

Domestic violence

If you have been subjected to or are at risk of violence from your spouse, partner, a lover or a member of your family, there are people who are able to help you.

Do not hesitate to call the police if you feel you are in danger. Most forces now have dedicated domestic violence units, with specially trained woman police officers (WPCs) who understand the dynamics involved in violent relationships.

Although it should not be your first port of call in an emergency situation, there is also a National Domestic Violence Helpline run by Refuge and Women's Aid. The number is 0808 200 0247. It is staffed 24 hours a day. If you are a man suffering from domestic abuse, you can call MALE (Men's Advice Line) on 0845 064 6800.

Further information and advice as to your practical options can be found at:
www.adviceguide.org.uk/index/family_parent/family/domestic_violence.htm

The legal side

In a violent situation, the court can make orders about:

- who can live in a property and who is excluded from it (an "occupation order"); and
- how one party should be protected from domestic violence (a "non-molestation order").

These orders can be made in an emergency (ex parte), without the other party's knowledge until after the event.

They tend to last for six to twelve months but in certain circumstances can be renewed.

Occupation orders can also set out who pays for what while one party is excluded from the house.

There is also scope to make orders about stalking or threatening behaviour.

Breach of a non-molestation order is punishable with up to five years in prison.