

What domestic support is available in Sandwell for those who want to remain at home and those who need to leave their home due to domestic abuse?

What is Domestic Abuse?

Domestic Abuse is defined in the [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#) as “any incident or pattern of incidents of physical or sexual abuse, violent or threatening behaviour, controlling or coercive behaviour, economic abuse, psychological, emotional or other abuse between those aged 16 and over or personally connected to each other”.

Is there support available if I am experiencing domestic abuse?

If you, or someone you know is experiencing domestic abuse, Sandwell Council have a legal duty to support you and your children. They will work with other agencies such as the police and health services, to provide appropriate support. The council commission services and work in partnership with Black Country Women’s Aid, the Council will make a referral to Black Country Women’s Aid, an Independent Domestic Abuse Advocate will be assigned to support you and this support will be tailored to your needs.

What support can I get if I am experiencing domestic abuse?

In Sandwell there is support available if you or someone you know is experiencing domestic abuse. Specialist community-based support is available, which can include working with you to create a safety and support plan for you and your children and provide advice and support. Further information on safe accommodation options as well as support for those who want to remain in their own homes if it is safe to do so is outlined below. You can contact Black Country Women’s Aid (BCWA) who provide specialist support for domestic abuse directly 24 hours a day on 0121 552 6448 or via webchat and WhatsApp on 07384 466181 during office hours. For more information, visit:

<https://blackcountrywomensaid.co.uk/> In addition, Ask Marc provides specialist support for male victims: 0121 289 6402; email: info@askmarc.co.uk or go to: www.askmarc.org.uk

What support is available if I need to leave home?

If you need to leave your home because you are experiencing domestic abuse, there is support available from Black Country Women’s Aid (BCWA) and Sandwell MBC Housing Solutions. Further details are outlined below:

SMBC Housing Solutions

The Council has a legal duty to support you under the *Homelessness Reduction Act 2017* where a person is threatened with homelessness as a result of domestic abuse or is homeless after fleeing domestic abuse.

Sandwell MBC Housing Solutions offers direct support to victims who present as homeless or threatened with homelessness due to domestic abuse. You can refer yourself directly by calling 0121 368 1166. Or by email to housing_choice@sandwell.gov.uk or by using the link to make a self-referral at <https://live.housingjigsaw.co.uk>

You will be assigned a Homelessness Prevention Officer who will carry out a full housing needs assessment and support you with your homelessness needs. **If you wish to stay in your own home and it’s safe to do so, you may be eligible for sanctuary support.**

The Sanctuary Scheme provides enhanced physical security measures as well as specialist domestic abuse support. Your allocated housing officer will be able to support you with this and provide you with further information or you can call directly for advice on 0121 368 1166.

Where it is determined it is not safe for you and your family to remain in your home you will be supported with safe temporary accommodation, this can either be with accommodation provided by Black Country Women's Aid as described below or within the Council's provision of temporary accommodation.

For longer term settled housing, your Homelessness Prevention Officer will discuss with you all the housing options available to you. This will include an application for council accommodation or other registered social landlords. You will be given a priority banding to reflect the homeless situation. We can also support you with accommodation in the privately rented sector by helping you to find accommodation and where necessary, supporting with deposit and/or rent in advance.

Black Country Women's Aid (BCWA) refuge support

BCWA provide specialist domestic abuse services in Sandwell and may be able to provide or source you with emergency accommodation also known as refuge, which is a safe house where you and your children can stay, and 24-hour support is available. They are available for victims with or without children, and regardless of age, gender, disability, ethnicity or sexuality.

BCWA refuge accommodation includes a range of options and they will try to find a place that best meets your needs and the needs of your children. They have a range of self-contained flats in shared accommodation which are suitable for most family sizes. There is also accommodation available for people with disabilities or access needs.

For victims seeking refuge with older male children, accommodation is available in selected properties and that will be assessed at referral stage where options will be provided.

You can contact BCWA directly 24 hours a day on 0121 552 6448 or via webchat and WhatsApp on 07384 466181 during office hours. For more information, visit <https://blackcountrywomensaid.co.uk/>

What happens when I make a referral for safe accommodation support?

When you call BCWA you will speak to a Referrals Coordinator to understand your specific circumstances including your safety and support needs and to determine the most appropriate support available to you. An assessment will be completed to gather information which will help to identify the most appropriate support for you.

What if I can't afford the rent in refuge?

BCWA has a number of different property types, so there are options available depending on your-family size and your personal financial circumstances. If you have no recourse to public funds or you are in employment and do not qualify for welfare assistance, BCWA will always work with you to find the most affordable options.

If following the assessment, refuge is not an affordable option for you, this should not be a barrier to you leaving the abusive situation and assistance will be provided to ensure that you are signposted and referred to agencies that can help you. BCWA will still be able to offer safeguarding support around domestic abuse.

What support is available in refuge?

In refuge, support is available on:

- One-to-one emotional support, with time and space to come to terms with what has happened and how it may have affected you and your children
- Support planning and safety planning tailored to your needs and your children's needs to help you plan your next steps
- Assistance with legal issues, such as civil and criminal cases, and child custody issues
- Support and advocacy with housing and setting up your new home or tenancy when you leave refuge
- Support to access welfare benefits, education, training and employment
- Culturally-sensitive, multi-lingual support including immigration advocacy and access to other agencies
- Access to counselling if you need it
- Support and advocacy with any statutory agencies that you are working with such as Children's Social Care
- Group work and activities include ESOL (English as a Second Language) courses, confidence building, and the Power to Change programme on domestic abuse
- Referrals and signposting to other services that you might need such as legal services, community organisations, health and wellbeing services

What is the refuge accommodation like?

In the BCWA refuge, adults and children can access a range of positive educational and recreational activities so that you can relax, learn new skills, and spend time with others who have had similar experiences. However, you can be as sociable or as quiet as you want to.

Refuge is a confidential space and everyone staying there needs to agree to keep the address private to ensure the safety of all. However, professionals such as health visitors, carers, children's workers and other services are allowed to visit and provide support.

What can I take with me to the refuge?

As a guide, try to take the following with you to the refuge:

- Identification documents.
- Birth certificates for you and your children.
- School and medical records, including the telephone numbers of the school and your GP or surgery.
- Money, bankbooks, cheque book and credit and debit cards.
- Keys for your house, car, and workplace.
- Driving licence (if you have one) and car registration documents, if applicable.
- Prescribed medication, and vitamin supplements.
- Cards or payment books for Child Benefit and any other welfare benefits you are entitled to.
- Passports (including passports for all your children if you have them), visas and work permits.
- Copies of documents relating to your housing tenure, (for example, mortgage details or lease and rental agreements).
- Current unpaid bills.
- Insurance documents.
- Address book.
- Family photographs, your diary, jewellery, small items of sentimental value.
- Clothing and toiletries for you and your children.
- Your children's favourite small toys.

Not all victims-survivors will need all these items, and there may be some items that you would need to take that have not been included in this list, but this is a general guide.

Can I leave refuge at any point?

You can return home from the refuge at any point and there will be things to consider and plan for to ensure your safety and that of your children is fully considered. You may decide to return with additional support such as having an injunction in place or additional security improvements and refuge staff can advise further on this. You may decide you want to be re-housed elsewhere. The choice is yours, and refuge workers will give you information about the various options to help you to decide what you want to do. They will also help you to get advice regarding joint property and mortgage agreements.

What support is available to male victims of abuse?

Safe accommodation support is available to male victims of domestic abuse. There is also support available for those who want to remain at home, if it is safe to do so. Ask Marc provides advice and support for men who have been affected by domestic abuse, stalking, rape or sexual abuse. You can contact them on Telephone: 0121 289 6402; email: info@askmarc.co.uk or go to: www.askmarc.org.uk

Can I bring my pet with me to refuge?

BCWA has a select amount of accommodation that accommodate families with pets and an assessment will be carried out at referral stage if there is a need and if there is availability. Alternatively, you may wish to arrange for a friend or family member to look after your pet whilst you are in a refuge.

What if I can't leave home?

We know that not all survivors of abuse wish to live in refuge. Some victims may want to stay in their own homes if it is safe to do so or find alternative accommodation within the community.

The community-based specialist domestic abuse support services in BCWA and Ask Marc will focus on your self-identified needs. You will be allocated a Domestic Abuse Advocate or an Independent Domestic Violence Adviser (IDVA) depending on your circumstances and they will directly support you in a range of the following support:

- Listening to you and being there for you as someone to talk to in confidence about what has happened and how you feel
- Advice and support planning tailored to your needs
- Sharing information with you so that you feel empowered to make decisions that are right for you
- Assessing your risk level and developing safety plans with you including practical steps to keep you and your children safe
- Helping you to understand how the criminal justice process works, explaining what will happen if you report to the police, and what happens in court. They can also support you at court and afterwards
- Information about civil orders that can help protect you from your abuser
- Helping you access other services who can help e.g. refuge, housing, immigration, counselling and legal services
- Maximising your safety by working closely with other agencies to reduce the risk of harm
- Interpreting services if you need them.