

Getting it right first time: Top ten actions

A quick guide for commissioners, domestic violence co-ordinators and managers of specialist and non-specialist services

1. Set up a champions network in your area or organisation

Agree with your partners to formally set up a domestic abuse champions' network throughout all frontline services. Work with a partner such as SafeLives to find champions and train them to support your workforce. Set up strong processes so that every professional knows what to do if someone discloses and which colleagues to ask for help if they are worried about a client or patient. Make sure every disclosure leads to a risk assessment and to the right support for that level of risk. Make sure managers support the scheme and make it visible throughout your organisations, through posters and information in public and non-public areas.

2. Make identifying domestic abuse part of everyday working in key services

Commission evidence-based programmes such as the Iris support and referral programme to run in your local GP surgeries (www.irisdomesticviolence.org.uk). Pilot routine or targeted enquiry as part of everyday working in key frontline agencies, especially children's services, substance misuse and mental health services, and make sure disclosure links to meaningful support for domestic abuse.

3. Put Idvas in the local community

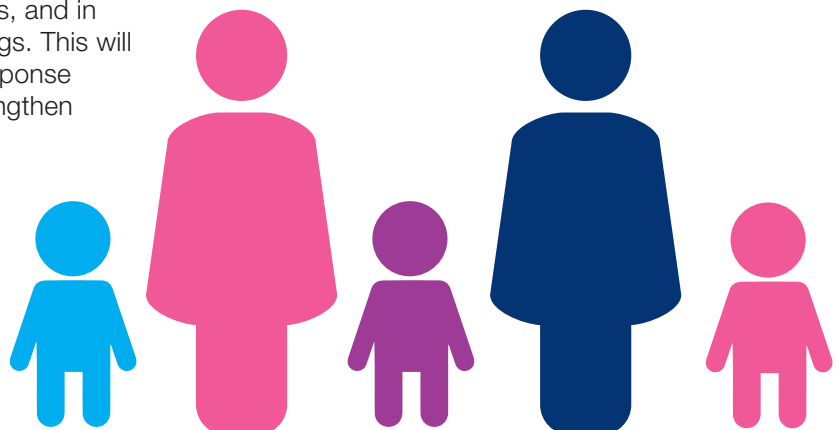
Make sure that your area identifies victims who don't engage with the police by co-locating Idvas in other places where victims might go, such as hospitals and other health settings, and in housing and homelessness settings. This will help you embed a community response to domestic abuse, and also strengthen your champions' network.

4. Make sure that your Idva teams are large enough to have a range of specialisms

A larger Idva team, managed through one structure (though not necessarily from one organisation), could have a range of specialisms unavailable to smaller teams. Lead Idvas could act as a centre of expertise and source of advice to their colleagues, alongside their caseload. Areas of specialism for an Idva service could include substance misuse, mental health, young people, sexual violence, LGBT victims, BAME victims, and honour-based violence. This will help Idvas develop and build their knowledge and skills. A larger team will also be able to offer a more robust service, with cover for absence and time for development and supervision. Talk to SafeLives about how to commission a multi-specialist Idva service.

5. Proactively seek out victims from diverse communities

Engaging with communities where victims may find it harder to disclose abuse may help you find those victims more quickly. BAME victims are more likely to seek help with housing, for example, so may be identified more readily by workers in housing services or specialists co-located there. Identifying young, LGBT and male victims - and victims without children - also needs proactive approaches. The champions' network should raise professionals' confidence to ask about abuse, no matter who the client or patient is.



6. Make sure your services are not predicated on victims leaving their relationship

Make sure that victims who continue to be in a relationship can access help and support. This is a challenge to manage, but is essential to reach some victims earlier. They may of course leave the relationship later, but help should be available when they seek it. This may be particularly important in identifying BAME victims, who are more likely to be living together when they get help.

7. Do a snapshot analysis to understand your local picture, and act on it

Trial asking all victims about their experiences within a set time frame (eg a working week). This could help you understand how long victims in your area live with abuse, and what missed opportunities there were to get them help earlier. Set a local target to cut the time victims live with abuse. And make changes to local services based on what you have learned.

8. Make sure that any public awareness work in your area links victims and families to support

Make sure all public information campaigns and helplines link to local systems to support victims and children. These systems must genuinely work for victims who self-disclose, and friends and family who raise concerns.

9. Change everyday practice so the risks of all family members are assessed

If your local services identify a child or adult at risk, make sure you actively identify and assess the risk of every other member of that family and any other significant individuals too. This must happen together, not in isolation. This will help you identify all victims and understand the risks posed by and to family members better. If you link all the risks together, you can come up with a better plan to make the whole family safe – and make sure no victims or children are missed.

10. Have enough capacity to help every identified victim and child

Identifying domestic abuse as early as possible is only the first step. Once identified, all victims and all children need effective support that responds to their risks and helps them become safe. That means an Idva service with capacity to support all high-risk cases in your area, plus an effective Marac. It means substance misuse and mental health services that are able to support those victims with complex needs. And it means a range of services for victims at medium and standard risk, for children and for perpetrators. Talk to SafeLives about our full recommendations on local commissioning.

For help on making any of this a reality in your local area, get in touch with SafeLives' expert team at info@safelives.org.uk.