

SafeLives' Dash Risk Checklist

Quick start guidance – Scottish version

You may be looking at this checklist because you are working in a professional capacity with a victim of domestic abuse. These notes are to help you understand the significance of the questions on the checklist. Domestic abuse can take many forms, but it is usually perpetrated by men towards women in an intimate relationship such as boyfriend/girlfriend, husband/wife. This checklist can also be used for lesbian, gay, bisexual relationships and for situations of 'honour'-based violence or family violence.

Domestic abuse can include physical, emotional, mental, sexual or financial abuse as well as stalking and harassment. They might be experiencing one or all types of abuse; each situation is unique. It is the combination of behaviours that can be damaging. It can occur both during a relationship or after it has ended.

Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 summary – (enactment April 2019)

The new Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act will enable behaviours that constitute coercive control to be included in a new Section 1 Domestic Abuse offence. Under the new Act, it is an offence for someone to engage in a course of behaviour, which is abusive to their partner or ex-partner, and which is likely to cause the partner/ex-partner physical or psychological harm. This includes fear, alarm and distress, and is either intended to cause their partner/ex-partner harm or the perpetrator is reckless as to whether it causes the partner/ex-partner to suffer harm.

Abusive behaviour is defined in two ways: a) behaving towards the partner/ex-partner in a violent (physically or sexually), threatening or intimidating manner or b) behaviour directed at their partner/ex-partner, at a child of their partner/ex-partner or at another person, which either has as its purpose or would be considered by a reasonable person to be likely to have any of the relevant effects listed below (Section 2):

- Making the victim dependant on or subordinate to them
- Isolating the victim from friends, relatives or other sources of support
- Controlling, regulating or monitoring the victim's day to day activities
- Depriving or restricting the victim's freedom of action
- Frightening, humiliating, degrading or punishing the victim

In relation to children, under Section 5 of the Act, the Section 1 offence is aggravated if at any time:

- Behaviour is directed at a child (*N.B. can be any child including neighbours, friends, etc.*)
- A child is made use of in directing behaviour towards the victim (*as above*)
- A child sees, hears or is present during an incident of behaviour that is directed towards the victim as part of the course of behaviour, or that a reasonable person would consider the course of behaviour, or an incident that forms part of the course of behaviour, to be likely to adversely affect a child *usually residing with the perpetrator or the victim*.

Many of the Dash risk checklist questions relate directly to behaviours that would constitute coercive control. You should consider the presence of controlling behaviours when completing the checklist and note any behaviours, however subtle, that may be being used to isolate, monitor, degrade the victim, or restrict their space for action. Remember to consider the cumulative effect of these behaviours and the impact on the person experiencing them as well as the whole family. You can use the final section of the checklist to record observations around this. This information should inform your overall professional judgement of the risks and needs of the victim, and the proceeding safety planning. This is known as a *structured professional judgement approach* to risk identification.

Information on the new legislation can be accessed at legislation.gov.uk.

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SafeLives' Dash

The purpose of the Dash risk checklist is to give a consistent and simple tool for practitioners who work with adult victims of current domestic abuse (in the last three months, or using professional judgement) in order to help them identify those who are at high risk of harm and whose cases should be referred to a Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (Marac) meeting in order to manage the risk. If you are concerned about risk to a child or children, you should make a referral to ensure that a full assessment of their safety and welfare is made. This should not replace your local arrangements for submitting a child concern or child protection referral. Consult your local Child Protection Guidance.

What this form is not designed for...

This form will provide valuable information about the risks that children are living with, but it is not a full risk assessment for children. The presence of children increases the wider risks of domestic abuse, and step-children are particularly at risk. If risk towards children is highlighted, you should consider what referral you need to make to obtain a full assessment of the children's situation. This is particularly relevant to the Section 5 aggravation introduced through the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018,

The form should not be used with known perpetrators of domestic abuse who may be accessing your service. If you are concerned that a perpetrator is presenting to your service as a victim, you should discuss with your manager, and take appropriate steps to ensure that this does not increase risk to other service users, and that you respond accordingly.

You may find it helpful to refer to the [Full Practice Guidance](#) for Dash that was developed to support new users of the tool.

The Dash risk checklist should be introduced to the victim within the framework of your agencies:

- Confidentiality policy
- Information sharing policy and protocols
- Local Marac referral policies and protocols
- Guidance on GDPR and Data Protection requirements. For further information, see SafeLives' [briefing for Maracs on the General Data Protection Regulations \(GDPR\)](#).

The Information Commissioner's Office in Scotland has further information on GDPR and Data Protection.

It is important that you are aware of your local Marac processes, how to make a referral, who your Marac representative is and how to contact the local Marac Coordinator. These will be specific to your locality. There is a [Marac Toolkit for Scotland](#) available on the SafeLives website.

It is also important to have information to hand on local support services that you can share with the victim if they choose to access support from a domestic abuse service in your area.

Before you begin to ask the questions in the Dash risk checklist:

- Establish how much time the victim has to talk to you: is it safe to talk now?
- What are safecontact details?
- Establish the whereabouts of the perpetrator and children.
- Explain why you are asking these questions and how it relates to keeping them and their children safe.
- Explain there are 24 questions to answer, and that you will record the answers in the victim's own words.
- Tell the victim that they can choose to stop the risk assessment at any time if they feel distressed or upset.
- Explain you will let them know whether you will be sharing information with relevant partner agencies, who they are and what information you will share.
- Explain that there may be the need to discuss their situation with a range of partner agencies at a multi-agency meeting called a Marac. This will ensure that everyone involved will be aware of the risks and help increase their safety. You may or may not require making a referral to Marac.

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While you are asking the questions in the Dash risk checklist:

- Identify early on who the victim is frightened of – ex-partner/partner/family member.
- Use gender neutral terms such as partner/ex-partner. By creating a safe, accessible environment LGBT victims accessing the service will feel able to disclose both domestic abuse and their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Revealing the results of the Dash risk checklist to the victim

Telling someone that they are at high risk of serious harm or homicide may be frightening and overwhelming for them to hear. It is important that you state what your concerns are by using the answers they gave to you and your professional judgement. It is then important that you follow your local area's protocols when referring to Marac and Children's Social Work Services.

Equally, identifying that someone is not currently high risk needs to be managed carefully to ensure that the person doesn't feel that their situation is being minimised and that they don't feel embarrassed about asking for help. Explain that these factors are linked to murder and serious harm and that if s/he experiences any of them in future, that they should get back in touch with your service or with the emergency services on 999 in an immediate crisis.

Resources

Be sure that you have an awareness of the safety planning measures you can offer, both within your own agency and other agencies. Be familiar with local and national resources to refer the victim to, including specialist services. The following contact details may be useful to you; but bear in mind there will possibly be local services that offer similar support; use these to build up information on local service provision.

National Support Services

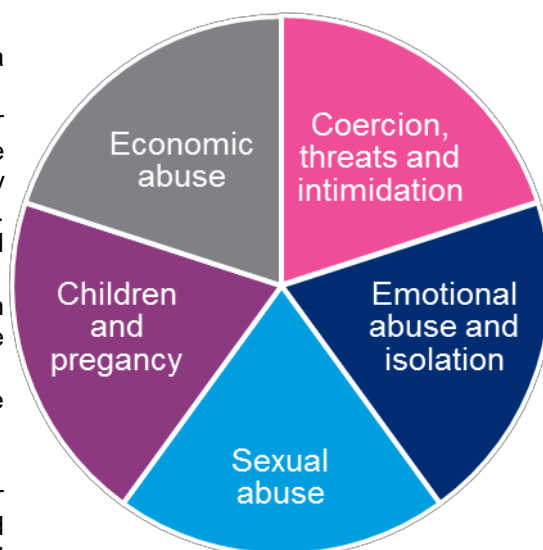
- **Scottish Domestic Abuse & Forced Marriage Helpline:** 0800 027 1234 (24 hours)
- **Men's Advice Line:** 0808 801 0327
- **Rape Crisis Scotland:** 08088 01 03 02 (every day, 6pm to 12 midnight)
- **Scottish Women's Rights Centre:** 08088 010 789 (Tues 6-9pm; Wed 1.30-4.30pm; Fri 10am-1pm)
- **Samaritans:** 116 123 (24 hours)

Asking about types of abuse and risk factors

Physical abuse

Questions 1, 10, 11, 13, 15, 18, 19 and 23 of the Dash risk checklist ask about physical abuse.

- Physical abuse can take many forms – from a push or shove to a punch, use of weapons, choking or strangulation.
- You should try and establish if the abuse is getting worse, or happening more often, or the incidents themselves are more serious. If your client is not sure, ask them to document how many incidents there have been in the last year and what took place. They should also consider keeping a diary marking when physical and other incidents take place.
- Try and get a picture of the range of physical abuse that has taken place. The incident that is currently being disclosed may not be the worst thing to have happened.
- The abuse might also be happening to other people in the household, such as their children or siblings or elderly relatives.
- Sometimes violence will be used against a family pet.
- If an incident has just occurred the victim should call 999 for assistance from the police. If the victim has injuries they should try and get them seen and documented by a health professional such as a GP or A&E nurse.



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Sexual abuse

We ask about whether the victim is experiencing any form of sexual abuse in question 16.

- Sexual abuse can include the use of threats, force or intimidation to obtain sex, deliberately inflicting pain during sex, or combining sex and violence and using weapons.
- If the victim has suffered sexual abuse you should encourage them to get medical attention and to report this to the police. See above for advice on finding a Sexual Assault Referral Centre which can assist with medical and legal investigations.

Coercion, threats and intimidation

Coercion, threats and intimidation are covered in questions 2, 3, 6, 8, 14, 17, 18, 19, 23 and 24.

- It is important to understand and establish: the fears of the victim/victims in relation to what the perpetrator/s may do; who they are frightened of and who they are frightened for (e.g. children/siblings). Victims usually know the abuser's behaviour better than anyone else which is why this question is significant.
- In cases of 'honour' based violence there may be more than one abuser living in the home or belonging to the wider family and community. This could also include female relatives.
- Stalking and harassment can become more significant when the abuser is also making threats to harm themselves, the victim or others. They might use phrases such as "If I can't have you no one else can..."
- Other examples of behaviour that can indicate future harm include obsessive phone calls, texts or emails, uninvited visits to the victim's home or workplace, loitering and destroying/vandalising property.
- Advise the victim to keep a diary of these threats, when and where they happen, if anyone else was with them and if the threats made them feel frightened.
- Separation is a dangerous time: establish if the victim has tried to separate from the abuser or has been threatened about the consequences of leaving. Being pursued after separation can be particularly dangerous.
- Victims of domestic abuse sometimes tell us that the perpetrators harm pets, damage furniture and this alone makes them frightened without the perpetrator needing to physically hurt them. This kind of intimidation is common and often used as a way to control and frighten.
- Some perpetrators of domestic abuse do not follow court orders or contact arrangements with children. Previous violations may be associated with an increase in risk of future violence.
- Some victims feel frightened and intimidated by the criminal history of their partner/ex-partner. It is important to remember that offenders with a history of violence are at increased risk of harming their partner, even if the past violence was not directed towards intimate partners or family members, except for 'honour'-based violence, where the perpetrator(s) will commonly have no other recorded criminal history.

Emotional abuse and isolation

We ask about emotional abuse and isolation in questions 4, 5 and 12.

This can be experienced at the same time as the other types of abuse. It may be present on its own or it may have started long before any physical violence began. The result of this abuse is that victims can blame themselves and, in order to live with what is happening, minimise and deny how serious it is. As a professional you can assist the victim in beginning to consider the risks the victim and any children may be facing.

- The victim may be being prevented from seeing family or friends, from creating any support networks or prevented from having access to any money.
- Victims of 'honour' based violence talk about extreme levels of isolation and being 'policed' in the home. This is a significant indicator of future harm and should be taken seriously.
- Due to the abuse and isolation being suffered victims feel like they have no choice but to continue living with the person and fear what may happen if they try and leave. This can often have an impact on the victim's mental health, and they might feel depressed or even suicidal.
- Equally the risk to the victim is greater if their partner/ex-partner has mental health problems such as depression and if they abuse drugs or alcohol. This can increase the level of isolation as victims can feel like agencies won't understand and will judge them. They may feel frightened that revealing this information will get them and their partner into trouble and, if they have children, they may worry that they will be removed. These risks are addressed in questions 21 & 22.

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- Consider that some of the emotional abuse and isolation experienced by victims could be constituted as coercive control, under the new legislation in Scotland.

Children and pregnancy

Questions 7, 9 and 18 refer to being pregnant and children and whether there is conflict over child contact.

- The presence of children including stepchildren can increase the risk of domestic abuse for the mother. They too can get caught up in the violence and suffer directly.
- Physical violence can occur for the first time, or get worse during pregnancy, or for the first few years of the child's life. There are usually lots of professionals involved during this time, such as health visitors or midwives, who need to be aware of the risks to the victim and children, including an unborn child.
- The perpetrator may use the children to have access to the victim, abusive incidents may occur during child contact visits or there may be a lot of fear and anxiety that the children may be harmed.
- Please follow your local Child Protection Procedures and Guidelines for identifying and making referrals to Children's Social Work Services.

Economic abuse

Economic abuse is covered in question 20.

- Victims of domestic abuse often tell us that they are financially controlled by their partners/ex- partners. Consider how the financial control impacts on the safety options available to them. For example, they may rely on their partner/ex-partner for an income or do not have access to benefits in their own right. The victim might feel like the situation has become worse since their partner/ex- partner lost their job.
- The [Citizens Advice Scotland](#) or the local specialist domestic abuse support service will be able to outline to the victim the options relating to their current financial situation and how they might be able to access funds individually.

We also have information on our website about [training for professionals in Scotland](#).

Other Marac toolkits and resources

If you or someone from your agency attends the Marac meeting, you can download our [Scottish Marac Toolkit](#). This essential document troubleshoots practical issues around the whole Marac process.

For additional information and materials on Maracs, please see our [Marac Overview – Scotland document](#) which outlines current practice alongside the 10 principles of an effective Marac. This provides guidance on the Marac process and forms the basis of the Marac quality assurance process and national standards for Marac in Scotland.

SafeLives' Dash Risk Checklist

Aim of the form

- To help frontline practitioners identify high risk cases of domestic abuse, stalking and 'honour'- based violence.
- To decide which cases should be referred to Marac and what other support might be required. A completed form becomes an active record that can be referred to in future for case management.
- To offer a common tool to agencies that are part of the Marac¹ process and provide a shared understanding of risk in relation to domestic abuse, stalking and 'honour'-based violence.
- To enable agencies to make defensible decisions based on the evidence from extensive research of cases, including domestic homicides and 'near misses', which underpins most recognised models of risk assessment.

How to use the form

Before completing the form for the first time we recommend that you read the full practice guidance and FAQs.

Recommended referral criteria to Marac

- 1. Professional judgement:** If a professional has serious concerns about a victim's situation, they should refer the case to Marac. There will be occasions where the particular context of a case gives rise to serious concerns even if the victim has been unable to disclose the information that might highlight their risk more clearly. ***This could reflect extreme levels of fear, cultural barriers to disclosure, immigration issues or language barriers particularly in cases of 'honour'-based violence.*** This judgement would be based on the professional's experience and/or the victim's perception of their risk even if they do not meet criteria 2 and/or 3 below.
- 2. Visible high risk¹:** The number of 'ticks' on this checklist. If you have ticked 14 or more 'yes' boxes the case would normally meet the Marac referral criteria.
- 3. Potential escalation:** The number of police callouts to the victim as a result of domestic violence in the past 12 months. This criterion can be used to identify cases where there is not a positive identification of a majority of the risk factors on the list, but where abuse appears to be escalating and where it is appropriate to assess the situation more fully by sharing information at Marac. It is common practice to start with 3 or more police callouts in a 12-month period but **this will need to be reviewed** depending on your local volume and your level of police reporting.

Risk is dynamic and can change very quickly. It is good practice to review the checklist after a new incident.

Please pay particular attention to your professional judgement in all cases. The results from a checklist are not a definitive assessment of risk. They should provide you with a structure to inform your judgement and act as prompts to further questioning, analysis and risk management whether via a Marac or in another way. The Marac is only one route for you to consider on the completion of the Dash risk checklist. In all instances appropriate safety planning should be considered, pertinent to the needs and risk of the person experiencing domestic abuse, and all others affected, including children.

The responsibility for identifying your local referral threshold rests with your local Marac. This is something that should be known to your organisation.

¹ For further information about Marac please refer to the 10 principles of an effective Marac: http://www.safelives.org.uk/marac/10_Principles_Oct_2011_full.doc

SafeLives Dash risk checklist for use by Idaa's and other non-police agencies² for identification of risks when domestic abuse, 'honour'- based violence and/or stalking are disclosed

Please explain that the purpose of asking these questions is for the safety and protection of the individual concerned. Tick the box if the factor is present. Please use the comment box at the end of the form to expand on any answer. It is assumed that your main source of information is the victim. If this is <u>not the case</u>, please indicate in the right-hand column	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW	State source of info if not the victim (e.g. police officer)
1. Has the current incident resulted in injury? Please state what and whether this is the first injury.	☐	☐	☐	
2. Are you very frightened? Comment:	☐	☐	☐	
3. What are you afraid of? Is it further injury or violence? Please give an indication of what you think [name of abuser(s)] might do and to whom, including children. Comment:	☐	☐	☐	
4. Do you feel isolated from family/friends? I.e., does [name of abuser(s)] try to stop you from seeing friends/family/doctor or others? Comment:	☐	☐	☐	
5. Are you feeling depressed or having suicidal thoughts?	☐	☐	☐	
6. Have you separated or tried to separate from [name of abuser(s)] within the past year?	☐	☐	☐	
7. Is there conflict over child contact?	☐	☐	☐	
8. Does [name of abuser(s)] constantly text, call, contact, follow, stalk or harass you? Please expand to identify what and whether you believe that this is done deliberately to intimidate you? Consider the context and behaviour of what is being done.	☐	☐	☐	
9. Are you pregnant or have you recently had a baby (within the last 18 months)?	☐	☐	☐	
10. Is the abuse happening more often?	☐	☐	☐	
11. Is the abuse getting worse?	☐	☐	☐	
12. Does [name of abuser(s)] try to control everything you do and/or are they excessively jealous? For example: in terms of relationships; who you see; being 'policed' at home; telling you what to wear. Consider 'honour'-based violence (HBV) and specify behaviour.	☐	☐	☐	
13. Has [name of abuser(s)] ever used weapons or objects to hurt you?	☐	☐	☐	
14. Has [name of abuser(s)] ever threatened to kill you or someone else and you believed them? If yes, tick who: You ☐ Children ☐ Other (please specify) ☐	☐	☐	☐	

² Note: This checklist is consistent with the ACPO endorsed risk assessment model DASH 2009 for the police service, known as DAQ in Scotland. Once completed, the Dash risk checklist form should be sent via secure means to the relevant Marac. Please do not send it to SafeLives; to do so would be a breach of the Data Protection Act

Tick the box if the factor is present. Please use the comment box at the end of the form to expand on any answer.	YES	NO	DONT KNOW	State source of info
15.Has [name of abuser(s)] ever attempted to strangle / choke / suffocate / drown you?	☐	☐	☐	
16.Does [name of abuser(s)] do or say things of a sexual nature that make you feel bad or that physically hurt you or someone else? If someone else, specify who.	☐	☐	☐	
17.Is there any other person who has threatened you or who you are afraid of? If yes, please specify whom and why. Consider extended family if HBV.	☐	☐	☐	
18.Do you know if [name of abuser(s)] has hurt anyone else? Consider HBV. Please specify whom, including the children, siblings or elderly relatives: ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Children Another family member Someone from a previous relationship Other (please specify)	☐	☐	☐	
19.Has [name of abuser(s)] ever mistreated an animal or the family pet?	☐	☐	☐	
20.Are there any financial issues? For example, are you dependent on [name of abuser(s)] for money/have they recently lost their job/other financial issues?	☐	☐	☐	
21. Has [name of abuser(s)] had problems in the past year with drugs (prescription or other), alcohol or mental health leading to problems in leading a normal life? If yes, please specify which and give relevant details if known. ☐ ☐ ☐ Drugs Alcohol Mental health				
22. Has [name of abuser(s)] ever threatened or attempted suicide?				
23.Has [name of abuser(s)] ever breached bail/other orders and/or formal agreement for when they can see you and/or the children? You may wish to consider this in relation to an ex-partner of the perpetrator if relevant. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Bail conditions Non-harassment Order Child contact arrangements Forced Marriage Protection Order Other – please detail				
24.Do you know if [name of abuser(s)] has ever been in trouble with the police or has a criminal history? If yes, please specify: ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Domestic abuse Sexual violence Other violence Other	☐	☐	☐	
Total 'yes' responses				

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For consideration by professionals

Is there any other relevant information (from victim or professional) which may increase risk levels? Consider victim's situation in relation to disability, substance misuse, mental health issues, cultural / language barriers, 'honour'-based systems, geographic isolation and minimisation. Are they willing to engage with your service? Describe.	
Consider abuser's occupation / interests. Could this give them unique access to weapons? Describe.	
What are the victim's greatest priorities to address their safety?	

Do you believe that there are reasonable grounds for referring this case to Marac?		Yes	☐
		No	☐
If yes, have you made a referral?		Yes	☐
		No	☐
Signed		Date	
Do you believe that there are risks facing the children in the family?		Yes	☐
		No	☐
If yes, please confirm if you have made a referral to safeguard the children?	Yes ☐ No ☐	Date referral made	
Signed		Date	
Name			

Practitioner's notes

This document reflects work undertaken by SafeLives in partnership with Laura Richards, Consultant Violence Adviser to ACPO. We would like to thank Advance, Blackburn with Darwen Women's Aid and Berkshire East Family Safety Unit and all the partners of the Blackpool Marac for their contribution in piloting the revised checklist without which we could not have amended the original SafeLives risk identification checklist. We are very grateful to Elizabeth Hall of CAFCASS and Neil Blacklock of Respect for their advice and encouragement and for the expert input we received from Jan Pickles, Dr Amanda Robinson and Jasvinder Sandhera.

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