

Populo Living

Domestic Abuse Group Policy

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Department	Customer Services
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Domestic Abuse Policy

1. Policy Summary

- 1.1** Some of our customers and their families may experience domestic abuse at some point in their lifetime. We want to do all we can to support our customers to address their issues in partnership with other agencies.
- 1.2** We'll always take time to understand the effect the abuse is having, making sure that our response is victim/survivor centred. We'll be helpful, sensitive and supportive – providing timely and accessible advice to reduce the risks they face.

2. Policy Scope

- 2.1** This policy applies to all customers, regardless of tenure type, who live in properties owned or managed by Populo Living.

3. Policy Principles and Aims

- 3.1** When domestic abuse does occur, we will take a collaborative, victim/survivor-centred approach to supporting those who are affected and/or impacted.
- 3.2 Domestic abuse is a crime under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, and a breach of tenancy or lease.**
- 3.3** Our policy explains what domestic abuse is, how we recognise it, what approach we'll take and how we'll respond to victim/survivor, children, young people and reported abusers.
- 3.4** We will work with appropriate local authority departments to support them in fulfilling their statutory duties and commissioning services for victims/survivors of domestic abuse and their children within safe accommodation.

4. Legal Compliance and definitions

- 4.1** Definitions mentioned in this Policy are explained in the list below. This is not an exhaustive list. For further examples of abusive behaviour, please see section 1 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

Domestic abuse - Domestic abuse is a crime under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. It is any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between people aged 16 years or over, who are or have been personally connected to each other such as married, in a civil partnership, in an intimate relationship or family members. This applies regardless of gender or sexuality.

Controlling behaviour - Controlling behaviour is a range of acts to obtain power over another person through fear and intimidation, which make a person subordinate and/or dependent. This involves isolating the victim/survivor from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour - Coercive control is a type of domestic abuse where a perpetrator uses humiliation, intimidation and manipulation to frighten and control the victim/survivor.

Economic/Financial abuse - Economic abuse is any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on another person's ability to acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or obtain goods or services.

Psychological Abuse - Involves the regular and deliberate use of a range of words and non-physical actions used with the purpose to manipulate, hurt, weaken or frighten a person mentally and emotionally; and/or distort, confuse or influence a person's thoughts and actions within their everyday lives, changing their sense of self and harming their wellbeing.

Physical abuse - Is deliberately hurting or injuring someone. This could include hitting, smacking, pushing, shaking, spitting, pinching, scalding, misusing medication, inappropriate restraint, inappropriate physical punishments, or other ways of causing physical harm.

Sexual abuse - Is any behaviour thought to be of a sexual nature which is unwanted and takes place without consent. Sexual abuse can be physical, psychological, verbal or online. Any behaviour of a sexual nature that causes you distress is considered sexual violence or abuse. It involves all unwanted physical contact of a sexual nature and ranges from pinching, embracing, groping and kissing, to rape and serious sexual assault which involves penetration without consent.

Honour-based abuse - Honour-based abuse is a crime or incident committed to protect or defend the 'honour' of a family or community. If your family or community think you've shamed or embarrassed them by behaving in a certain way, they may punish you for breaking their 'honour' code.

Modern day slavery - Modern slavery covers a set of specific legal concepts including forced labour, debt bondage, forced marriage, slavery and slavery-like practices, and human trafficking. Essentially, it refers to situations of exploitation that a person cannot refuse or leave because of threats, violence, coercion, deception, and/or abuse of power.

Personally connected - People who are 'personally connected' are: intimate partners, ex-partners, family members or individuals who share parental responsibility for a child. There is no requirement for the victim and perpetrator to live in the same household.

MARAC - Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference. It is a meeting attended by agencies to discuss cases of domestic violence that professionals consider to be 'high risk'. The purpose of the MARAC is so that all the agencies involved in helping victims can agree how best to offer protection and reduce risk.

DASH - Domestic Abuse Stalking & Harassment Risk Assessment (DASH) is part of the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Co-ordinator (MARAC) referral. DASH is a risk assessment form to establish the level of risk.

DAHA - The Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance's (DAHA) mission is to improve the housing sector's response to domestic abuse through the introduction and adoption of an established set of standards and an accreditation process.

4.2 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 recognises children as victims of Domestic abuse in their own right if they witness or experience domestic abuse in the home. Where children are experiencing or witnessing domestic abuse this must be reported to Children Services.

5. Policy

Our approach to domestic abuse

5.1 Domestic abuse is a breach of tenancy, and where appropriate we will act against those responsible.

5.2 We recognise it can be challenging for victims/survivors to disclose information regarding domestic abuse. Therefore, we make it easy to report any incident to us, including over the phone, email, third party, or in person. We will offer a safe and confidential space for the reporter or victim to meet with us which matches their needs

5.3 A report of domestic abuse may not come from the survivor or victim and may not be labelled as domestic abuse by the person making the disclosure. We will ensure that we train our staff to be able to recognise a report of domestic abuse, even when it is not given that label by the person making the disclosure.

5.4 When we become aware of domestic abuse situations, we'll always:

- encourage the reporting of the incident to the police where safe to do so
- train our people to spot signs of domestic abuse, to provide guidance and support to victims/survivors
- treat all reports as a priority and respond within one working day
- provide accurate, helpful and supportive advice
- be understanding, empathetic, supportive and sensitive
- think about the impact on them and their family – especially children
- consider any disabilities or cultural issues, including intersectional needs (Intersectionality explains how different aspects of a person's identity—like race, gender, sexuality, or disability—overlap and interact to shape their experiences, especially regarding discrimination or inequality.)
- treat reports confidentially (but if we are concerned, they or anyone else is at risk of serious harm we'll report the concern to the police or safeguarding team)
- work with local authorities, police and other agencies such as specialist support services to make sure our customers are safe
- respect the wishes of the victim/survivor, unless this puts them or anyone else at serious risk of harm
- where appropriate to do so, take action against the reported abuser, if they are our customer, to make sure they are accountable for what they have done.

Responding to reports of domestic abuse

5.5 We'll make sure we offer help without making matters worse for the victim/survivor or their family.

5.6 When speaking to the victim/survivor, we will:

- be non-judgemental, listen sympathetically and accept their account of the situation
- complete a risk assessment and agree an action plan, being clear about what we can and can't do as their landlord
- protect their identity and location, supporting them to improve the security of their home, such as changing locks or fitting alarms
- work with the resident and Police on "target hardening" solutions
- signpost and liaise with support services to manage the risks, including safeguarding referrals for adults and/or children
- offer advice on how they might resolve the issue. This may include the right to take their own civil action against the reported abuser
- agree with resident safe communication methods.

5.7 Although we don't provide services from our offices, in the case of domestic abuse we will make an exception, and we may offer our meeting rooms to create a safe environment where victim/survivors can talk. When our office is not accessible to customers, we will try to provide a more convenient safe space to meet them.

5.8 Where professional advocates or the police advise a victim is at high risk, we may work with the local authority to explore alternative accommodation options. In these instances, we will either signpost or refer to the relevant Local Authority Housing Needs and Lettings Team for alternative housing advice.

Responding to reported abusers

5.9 Domestic Abuse is a criminal act and a breach of tenancy or lease conditions and we will:

- support the police and local authority in prosecuting reported abusers by providing evidence where we have permission from the victim/survivor
- where appropriate, consider taking enforcement action to remove them from our homes
- where there is a joint tenancy, and a victim/survivor is unable to return to their home due to risk of harm, encourage them to seek legal advice
- where appropriate, recharge the reported abuser for any damage they've caused to the home
- where appropriate, refer the reported abuser to intervention programmes or other support where available.

5.10 We may also support reported abusers into other accommodation where available and appropriate – to reduce the risk to victims/survivors.

Contractors

5.11 We expect any contractor working for or on behalf of Populo Living to be vigilant and report any red flags or potential signs of Domestic Abuse to us.

5.12 Through our procurement processes will ensure all contractors working on our behalf understand Domestic Abuse, resident safety and safeguarding risks.

Continuous improvement to better support customers

5.13 We will work to innovate, develop and improve the service we provide. This will be informed by our data, customer feedback, staff feedback, Housing Ombudsman recommendations and feedback and emerging sector best practice (including feedback from DAHA).

Partnership working

5.14 Domestic abuse cannot be dealt with by any one organisation or agency working in isolation.

5.15 We work alongside other partner agencies, including attendance at multi-agency meetings like MARAC to find solutions together and ensure victim/survivor safety.

5.16 We have also developed formal information sharing protocols and partnership agreements to allow us to respond quickly to domestic abuse.

5.17 We may make a referral to Social Services or the Police, this can include a safeguarding referral without the permission of the victim where the situation and the Data Protection Act 2018 justify it.

Information sharing and data protection

5.18 Where appropriate, Populo Living will share information with relevant partners—such as regulatory bodies, law enforcement agencies, or trusted third-party service providers—to effectively carry out its functions and duties. We will work within the provisions of the Data Protection Act and, where applicable, the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which establish clear guidelines for the sharing of information and the protection of confidentiality and privacy.

5.19 Populo Living is committed to ensuring that personal data is treated fairly, lawfully, and appropriately, with the rights of individuals being always upheld. However, if an individual's safety is at risk, we are required to report our concerns to the responsible authorities and share the necessary information to protect that individual.

5.20 When we store or share information, we will consider the JAPAN test:

Justified - Is what we're doing justifiable in the circumstances i.e. can we justify the need to collect/store/share/destroy the personal information we are handling?

Authorised - Are we authorised to do this? Or is someone else designated as responsible for managing the recording or disclosure of this personal information?

Proportional - Is what we are doing proportional to the purpose? Could we achieve it by recording or sharing less or no personal information?

Auditabile - Have we recorded what we've shared, with whom and why, so there is evidence of our actions?

Necessary - Is what we are doing necessary, or can the end result be achieved in some other way without this disclosure?

7.0. Compliance

5.21 In order to recognise and effectively respond to cases of domestic abuse, all staff are expected to complete annual safeguarding and domestic abuse e-learning. Further training will be arranged dependent on roles.

5.22 Domestic abuse cases will be logged, managed and reported through our housing (case management) system and will be kept in line with GDPR and data protection policies and data retention schedules.

5.23 Responsible managers will regularly monitor each case of domestic abuse against our performance targets, provide appropriate advice and support to the responsible officer dealing with a case, ensure that they receive appropriate training; and ensure that all cases are appropriately recorded.

5.24 We will work with appropriate local authority departments to support them in fulfilling their strategic duties and commissioning services for victims/survivors of domestic abuse and their children within safe accommodation.

5.25 We comply with DAHA's principles and values by embedding a person-centred and victim/survivor-led approach within our housing services. We ensure that victims/survivors have access to safe, secure, and appropriate housing, free from fear, by working within a coordinated community response framework. Through collaboration, empathy, and accountability, we provide trained staff, clear policies, and effective safeguarding measures to support those affected by domestic abuse