

Domestic Violence

The Home Office define domestic violence as 'any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional

'Controlling behaviour is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour is: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.'

Reasons to Seek Help

Some important information to consider if you are in an abusive relationship:

- You are not the only one
- You are not to blame
- Ignoring violence is dangerous
- You don't have to deal with it alone
- It is your right to be free of the violence
- Domestic violence affects children, too. *In 90% of domestic violence cases, your children can be in the same or next room.* Children could feel isolated, scared or confused when domestic violence is present within the home

The Housing Solutions Service can help and advise you if you are experiencing domestic violence or abuse. Even if you are not sure if it is happening, but need some help as you do not believe you have suitable accommodation, you can be given help and support.

We also know that if you have decided to leave your accommodation, having somewhere safe to live will be a top priority for you.

If you are in immediate danger it is highly recommended that you contact the police by calling 999. You can also approach a Police Station or Community Safety Unit if you wish to report an incident.

You should get in touch with us at the earliest and safest opportunity
<https://www.westminster.gov.uk/identifying-your-need-for-housing>

We may be able to:

- Try to prevent you from becoming homeless
- Help make your accommodation more suitable
- If appropriate, help you move in a planned way
- Look at alternative housing options
- Refer you to hostels
- Checks refuge vacancies
- Refer you to domestic violence organisations
- Provide contact details for help lines
- Sign post you to other organisations

Westminster City Council Tenant? – If you are a tenant and experiencing domestic violence, you should contact your Housing Office to apply for a Management Transfer. Full details of how this type of transfer is dealt with can be found in our Housing Allocation Scheme
<https://www.westminster.gov.uk/how-we-allocate-housing>

You can also seek help and advice from the National Domestic Violence Helpline <http://www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk>

Housing Benefit

If you are in receipt of Housing Benefit for your current home, but have to flee, in some cases, it is possible for Housing Benefit to be paid against two rented homes up until 52 weeks. Normally, this is where:

- You have left and remain absent from the former home through fear of violence by a person in the home of by a person who was formerly a member of the claimant's (your) family.
- You must be liable for rent on both homes and it is reasonable to meet the rent on both properties i.e. be the tenancy holder.
- **However, you must have an intention to return to your original home.**

<https://www.westminster.gov.uk/guide-housing-benefit-and-council-tax-support>

To find out about other benefits you may be entitled to continue to receive, or to claim, visit <https://www.gov.uk/browse/benefits>

Housing Options in Westminster

Extra help: If you need some extra help and are not threatened with homelessness or homeless, you can visit our People First website <https://www.pfha.co.uk/>. You can obtain more information and advice about staying in your own home and information on the **Care Act**. This aims to improve your wellbeing and independence by giving you greater control and influence when you are in need of support.

Finding accommodation: Finding suitable accommodation in Westminster can be very difficult given the high cost and lack of available places. It can be particularly difficult if you are trying to find a place for the first time. You will need to know how much you can afford to pay in rent (with the assistance of Housing Benefit if you are not working, or have a low income) and where possible, money to cover any deposit due upfront when renting a home. You need to be realistic and consider:

- How **much** you can afford to pay each week
- What **facilities** you want (e.g. central heating, a telephone, a garden)
- What **size** property you need (e.g. bedsit or a two-bedroom flat)
- The **location** (e.g. somewhere close to public transport, shops, friends, etc.)
- **Who** you want to live with (e.g. whether you want to be a lodger in your landlord's home, live on your own, or have flat mates).
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You need to think very carefully how much you can afford to pay and realistic. Do not overstretch yourself because you will have other bills to pay for apart from your rent.

Financially, it may be better for you to share the cost of accommodation with others. However, you need to decide if you can live in accommodation where you have your own bedroom, but will have to share the lounge, bathroom and kitchen with others. If you flat-share, you need to be aware that one of your flat-mates might move out. If this happens, the full rent will still have to be paid.

Staying with family or friends: Living with family or friends is the cheapest form of accommodation. It may also give you the opportunity to save money towards a deposit. If your relationship with family and friends has broken down we can arrange mediation to help rebuild your relationships. If this is a temporary solution we can continue to explore your other housing options and help you to move in a planned way.

Private Rented Accommodation: You should consider the size and type of accommodation you need for your household and how much rent you can afford. You should also consider whether the accommodation is suitable for your health needs.

To check the amount of rent a private landlord is asking for is reasonable, you can check what the Local Housing Allowance amount is. This is the maximum Housing Benefit you will be allowed to have for the property size you need, if you are eligible for it. <https://www.gov.uk/housing-benefit/what-youll-get>

Transfer Homes: If you are a Westminster Council tenant or a tenant of another council, or a tenant of a Housing Association, you can apply to transfer or exchange to alternative accommodation. You may also be able to receive a cash incentive to give up your current accommodation and obtain an alternative elsewhere.