

# How will you know that a service user is perpetrating domestic abuse?

This factsheet is for practitioners in non-domestic abuse services who may suspect or receive information that a service user may be perpetrating domestic abuse.

## Introduction

The presenting issue of domestic abuse perpetrators who access your service may not be directly linked with domestic abuse. For example: a perpetrator seeing their GP for depression symptoms may not talk about using abusive behaviours and the subsequent break down in the relationship; the GP will, therefore, be none the wiser, unless they receive information about their patient's use of domestic abuse. Or, a perpetrator seeing a Counsellor about a 'mid-life crisis' may focus entirely on their own feelings of, for example, not having achieved what they were aiming in their career, rather than using domestic abuse.

A practitioner in a service that is not domestic abuse specific, may receive information about their service user as a perpetrator in the following ways.

## They tell you themselves

- a. Directly: it is not uncommon for perpetrators to ask for help with their domestic abuse. This is a window of opportunity often becoming available soon after an incident of abuse, when the perpetrator has had time to reflect about the consequences of their behaviour.
- b. Indirectly: perpetrators are embarrassed to admit that they are violent and abusive. They often refer to anger or relationship problems, rather than owning their abusive behaviours. Another common 'indirect' way of disclosing is saying that their partner tells them they need help with their behaviour. This still provides an opportunity to motivate the service user to access specialist help.

## Someone else tells you

- a. Another service/frontline worker makes a referral/passes information
- b. Their partner tells you

## By observing how a service-user talks about their relationship

Perpetrators tend to talk about their partners using unkind language and blaming them for everything that's gone wrong in the relationship. You can also think about their motivation for speaking with you: victims want to recover, perpetrators want revenge.

These are some examples of the tone of language and motivation perpetrators often present with:

- a. They are insistent on you taking action on their behalf to change their partner's behaviour – prioritising this over their own help-seeking
- b. They talk about child contact as if it is their right, prioritising their own needs, without any apparent understanding of the focus being on the children
- c. They speak about past offences or current criminal or civil proceedings against them, possibly arguing they are unfairly brought, often referring to a conspiracy against them

Once you have established that the service user is perpetrating domestic abuse, or you suspect it, you can engage with them on that issue, so you can signpost or refer appropriately.

For more information, contact the [Respect Phonenumber](#)