

Practice Guidance for using the Older Person Supplementary Questions to the Domestic Abuse Stalking, Harassment and Honour Based Abuse Risk Identification Checklist

Introduction

The Older People Supplementary Question Checklist is designed to assist professionals in assessing the risk of domestic abuse in older people, and for those who provide care for an older person and are personally connected (as defined by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021¹). It aims to identify potential signs and indicators of abuse, neglect or coercive control that may be present. By using the checklist, you can gather essential information to evaluate the level of risk and guide appropriate interventions to ensure the person's safety and well-being.

When to use the Older Person Supplementary Questions - Domestic Abuse Stalking & Honour Based Abuse (DASH) Risk Assessment

The checklist should be used as a supplementary list to further explore the risk of domestic abuse in older people, and for those who provide care for an older person and are personally connected. It is important to note that the DASH risk assessment should always be used as the primary assessment tool when domestic abuse is identified. The DASH Risk Assessment is a comprehensive and validated tool designed to assess the risk and safety concerns with domestic abuse.

While the Older Person Supplementary Checklist can help identify potential signs and indicators of abuse or control, it is not intended to replace or supersede the use of the DASH Risk Assessment. The DASH Risk Assessment should be deployed as the initial and primary assessment tool when domestic abuse is suspected or disclosed by an individual.

The checklist is a tool to guide your assessment, but professional judgement and collaboration with relevant agencies, for example the Domestic Abuse Hub, are crucial. Each case is unique, and it is essential to tailor the assessment to the specific needs of the person.

¹ Domestic Abuse Act 2021 Part 1

Definition of "personally connected"

(1) Two people are "personally connected" to each other if any of the following applies —

- (a) they are, or have been, married to each other;
- (b) they are, or have been, civil partners of each other;
- (c) they have agreed to marry one another (whether or not the agreement has been terminated);
- (d) they have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether or not the agreement has been terminated);
- (e) they are, or have been, in an intimate personal relationship with each other;
- (f) they each have, or there has been a time when they each have had, a parental relationship in relation to the same child (see subsection (2));
- (g) they are relatives.

Creating a supportive and safe environment

It is important to create a safe and supportive environment for the assessment. Approach the conversation with empathy, respect and sensitivity, acknowledging the unique experiences and needs of older people and those with caring responsibilities. Ensure privacy throughout the process, assuring them that the information shared will be used solely to support their safety and address their concerns. Explain the boundaries of confidentiality.

When using the checklist, keep the following guidelines in mind:

1. Explain the purpose – communicate the purpose of the assessment. Explain that the goal is to assess the potential risk of domestic abuse and ensure their safety and well-being
2. Active listening – Engage in active listening to fully understand the person's experiences and perspectives. Demonstrate empathy and validate their emotions to establish trust and rapport.
3. Open-ended questions – along with the structured questions, encourage the person to share their experiences using open-ended questions (see prompts below). This allows them to provide additional context and insights that may not be covered in the assessment tool.
4. Use plain language – ensure that the questions are clear, concise, and easily understood. Avoid using jargon or complex terminology that may confuse or intimidate the person.
5. Be patient and allow silence – Older individuals may need more time to process questions or recall specific incidents. Be patient and allow them to gather their thoughts. Offer reassurance that they can take time to respond.
6. Use prompts and examples – If the person is having difficulty recalling incidents or expressing their concerns, provide prompts or examples to help trigger their memory or provide context. However, be cautious not to impose or lead their responses.
7. Cultural sensitivity – Be aware of the potential influence of cultural, religious, or societal factors on the experience of older people. Adapt your approach to respect and accommodate their cultural background.
8. Evaluate safety and support – In addition to assessing risk, evaluate the person's safety and support systems. Determine the availability of support from family, friends, professionals, or community. Assess their access to emergency services, the Domestic Abuse Hub or other specialist support.
9. Develop a safety plan – work with the person to develop a personalised safety plan based on the identified risks. The plan should include strategies for physical safety, emotional support, and access to emergency support.
10. Document and follow up – Document the information gathered during the assessment, including the person's responses, identified risks and safety interventions. Regularly review and reassess the risk level as circumstances change.
11. Make referrals – Seek further support and guidance from the Domestic Abuse Hub by calling 0300 123 5101. The Hub will be able to advise whether to make a referral.

Using the checklist – Practice Points

- Does your carer become angry and stressed when you need their help, making you feel like you have done something wrong or that you are a burden?
(Include if you feel the carer is struggling to cope with looking after you?)
 - Explore the relationship with the care giver and assess whether the person feels that they are a burden or have done something wrong.
 - Determine if the care giver's behaviour includes manipulation.
- Are your caring needs being met including your mobility needs?
(Think about access to fluids, appropriate medication management, safe nutritional intake, access to walking aids)
 - Older people may be more susceptible to abuse due to physical frailty, cognitive impairment.
 - Enquire about the person's care needs, including mobility requirements. Determine if these needs are being met adequately and if there are any barriers preventing them from receiving necessary care.
 - Additional prompt questions – do you have any chronic health conditions or disabilities that affect your daily functioning? Are you dependent on others for your personal care or medical needs? Have you experienced any recent changes in your physical or mental health?
- Are you stopped from accessing outside support?
(This could include accepting a package of care or support as a carer)
 - Determine if there are any restrictions on their interactions with friends, family or support services.
 - Additional prompt questions – Do you have family members, friends or neighbours who provide support or assistance? Are you in regular contact with people who can help in case of emergency? Are you isolated or experiencing a lack of social connections?
 - Additional prompt questions in relation to cultural factors – Are there any cultural or religious factors that may impact your decision to seek help or leave the relationships? Do you have any concerns about how your community or religious community might respond to your situation?
- Have you ever been made/coerced to sign a document against your will?
 - Explore any instances where they may have felt pressurised or manipulated in financial or legal matters.
- Are you aware of your finances and are you able to access them?
 - Older individuals are often targeted for financial exploitation. Assess their financial situation, including control over their finances and any suspicious or unauthorised transactions.

- Additional prompt questions – Are you in control of your own finances, or does someone else manage your money? Have you noticed any unauthorised or suspicious financial transactions? Are you experiencing financial difficulties or concerns due to your relationship?
 - Do you feel confident to say no when anyone asks you for financial help?
- Does anyone ever talk to you in a way that makes you feel humiliated/ashamed/frightened when providing you with personal care? (this could be assisting you with washing/dressing/toileting)
 - Assess if there are any instances of verbal or emotional abuse in the care giving context.
- Are you able to physically leave your home because of your mobility needs? Or your caring needs? (include if as a carer are not free to leave due to caring responsibilities)
 - Determine if there are any barriers that restrict their freedom of movement.
- Do you have access to a telephone and/or lifeline alarm?
 - Determine if the person has access to a telephone and/or a lifeline alarm for emergencies. Assess if they feel confident in reaching out for help or contacting emergency services if needed.
- Does it feel like your home has been taken over?
 - Enquire if the person feels like their home has been taken over or if they have lost control over their living environment. Assess if there are any signs of coercion, isolation, or control by others.
 - Additional prompt questions – Do you feel safe in your current living situation? Are there any concerns about your housing stability or the potential for eviction? Has your partner or caregiver threatened to force you out of your home?
 - Enquire if there is a risk of domestic abuse in relation to a family member using or dealing drugs from the home. Ask if the person has witnessed or experienced any abusive behaviour associated with substance use in the home or if they feel their living environment has been compromised or invaded.

Professionals can consult the Domestic Abuse Hub for further guidance and support. The Hub offers valuable expertise, information and referral pathways to assist in addressing domestic abuse effectively.