

Domestic Abuse Policy and Procedure (Customers)

Policy Statement

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to raise awareness of domestic abuse, set out Orwell's commitments to addressing it, and ensure our team members feel equipped and empowered to support customers who are at risk of, or experiencing, domestic abuse to stay safe.

Domestic abuse is when one person aged 16 or over behaves in a harmful or controlling way towards another person they are personally connected to. People are considered personally connected if they:

- Are, or have been, in a relationship (partners)
- Are related to each other (family members)
- Share a child together

Abuse doesn't have to be directed at the person themselves. The law also says that abusive behaviour still counts as domestic abuse even if it's aimed at someone else, such as the person's child, if the purpose or effect is to harm, control, or frighten the person experiencing the abuse.

Domestic abuse is a criminal offence and will not be tolerated. It affects people of all ages, genders (including women, men, and non-binary people), races, sexual orientations, economic backgrounds, geographies and tenures, and has significant impacts on children, families and communities.

Orwell maintains a zero tolerance to all forms of abuse and we recognise our duty to protect people's health, wellbeing and human rights, enabling people to live free from harm, abuse and neglect. This Domestic Abuse Policy for customers is closely linked to the Domestic Abuse Policy for colleagues, Anti-social Behaviour Policy and Safeguarding policies.

This policy applies to all Orwell colleagues, including senior managers, the Board and volunteers or anyone working on behalf of Orwell: safeguarding victim-survivors or domestic abuse is everyone's business.

Legal Obligations

Orwell is committed to preventing, identifying and responding to domestic abuse and meeting its responsibilities under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. We will take a victim-survivor centred approach, working with partner agencies to safeguard victim-survivors and any children or adults at risk.

Our approach is guided by the

- Domestic Abuse Act 2021
- Children Act 1989 and 2004
- Care Act 2014
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014
- Housing Act 1996
- UK GDPR & Data Protection Act 2018
- Equality Act 2010.

Definition

Behaviour is considered abusive if it includes:

- Physical or sexual abuse – hitting, pushing, restraining, unwanted sexual contact or sexual coercion.
- Violent or threatening behaviour – making threats, damaging property, intimidating someone, or threatening to harm them, their children, pets, or loved ones.
- Controlling behaviour – isolating someone from friends or family, monitoring who they see, dictating what they wear, where they go, or how they spend their time.
- Coercive behaviour – using intimidation, humiliation, manipulation, threats, or punishment to make someone comply with demands.
- Economic abuse – controlling access to money, preventing someone from working, forcing debt, monitoring spending, or taking their income or benefits.
- Technology-facilitated abuse – using technology to monitor, track, harass, or control someone, such as checking their phone, tracking them through apps (for example Life360), monitoring CCTV, pet cameras, smart devices, social media, or online accounts.
- Psychological or emotional abuse – constant criticism, gaslighting, blaming, belittling, intimidation, or making someone feel worthless, fearful, or dependent.
- So-called ‘honour’-based abuse – including forced marriage, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), and other abuse linked to family or cultural expectations.

Domestic abuse may be a single incident or a pattern of behaviour over time.

People experiencing domestic abuse may prefer to be called ‘victims’ or ‘survivors’, or neither. We will respect the preferences of our customers in speaking with them, for the sake of consistency and empowerment, we use the term ‘victim-survivor’ in this policy and associated procedures.

Orwell's Commitment

Orwell believes that no one should live in fear of domestic abuse and will take steps to advise, assist and support any person suffering from, or threatened with, domestic abuse.

We recognise that anyone can experience domestic abuse and are committed to supporting all victim-survivors. We also acknowledge the evidence that women and girls are disproportionately impacted by certain forms of domestic abuse, and we take this wider context into account in our work.

Domestic abuse doesn't always present itself in obvious ways; it can be hidden in plain sight. As Orwell employees, it is vital that we remain professionally curious and alert to subtle signs. By staying attentive and compassionate, we play a crucial role in ensuring that people affected by abuse are not overlooked and are offered appropriate and safe support.

People experiencing domestic abuse will be treated in an empathetic, supportive and non-judgemental way. We operate a victim-survivor-centred approach, and a victim-survivor's disclosure alone is sufficient for them to be given advice and assistance as a matter of priority.

We will:

- Provide safe, accessible and inclusive routes for customers to disclose domestic abuse, including a range of reporting options that protect privacy and safety. We will actively promote awareness through our website, social media, neighbourhood communications and communal areas, making clear that domestic abuse will not be tolerated.
- Respond effectively at the first opportunity, ensuring colleagues can recognise domestic abuse, listen sensitively and act safely. We will take a survivor-centred, trauma-informed approach, treating all disclosures seriously, confidentially and without judgement, while tailoring communication and service delivery to minimise risk and prevent further harm.
- Respond to reports of Domestic Abuse sensitively and appropriately, including those made by third parties, and provide personalised support that reflects each victim-survivor's individual circumstances, risks and preferences. Where requested, victim-survivors will be offered the option of dealing with a colleague of the same gender.
- Work with safeguarding services and partner agencies to assess risk, coordinate support and protect adults and children who are experiencing, or are at risk of, abuse, neglect or harm.
- Take practical steps to improve safety, including target-hardening measures and other interventions that help victim-survivors remain safe in their homes where appropriate.
- Hold perpetrators accountable by using the legal, tenancy and enforcement powers available to us, working with the police and courts where necessary, while taking account of the victim-survivor's wishes and future housing needs.

- Ensure colleagues receive appropriate domestic abuse training and refresher training, enabling them to provide effective support and work confidently with partner agencies.
- Handle personal information lawfully and sensitively, comply with data protection requirements, and ensure services are accessible, equitable and responsive to the needs of all victim-survivors.
- Involve customers in shaping and reviewing our approach, using feedback and lived experience to continuously improve our services and support.

Our approach is rooted in equity and intersectionality. We are committed to understanding and addressing the ways in which overlapping identities can affect people's experience of abuse and their access to safety, justice and support.

We are committed to ensuring that all victim-survivors can access support in a way that is safe, respectful and inclusive. We recognise that victim-survivors from marginalised communities - including women, racially minoritised people (global majority), LGBTQ+ individuals, disabled people, older adults and those with insecure immigration status - may face additional barriers in seeking help.

Linked Policies

This policy and procedure should be read in conjunction with:

- Domestic Abuse Policy and procedures (colleagues)
- ASB Policy and Procedure
- Tenancy and Allocations Policy and Procedure
- Safeguarding Policy and Procedure
- Data Protection Policy and Procedure