

People experiencing domestic abuse

You should always feel safe in your home. You should be safe from any abusive behaviour. This includes physical violence, controlling behaviour, financial and sexual abuse. You are not alone, and you are not to blame.

There is help out there to assist you with deciding on your options, including [staying safe in your home](#) or [leaving it](#).

If you have experienced/are experiencing domestic abuse, you can call the police on 101 or [report an incident online](#). **If it's an emergency situation, always call 999.**

Support if you're affected by domestic abuse

There are several organisations that can help you, including:

- [24-hour Domestic and Sexual Abuse helpline](#)
- [Women's Aid NI](#)
- [The Men's Advisory Project](#)
- [LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline](#)

Domestic abuse can affect many aspects of your life, including your mental and physical health. If your health is suffering, you should always speak with your GP. There is also a [range of services](#) that can help you with specific issues.

Staying in your home

If you decide to stay in your home, you must take measures to stay safe. You should speak to:

- [a solicitor](#) about getting a court order to keep the abuser away from you and your home
- the Housing Executive if you are one of their tenants. They may be able to help make your home safer.

Keep an abuser away from you and your home

Depending on the type and extent of the domestic abuse, it can be dealt with in both the criminal and civil courts. The Belfast Area Domestic Violence Partnership has produced [information on what the law can do to help you](#).

The two main types of court orders that a solicitor can help you get to keep you safe from an abuser are:

- An [occupation order](#) - this is where the court decides that an abuser must stay away from your home. It means that the abuser can no longer live with you. It gives you the right to remain in the home. You can get an occupation order even if you're not the main tenant or owner, or if the abuser is the legal owner or tenant. You must call the police if the abuser breaks the occupation order. Breaking an occupation order could lead to the court issuing the abuser with a fine or a jail sentence.
- A [non-molestation order](#) is a legal injunction which prevents an abuser from harassing, threatening or being violent towards you. Depending on what the court decides should be in the order, it can stop an abuser from contacting you, coming to your home or going to specific areas. The order can give you some peace of mind before making long-term decisions about your housing situation. You must call the police if the abuser breaks the non-molestation order. Breaking a non-molestation order is a criminal offence, and the person who breaches it can be arrested and face jail time.

Get help keeping your home safe

If you decide to stay in your home, you should take action to make it safer.

If you are a Housing Executive tenant, they might be able to help you. They run a [sanctuary scheme](#) that can install proper security (such as alarms and CCTV). To access the scheme, the police will need to check your home first.

Leaving your home

Preparing to leave

If you've decided to leave an abuser, prepare ahead of time if you can. The safety of you and any dependants is a priority.

It's a good idea to pack an emergency bag for yourself and any children leaving with you. Try to find somewhere safe to hide it. It might be best to leave it somewhere away from your home, such as at a friend's house or with a trusted family member.

If you can, put aside some money to take with you or deposit some money into a separate bank account under your name.

You will need to consider what practical items to pack away for you and your children. You may not be able to return to the property once you have left. You might need to pack away things like

- school uniforms
- favourite toys
- medications
- bank cards
- important documents such as medical cards, birth certificates, passports
- anything on record relating to the abuse (police reports and court orders) and
- money

If you're not entitled to benefits because of your immigration status, it can be harder to think about leaving an abusive situation. [Speak to one of the organisations above](#) to check if you can get help.

Getting housing help when you leave

[If you decide to move out of your home](#), speak with the [Housing Executive](#) as soon as possible. The Housing Executive has a legal duty to assess someone who is homeless or is threatened with becoming homeless.

The Housing Executive can assess your situation to see what duties they owe you. In the first instance, this might include offering you somewhere to stay temporarily. The Housing Executive will never talk to your abuser about your situation. But they may want to speak to people or groups you've contacted about what has happened to you, such as a solicitor, friend or family member.

The Housing Executive will have a **legal duty** to give you temporary housing if they believe that you:

- are homeless or cannot go back to your home, and
- have experienced or are at risk of experiencing domestic abuse in your home. This is also known as having a 'priority need'.

The Housing Executive should offer you temporary accommodation if you meet these criteria. Temporary accommodation could be in a hostel, B&B or a 'single let' in a privately rented house. The temporary accommodation may be outside the area where you have been living.

If the Housing Executive doesn't give you temporary accommodation, you should [get advice from one of our advisers](#). You might be able to challenge the decision.

If you need somewhere to stay at the weekend or when the Housing Executive offices are closed, you should contact:

- the [Housing Executive out-of-hours service](#) or
- one of the [hostels](#) that takes self-referrals

You can also contact [Women's Aid](#) to see if you can stay in one of their hostels.

You can get free bus or rail tickets from the Housing Executive or Women's Aid to travel to a refuge or emergency accommodation.

You might still have to pay rent on your home, even if you have left it. You can [**get help paying for two homes**](#) if you:

- left because of threats of violence and
- you plan to go back and
- you're entitled to benefits.

If you left because of domestic abuse and your rent is not covered by benefits, [**speak to our advisers**](#) for help.

Getting help with your animals

Having a pet or 'companion animal' can offer many health benefits. They can help your emotional, physical, and mental well-being. You may also be responsible for farming or working animals. Concern for their safety may make you stay in a dangerous living situation.

Domestic abuse may not only be directed at you or members of your family. Unfortunately, the welfare of any animals may also be at risk. Animals may be used as an emotional weapon to keep you living in an abusive situation or to cause you further fear or distress. They may use the animal to control you, to make you feel that you have no option but to stay with them.

Unfortunately, most domestic abuse refuges do not have the capacity to accept animals. It can also be difficult to find a private landlord who will allow you to keep an animal.

Some charities may offer a [**fostering service**](#) for a limited time until you get settled into a new home:

- In Northern Ireland, you can contact the [**Causeway Coast Dog Rescue**](#) or [**USPCA**](#)
- If you plan to relocate to the Republic of Ireland, contact [**Safe Ireland**](#) or [**DSPCA**](#)
- In Great Britain, the leading charities that can help are [**Dogs Trust Freedom**](#), [**Cats Protection Lifeline**](#), [**Endeavour**](#) and [**Refuge4Pets**](#)

Even if these groups are not in your area, you should be able to contact them for advice on what to do. You can also find more details from [**the Links Group**](#).