

DOMESTIC Abuse



Our approach to helping those who are experiencing domestic abuse

We all have the right to be safe and be free from abuse. Supporting those experiencing domestic abuse is a priority for Octavia. We want those experiencing domestic abuse to feel they can approach us, talk to us, and be listened to. Their safety is our primary concern and we will help them to make informed decisions about what they wish to do.

The options available will vary depending on whether the person is a tenant, leaseholder, household member, visitor, or a service user. We will always take the issues seriously, and as a minimum direct those experiencing abuse to services who can provide help and support.

What we mean by domestic abuse, and by coercive and controlling behaviour

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.”*

Abuse is not always physical. It can be sexual, financial, psychological, or emotional. It can occur in any domestic relationship no matter the gender or sexuality of the abuser or abused. Abuse within families may include honour based violence, forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

In cases where adolescents under the age of 16 abuse a parent or another adult in the home, our approach follows the same steps as for a case where the abuser is over 16. However the actions we can take, or are available to the person experiencing the abuse, may differ.

Controlling behaviours are acts designed to dominate another person, or make them dependent on the abuser by isolating them from sources of support. It may involve depriving the person of their independence and means of escape, or regulating their everyday behaviour.



Coercive behaviour is an act or acts of assault, threats, humiliation, intimidation or other abuse used to harm, punish or frighten someone.

Sustained and serious controlling or coercive behaviour in intimate or familial relationships is a criminal offence. Many other acts related to domestic abuse are also criminal offences.

What you can expect from our service

We treat anyone reporting domestic abuse in a sympathetic and supportive manner. All reports of domestic abuse will be investigated. If you tell us that you are suffering from domestic abuse, you will:

- ▶ Be taken seriously;
- ▶ Be supported irrespective of your age, gender, sexuality, disability, ethnicity, religion, social background or any other characteristic;
- ▶ Be given advice and assistance as a priority to help you decide what to do next;
- ▶ Be offered a confidential interview straight away if you tell us at our reception in Emily House;
- ▶ Be offered a meeting in an agreed safe venue within one working day with an officer of the gender of your choice, if you tell us by telephone, email, or while one of our staff is visiting you at your home;
- ▶ Be offered continued contact with us using a method that we agree with you.

If we are informed by a third party such as a neighbour or a family member, we will ask for more information from them before trying to make contact with the potential victim in a safe way.

If a member of staff or contractor suspects that a person may be experiencing domestic abuse, they will raise their concerns with a relevant colleague or their line manager so their concerns can be investigated.

All Octavia staff who work directly with customers receive regular training on identifying domestic abuse. Our Housing Services team receive further training and briefing on working with those experiencing domestic abuse.

What will happen when you contact us about domestic abuse

We will offer you an interview to assess the risks you face and to come up with a plan of action together. We will use the SafeLives Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment risk assessment (DASH) questionnaire. SafeLives is a nationwide organisation working to raise awareness of domestic abuse and for work in this area to be co-ordinated across organisations. The plan of action may include:

Referrals

- ▶ We will let you know where you can access legal help and explain actions that we could take.
- ▶ Refer you immediately to a relevant support organisation including national organisations, local groups and specialist agencies who can support older people, people from particular ethnic backgrounds, men who are abused, and people in same-sex relationships.
- ▶ Report incidents to the Police or help you to do so yourself.



- Raise your situation with a Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC), a meeting involving a number of agencies providing support to those experiencing domestic abuse.
- Raise your situation with the Local Authority if the abuse involves children, or someone with care and support needs (see our Safeguarding Policies for more information).

Other support

- Provide support and advice about your housing including exploring the possibility of a move to another property or raising your case with the Local Authority's Housing Service.
- Refer you to a scheme to make changes to your home to improve safety and security.
- Provide finance and benefits information and support.
- Ensure children or young people affected by the abuse have access to support.
- If appropriate, direct perpetrators to support organisations in order to change their behaviour.

Following up

- Check in with you at times and frequency that you agree with us.

We will always seek your consent to share information about you and your situation, but we might have to inform others without your agreement if:

- Children or people with care and support needs are present in the home;
- We believe sharing information will lead to the prevention or detection of crime;
- There is an immediate or potential risk of serious harm to anyone experiencing domestic abuse.

When we share information with other agencies, we will follow our own Data Protection Policy and inform you that we are doing so where this would not compromise your safety.

How you can contact us about domestic abuse

Call our Customer Contact Team on **020 8354 5500**. They will put you through to a member of our Tenancy Solutions and Support Team to assist you.

Please contact us if you need any part of this information in Braille, on audio tape or explained in a different language.

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