to discuss the incident and how they are feeling.

For home-based colleagues, after the call, in all scenarios where support has been requested, the caseworker will be contacted via video call to: ask how the call has affected them, provide signposting to additional support and arrange line manager supportive care

Team leaders must support their colleague, this could include giving the colleague time away from their duties, listening to the colleague and ensuring that the colleague is aware of the counselling services available under PAM Assist, Employee Assistance Programme.

The PAM Assist, our Employee Assistance Programme can provide an independent, confidential counselling service. You can contact the PAM Assist helpline by calling 0808 169 1111. This service is available 24 hours a day and all calls are free of charge from landlines. There is also a management support service to help team leaders deal with these conversations with their members of staff.

Section B – the customer indicates that they are safe but you still have concerns about their immediate or future safety

If the customer states they are safe but you still have concerns about their immediate safety or future safety, firstly follow [Section C](#) to encourage them to seek help and to signpost them to specialist support services.

Ensure the customer is aware of the following:

- that they can ask their bank for a non-geographical sort code so that their account details don't reveal any location information
- that if they or the children have changed their names they can ask CMS not to disclose their new names to the other parent
- timescales for any notifications to reach the other parent e.g make the customer aware that when they receive a notification of change the other parent is also likely to receive the notification at or around the same time. This is to enable them to contact support organisations and stay safe during this period.

Consider whether the actions being requested on the call have the potential to negatively affect the situation, which could result in the customer being in danger.

Following the call, you must then seek help yourself to establish whether a call to the emergency services is appropriate.

The most important thing is the safety of our customers and their children. If you are concerned that the customer may be at serious risk or in immediate danger and they haven't given consent for you to call the emergency services, discuss the situation with a team leader who will decide if it's still necessary to call the emergency services. Follow the instructions in Section A, [Call the Emergency Services](#). A decision will need to be taken on the facts of each case.

Once any deemed risk has been addressed, or if you have decided that it's not necessary to contact the emergency services at this time but you still have concerns about your customer's wellbeing, consider a referral to an Advanced Customer Support Senior Leader (ACSSL).

Consider Referral to an Advanced Customer Support Senior Leader (ACSSL)

After considering support via the emergency services and all other appropriate signposting information has been provided, if your customer still requires further support, consider a referral to an Advanced Customer Support Senior Leader. Also, all cases are to be discussed with the CWs STL to identify if it should be referred on to the Consider Referral to an Advanced Customer Support Senior Leader (ACSSL).

Complete the [ACSSL Referral Form](#). The ACSSL will assess the situation and contact the referrer to advise on any further action they need to take. If the case is particularly complex, the ACSSL may make a decision to take over the case and make all necessary contacts with the customer and/or any support services.

If you are advised that there is no further action to take or that the ACSSL has taken over the case, record this in the contact notes for the customer.

For more information regarding Advanced Customer Support, refer to the [ACS guidance](#).

Section C – Customer states they are safe

Signpost

Advise the customer to contact their neighbourhood policing team for advice if the abuse is ongoing but is not an emergency. Details of their local policing can be found on:

[www.police.uk\(link is external\)](#) - for customers living in England, Northern Ireland or Wales

[www.scotland.police.uk\(link is external\)](#) - for customers living in Scotland.

The Complex Needs Toolkit is available on the [2012 Scheme Tools](#) intranet page and holds links to information which can be used to support vulnerable customers including victims of domestic abuse.

Encourage or help the customer to seek help. If the customer has access to the Internet, signpost them to the [GOV.UK\(link is external\)](#) website. Customers can search the site for 'domestic abuse' to find information which will enable them to get the expert help and advice they need from specialist support services.

You can offer to [send the customer an MCMC message](#) which will have a list of support organisations that can help the customer stay safe. Please see the [DA lines to take and signposting](#) for more information.

For verbal signposting some useful organisations that you can signpost to are:

- **English National Domestic Violence Helpline** - 0808 200 0247
- [www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk\(link is external\)](#)
- **Galop** (for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people)- 0800 999 5428
- [www.galop.org.uk\(link is external\)](#)
- **Men's Advice Line** - 0808 801 0327 - [www.mensadviceline.org.uk\(link is external\)](#)
- **Rape Crisis** (England and Wales) - 0808 802 9999
- [www.rapecrisis.org.uk\(link is external\)](#)
- **Scotland's Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline** - 0800 027 1234 - [sdafmh.org.uk\(link is external\)](#)
- **Scottish Women's Aid** - 0131 226 6606
- [www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk\(link is external\)](#)
- **Live Fear Free Helpline (Wales)** - 0808 80 10 800 - [https://gov.wales/live-fear-free\(link is external\)](https://gov.wales/live-fear-free(link is external))
- **Women's Aid Federation** (Northern Ireland) - 0800 917 1414
- [www.womensaidni.org\(link is external\)](#)

The [Signposting Directory](#) is also available on the intranet, and holds details of organisations that can provide support for customers who are victims and survivors of domestic abuse.