

Domestic Violence/Abuse: Guidance for Student Support and other Trusted Roles

1. Introduction
2. Background
3. Types and Impact of Domestic Violence/Abuse
4. Barriers to seeking support
5. Guidelines around having conversations with Students
6. Practical Steps to Support Students
7. Resources/Supports for Students
8. Further Considerations

1. Introduction

University College Dublin is committed to providing a safe campus environment and experience for everyone. We are keen to support all students to develop and maintain safe and healthy relationships.

This document has been developed to provide guidance to all student-support/student-facing and other trusted roles in UCD who may be more likely to receive disclosures of domestic violence/abuse over the course of their work due to the high level of interaction these roles have with students. It is intended to provide these roles with a greater understanding of the impact of domestic violence/abuse on an individual and the support they can offer students if they are disclosed to.

It is likely that students may often not recognise the behaviour as domestic violence/abuse but the situation they describe may fall under the definition of domestic violence/abuse. These student-support and student-facing roles/units that may be disclosed to have been identified as (but are not limited to):

- Student Advisers
- Academic staff/tutors
- School office staff
- Library staff
- Student Health Centre
- Student Residences (both Belfield and Smurfit locations)
- Student Union
- Counselling Service
- Dignity & Respect Support Service

This document should be read in conjunction with the Domestic Violence and Abuse policy.

2. Background

There is no one ‘type of person’ who is subjected to domestic violence/abuse. A person of any age, nationality, ability, religion, socioeconomic status, and other factors can be subjected to violence/abuse by an ex-/partner or family member.

The impact of domestic violence/abuse can be devastating and wide reaching, both for the person experiencing the abuse and those who are close to them such as children, other family members and friends and carers. The harm caused by domestic violence/abuse can have many layers - physical, emotional, behavioural, cognitive, and social; and the effects usually overlap and interconnect. Unsurprisingly, domestic violence/abuse (whether being currently experienced or historic) will affect a student’s overall engagement and ability to function at university, having a detrimental impact on their studies and work opportunities.

Domestic Violence is prevalent in Ireland and across the world. Important Statistics in Ireland (bearing in mind that domestic Violence/Abuse is under-reported):

- One in four women in Ireland who have been in a relationship have been abused by a current or former partner.
- A 2014 EU-wide study by the [European Union Fundamental Rights Agency](#) revealed that:
 - 6% of Irish women have experienced sexual violence and 31% of women have experienced psychological violence by a current or former partner since age 15
 - 12% of Irish respondents in the study had experienced stalking (including cyber-stalking)
 - 41% of Irish women know someone in their circle of family or friends who have experienced intimate partner violence
- About 25% of LGBTI+ people suffer through violent or threatening relationships with partners or ex-partners (Women’s Aid)
- At least 1 in 7 men in Ireland will experience domestic violence during their lifetime, including coercive control (Men’s Aid, November 2024)

3. Types and Impact of Domestic Violence/Abuse

Safety and security	Productivity, participation and attendance	Progression and stability
Perpetrators of domestic abuse will often continue the abuse while the victim-survivor is in their place of study/education or travelling to/from their place of study. Peers may be directly affected	The impacts of domestic violence may have a negative impact on victim-survivors’ productivity. Where a student is being abused, it is common to see an increase in absenteeism and presenteeism	The impacts of being subjected to violence and abuse often affect a student’s ability to reach their full potential. This can create difficulty in their studies, staying in education and having a knock-on effect

by the abuser's harassment, stalking, and assault.	(where individuals are present in their place of study but affected by sickness, distraction or distress).	on progressing into retaining employment and with their career.
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The most common types of domestic abuse are physical, sexual, financial, emotional or psychological abuse (see appendix 1 for examples of behaviour). Abuse is seldom overt - the close victim-abuser relationship can obscure the abuse taking place, making it difficult for a victim themselves or people outside of that relationship to identify. Violence and abuse often increase in frequency and severity over time.

4. Barriers to Seeking Support

Accessing any available support on domestic violence/abuse from the University requires the student to take the step of disclosing their experience to someone. This is not an easy task and there are many barriers that may prevent individuals from speaking out about the abuse they are suffering. It is important to understand the power of these barriers, as they explain why many individuals struggle to escape an abusive relationship, even when they (or other family members) have endured abuse over a long period of time and may have suffered ongoing or serious injury. Here are some examples of internal and external barriers:

Internal Barriers

Internal barriers relate to common fears, beliefs, and attitudes that victims-survivors themselves may have.

- Fear of not being believe or being blamed
- Embarrassment, shame
- Self-blame and guilt
- Fear of 'dishonouring' family
- Protect partner/relationship/ financial security
- Fear abuse may escalate
- Fear of losing children, home
- Being unaware of options or available resources
- Fear of impact on career/studies
- Concerns about confidentiality or privacy if disclosing at place of study

External Barriers

External barriers relate to other people's beliefs about domestic abuse, lack of specialist support (policies and procedures), and societal and cultural norms.

- Abuser's physical presence or controlling behaviour
- Abuser's manipulation of professionals

- Lack of money/financial support
- Social isolation
- Cultural and societal norms (e.g. stigma of separation/ relationship-breakdown/ single parenthood; religious prohibitions on divorce)
- Putting friends/family at risk or upsetting them
- Public perceptions and victim blaming attitudes

Victims-Survivors may also have concerns that someone's response could put them in danger or have negative repercussions for any feelings of safety and respite their place of study offers them.

Disclosing domestic violence, planning to leave or leaving a domestic abuse situation, is therefore a dangerous time for the person who is being abused. A response to a student who is disclosing their experience needs to consider and always prioritise their safety. Considering confidentiality and being student-led are fundamental principles to responding safely and effectively.

5. Guidelines around having conversations with Students

Receiving a disclosure of domestic violence/abuse:

If a UCD student indicates that they are a victim of domestic violence/abuse through the behaviours they are describing, the following approach should be taken when disclosed to.

Supportive Statements/Approaches

- Supportive Statements:
 - *This is not your fault.*
 - *You have a right to feel safe.*
 - *Help is available to you.*
- Speak to them in a private space, where they feel safe.
- Listen
- Be non-judgemental
- Maintain confidentiality (under the limits of confidentiality)
- Signpost to appropriate internal/external support services (see below)
- Respect their background, culture and beliefs.
- Keep questions open-ended.

Unhelpful questions or statements:

- *"Why don't you just leave?"*
- Do not criticise the person for staying in their situation.
- Make assumptions about the person in front of you based on their gender identity, sexuality, age, etc.
- Force the issue – it might take several tries before they are ready to talk
- Speak to the family or friends of the victim

At all times, be student-led, trauma-informed and most importantly, *believe them*.

In situations where domestic violence/abuse is suspected, it is important to address the concern with tremendous sensitivity and caution. Knowing what your limits are and how you can respond is important.

Recognise

- Refer to the non-exhaustive list of examples above to help inform your thoughts. It's important to be open-minded and not make assumptions.
- Check in with the student and, if comfortable to do so, sensitively share your observations and personal concern.
- You are not expected to be an expert so it's important not to offer professional advice or promise a specific outcome.
- Be aware as to how to receive a disclosure as per above and refer to the policy for further direction - be aware of the Domestic Violence/Abuse policy and understanding how to refer to internal supports, if needed.

Respond

- If your concern is verified, ask what you can do to help, let the student know that you are there to listen and guide them towards supports and resources that are available – as set out in the policy.
- Allow them to be in control - ask how you can help and allow them to make their own decisions. They are experts on their own safety.
- Avoid expressing judgment or shock; don't criticize their decisions; don't try to "fix" the situation. Listen and respond in a non-judgemental way.
- Help them source relevant information but avoid insisting on them doing anything or speaking to anyone they don't want to.

Refer

- Encourage the student to engage with their student adviser
- In some situations, if there is a belief that the individual is in imminent danger and/or you have concern for workplace safety, involve the Student Advisers, Campus Security and/or the Gardaí. Otherwise, concerns should remain confidential.
- Signpost the internal and external 'Sources of Support', outlined below.

Please refer to this webpage for guidance on [Assisting Students in Distress](#) for University staff for further information.

6. Practical Steps to Support Students

There is no single approach to supporting individuals as their experience and needs will differ. Studies show that the stigma of domestic abuse makes it difficult for individuals to disclose abuse, it is important therefore that if any student seeks help or support for domestic abuse, that they are treated with respect and listened to. The impact of the abuse may be immediate, as a direct result of physical injury, or indirectly and over a long period of time as a result of coercion, control, and stress.

The following are example of steps that could be taken to support student - putting these supports in place may require the involvement of a number of people. This will not be done without the consent of the student concerned.

- Extenuating circumstances applications.
- Access to counselling/support services
- Signposting and guidance to external specialist services
- Assisting with contacting the Gardaí
- Arranging short-term emergency accommodation if urgently required and where possible
- Availing of a leave of absence
- Adjusting course load
- Exploring flexible study arrangements

Whilst there are processes associate with putting various supports in place, consideration should be given to providing these with the minimum requirements/least intrusive manner as possible.

7. Resources/Supports for Students

UCD Supports

The following is a list of internal supports that you can signpost students to and reach out to yourself for further guidance and information:

- [UCD Dignity & Respect Support Service](#) – *UCD's Sexual Misconduct Policy*.
- Academic support: [Extenuating circumstances application](#)
- [Silvercloud](#) (for students) has a range of supports
- [Togetherall](#)
- [UCD Student Counselling Service provides free and confidential counselling services to UCD Students: How do I register for counselling? - UCD Student Counselling Service](#)
- There are a range of further options available on [UCD Mental Health Supports for Students](#) webpage.
- [UCD Community Gardaí](#):
 - Office hours Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays (1-2pm, UCD Village)
- [Duty Manager \(Estates\)](#): the Campus Duty Manager is responsible for the safe and smooth 365 24/7 operation of the University's estate portfolio. The Campus Duty Manager takes an active role in managing normal campus operations, critical and urgent issues, service provision and project activity across the campus(es)
- [UCD Walk Safe Service](#)

External Supports

- [Too Into You](#): Instant messaging support service for anyone concerned about their relationship/a friend's relationship. Run by Women's Aid and explores healthy and unhealthy relationships and aims to teach young people (18-25) about intimate relationship abuse, including coercive control. See link below for three new video resources which can be helpful in speaking to students about abuse and the supports available:
 - [What is intimate relationship abuse?](#)

- [Abuse can happen to anyone, but everyone can find support](#)
- [What is Lovebombing?](#)
- [Domestic & Sexual Violence Support Services](#): There are a range of support services from State agencies and the voluntary sector here.
- [Text About It](#): Messaging service for anyone wanting immediate support for their wellbeing or mental health.
- Gardai
- Women's Aid
- Dublin Rape Crisis Centre
- Men's Aid
- [SATU](#) (Sexual Assault Treatment Unit)
 - Nearest location: Dublin (Rotunda Hospital)

8. Further Considerations

Marginalised Groups: Although domestic abuse affects individuals from all ethnic groups and multiple communities, the form the abuse takes may vary and there may be additional barriers to inclusion, support and services. For example, people experiences may be compounded by racism and may affect their ability to seek help. Consequently, support needs to take account of the diverse nature of experiences and recognise how intersectionality can impact individuals' ability to seek support - victim/survivors are not homogenous.

Both the victim-survivor and the perpetrator of domestic abuse are located in UCD: This behaviour may fall within scope of the Bullying and Harassment policy and/or Sexual Misconduct policy. In these instances, the University will take appropriate action to ensure safety. For example, action may need to be taken to ensure that the victim/survivor and perpetrator do not come into contact in the university. In these instances, further information can be provided by HR or the Dignity and Respect Support Service.

Types of Abuse

The list below has been developed to assist staff in identifying possible signs of domestic violence/abuse. Not all methods of violence are listed below and some are hard to define.

Type of Abuse	Examples of Behaviours
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<p>Physical Assault:</p> <p>Causing or potentially causing any harm to the body of the other person.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Punching or slapping them ● Using weapons, such as knives or hammers against ● Using household items as weapons, such as throwing a phone at the person ● Biting/Pinching/Kicking the person ● Pulling their hair ● Pushing or shoving them ● Burning them ● Strangling or choking them ● Raping them
<p>Emotional or Psychological Abuse Causing or attempting to cause psychological harm to the other person by the use of: verbal aggression and threats; humiliation; undermining of self-esteem; name calling; continual “put downs”; psychological degradation; exploitation; threatening to hurt children; intimidation; bullying;</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Constantly putting you down and calling you names in private and/or in front of others ● Not listening or responding when you talk ● Restricting where the person can travel to or who you can see. ● Monitoring the petrol or diesel you have used in your car or the distance you have travelled ● Not allowing friends or family to the house or stopping you from spending time with them ● Telling your family and friends lies about you ● Sulking or not speaking to you when you do something they don’t approve of ● Lying to you or withholding information from you ● Being jealous of your other relationships with family, friends or colleagues ● Having other relationships ● Breaking promises and shared agreements ● Threatening to harm themselves
<p>Financial Abuse: Controlling or attempting to control the other person by means of economic blackmail; having dominant or complete control of all monies and bank accounts; denial of access to necessary funds; preventing the victim from working or having financial independence.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Controlling all household money and asking you to account for money spent, including showing receipts ● Denying you access to your bank account or shared bank accounts ● Sabotaging your work or preventing you from attending work (example: hiding your car keys) ● Withholding money for food, household or personal items ● Not paying bills, rent or the mortgage and allowing arrears to build up ● Not paying child maintenance as agreed or at all ● Running up bills in your name (creation of debt) ● Maxing out your line of credit
<p>Sexual Violence Sexual violence includes any form of sexual activity that takes place without the full and freely given consent of one of the people involved. It includes sexual</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Raping you ● Using force, threats, or intimidation to make you perform sexual acts ● Making you feel guilty for not having sex

<p>degradation and any form of physical or emotional coercion or manipulation into any type of sexual activity that is against the wishes of one of the people involved. Any unwanted sexual activity from sexual touching to rape between spouses, cohabitants, partners or ex-partners is a form of sexual violence.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Any degrading treatment based on your sexual orientation ● Withholding contraception or controlling your access to it ● Making you watch pornography or forcing you to participate in the making of it ● Sharing, or threatening to share, intimate images online or with friends, family or colleagues
<p>Social Abuse This involves the systematic isolation of one person in the relationship from their family and friends or from social activities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Forbidding or physically preventing the person from going out or meeting people, ● Forbidding or physically preventing the person from engaging in or attending for work or any other appointment. ● spreading malicious rumours in an attempt to ruin your reputation.
<p>Harassment, including Social Media or Online Harassment:</p> <p>Behaviour used to pursue, stalk or intimidate the other person in the relationship. The intention of this type of abuse is usually to harm the victim emotionally or to cause damage to their image or reputation or how they are viewed by others. Online abuse involves the use of technologies such as mobile phone texting, electronic communication or social networking to carry out these behaviours.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Using tracking devices to monitor your locations and activities ● Sending excessive amounts of voice calls, emails and texts ● Denying access to technology to isolate you ● Sending abusive messages online to threaten you and/or your family ● Sharing intimate and private pictures or messages online