



**SURVIVING  
ECONOMIC  
A B U S E**

# How the police can help

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Building safety

If a current or former partner has interfered with your money or other economic resources in some way to limit your choices, this information is for you. It outlines how the police can support you if you have experienced economic abuse.

The police are there to keep you safe. If you are in immediate danger, they should be your first port of call by dialling 999.

## The role of the police

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**“I refuse to be told that nothing can be done and I want change for other victims. I know first-hand how devastating the effects of economic abuse can be.”**

Approaching the police if you are experiencing abuse can be daunting. You may wonder what the police can do to help, and may feel nervous about reporting the abuse.

There is a lot that the police can do to help, and they will prioritise the safety of you and your children. Keeping the public safe is one of the key responsibilities of the police.

Reporting abuse is the first step towards accessing justice. It may be useful to understand how economic abuse relates to the law, as the police can only act if the abuser's behaviour is criminal.

## Economic abuse and the law

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Although there is no criminal offence of domestic abuse, many specific forms of abusive behaviour are criminal offences. This includes threats to kill, assault and rape.

Some of the ways that an abuser might restrict how you acquire, use and maintain money and other economic resources<sup>1</sup> (such as accommodation, food and clothing) can be criminal offences.

These include:

- blackmail
- criminal damage, e.g., destroying or damaging property
- harassment, e.g., in the workplace
- theft
- threats to destroy or damage property
- false imprisonment, e.g., preventing someone from leaving the house and going to work

**Controlling or coercive behaviour** is also now a criminal offence. It was introduced by the Serious Crime Act 2015. Economic abuse is a form of controlling or coercive behaviour and often overlaps with other controlling tactics such as:

- physical assault (e.g., using physical force to take money)
- sexual assault (e.g., making a partner perform sexual acts for money)
- threats (e.g., of physical abuse if bank account details are not shared)
- humiliation (e.g., restricting money needed for essential items, such as sanitary products)
- intimidation (e.g., destroying property)
- isolation (e.g., being prevented from working or not having access to transport)

Our research shows that six in ten successful prosecution of the controlling or coercive behaviour offence include economic abuse.<sup>2</sup>

The abuser may make you feel like you cannot seek help from the police. Some possible tactics include:

- telling you that you will lose your job
- telling you that the police won't do anything
- insisting that you won't be believed
- having or claiming to have friends in the police force

It may take a number of attempts to get the right response from the police. However, many police forces have been trained on how challenging it can be for you to report domestic or economic abuse. They have a responsibility to believe you and keep you safe.

## Reporting a crime

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If any of the above circumstances apply, you can report the abuser to the police. If you are not in immediate danger, the number for your local police is **101**, regardless of where you live. You can also report in person at your local police station.

If you are in immediate danger, you can call **999**. If you cannot speak to the operator on the 999 call, you can **press 55** to let them know your call is genuine. This will not let the police know where you are, however. If you can say anything, tell them your location.

If you are experiencing domestic abuse, the police should speak to you separately from the abuser. You can also ask to speak to a female police officer, if you would prefer to.

Usually, the police will investigate and, if there are sufficient grounds, they may arrest the abuser. This does not necessarily mean that the abuser will be charged.

Usually the police pass the case on to the **Crown Prosecution Service**, who will decide whether to pursue charges.

The police do not need to see the offence happen. They do not need a warrant to make an arrest if they suspect the abuser is going to commit an offence.

They will try to gather evidence, such as photographs of damage or injuries, so that the case is not solely based on your statement.

If the abuser has committed an 'arrestable offence', the police will not need your permission to make an arrest.

If you report the abuser to the police, seek support from a local domestic abuse or legal service. You can search for a local domestic abuse service on the [Women's Aid website](#).

If the police take action against the abuser, you can ask for a crime reference number, which may be helpful if you seek further support.

## Evidence

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The police may ask you for evidence, as well as gather evidence for themselves.

Evidence of economic abuse and controlling or coercive behaviour can include:

- bank records
- medical records
- a diary of events, if you keep one
- evidence on the internet, such as emails and social media records
- text messages and phone records
- photographic evidence of lifestyle and the state of the household
- witness testimony, which may include talking to your friends and family about the abuser's behaviour

## What else the police can do

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The police can also support you with:

## Specialist help and support

The police can help you to access domestic abuse support services local to you.

### Transport to a safe place

If you have to flee your home, the police can help arrange transport to take you to a safe place.

### Support to return to your property safely

If you are afraid of returning home to collect any items you may need, you can request a police escort to help you do so safely.

### An order to protect you from abuse

The police can, in some circumstances, issue a Domestic Violence Protection Notice (DVPN). This means that a Magistrates' Court will hear the case and may decide to put a Domestic Violence Protection Order (DVPO) in place. This would remove your partner from your home for up to 28 days.

## If you are not happy with the police response

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If you are unhappy with the response from your local police force, they should each have a domestic abuse policy, strategy or guidelines for you to check.

If their response does not match these guidelines, you may wish to make a formal complaint. Women's Aid has a [directory of local services](#) that can help you do this.

## Who else you can call

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### “Economic abuse is why I kept returning.”

Abuse through your money and economic resources can create economic instability and/or make you dependent on an abuser. Without the money or resources to leave, it is easy to become trapped and experience more harm as a result.

If you are not in immediate danger and do not wish to contact the police, there are other organizations that can help.

## Call a domestic abuse helpline

Phone and online helplines can provide support and guidance. They include:

- [National Domestic Abuse Helpline \(England\)](#): A confidential, 24-hour service run by Refuge. Call on **0808 2000 247** or access the service online. You can set a codeword and send a message to the helpline to either contact you by phone or email. They can also contact an alternative number you provide, such as for a friend's phone. If you are asking them to contact you by email, it is important your email is safe and not checked by the abuser.
- [Women's Aid online chat](#): Chat directly with a Women's Aid support worker (Mon– Fri, 10am–4pm, Sat–Sun 10am–12pm).
- [Live Fear-Free Helpline \(Wales\)](#): A 24-hour service available on **0808 80 10 800**. Live chat is available or you can email [info@livefearfreehelpline.wales](mailto:info@livefearfreehelpline.wales). A 24-hour text service can be accessed on **07860 077333**.
- [Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline \(Scotland\)](#): A 24-hour service available on **0800 027 1234**. You can also email [helpline@sdaafmh.org.uk](mailto:helpline@sdaafmh.org.uk). An online chat service is also available.
- [Domestic and Sexual Abuse Helpline \(Northern Ireland\)](#): Managed by Nexus NI, the helpline is available 24-hours a day on **0808 802 1414**. You can also email [help@dsahelpline.org](mailto:help@dsahelpline.org) or use the web chat service.
- [National LGBT Domestic Abuse Helpline](#): Run by Galop, the service is available Mon, Tues and Fri, 10am–5pm; Wed and Thurs, 10am–8pm) on **0800 999 5428** or [help@galop.org.uk](mailto:help@galop.org.uk).
- [Men's Advice Line](#): Call on **0808 801 0327** (Mon and Wed, 9am–8pm; Tues, Thurs and Fri, 9am–5pm) or [info@mensadvice.org.uk](mailto:info@mensadvice.org.uk). Web chat service also available.

## Contact a local domestic abuse service

You can search for your local service on the [Women's Aid website](#) or on [Hestia's Bright Sky app](#).

Many charities have ways to contact them online, which may help you hide the contact from the abuser.

## Further support

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If you are experiencing economic abuse, you are not alone. We have more information that can support you to take steps towards safety and begin to regain control of your finances.

### Financial Support Line for Victims of Domestic Abuse

**W 01323 635 987** (Mon–Fri, 9am–1pm & 2pm–5pm)

The Financial Support Line for Victims of Domestic Abuse is run in partnership between Surviving Economic Abuse (SEA) and Money Advice Plus. It offers specialist advice to people experiencing domestic abuse who are in financial difficulty.

Visit [www.survivingeconomicabuse.org/resources](http://www.survivingeconomicabuse.org/resources) for information including:

- Organisations that can help you, including those that can support you with legal information and advice
- Economic abuse and controlling or coercive behaviour
- Steps you can take towards economic safety

## References

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1. Adams, A. E., Sullivan, C. M., Bybee D., and Greeson, M. R. (2008). Development of the Scale of Economic Abuse. *Violence Against Women*.
2. Sharp-Jeffs, N. with Learmonth, S. (2017). *Into Plain Sight: How economic abuse is reflected in successful prosecutions of controlling or coercive behavior*. London: Surviving Economic Abuse.

