**Help available from Department for Work and Pensions for people who are victims of domestic violence and abuse**

**Domestic violence and abuse is still a huge problem in our society, with far-reaching and devastating impacts.**

**The cross-government definition of domestic violence and abuse is any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, 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.**

**The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:**

* **psychological**
* **physical**
* **sexual**
* **financial**
* **emotional**

**Find out more about the**[**cross-government definition of domestic violence and abuse**](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/domestic-abuse-how-to-get-help)**.**

**The government is fully committed to the prevention of abuse and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has a range of measures designed to support people who flee violent and abusive households.**

**1. Informing us about the domestic violence and abuse**

**Talk to a work coach at a jobcentre about the domestic violence and abuse to receive additional support from DWP.**

**You can request to have an appointment with a work coach in a private room.**

[**Find your local jobcentre**](https://find-your-nearest-jobcentre.dwp.gov.uk/)**.**

**2. Providing evidence of domestic violence and abuse**

**Victims will need to provide evidence of any domestic violence or abuse to receive support from DWP.**

**You’ll need written evidence from a person acting in an official capacity showing that:**

* **your circumstances are consistent with those of a person who has had domestic violence or abuse inflicted, or threatened, upon them, during the 6 months before you notified DWP**
* **you have made contact with the person acting in an official capacity to tell them about any incidents that have occurred in the past 6 months.**

**A person ‘acting in an official capacity’ means:**

* **a health care professional**
* **a police officer**
* **a registered social worker**
* **your employer or a representative of your trade union**
* **any public, voluntary or charitable body which has had direct contact with you about the domestic violence or abuse**

**You must provide your evidence to the jobcentre as soon as possible but no later than one calendar month after you first told us about the domestic violence and abuse.**

**3. Housing Benefit**

**There is special provision for when you’re temporarily absent from your home through fear of domestic violence and abuse.**

**If you intend to return to your former home, you can receive Housing Benefit for both a former permanent home and temporary accommodation. Your former home must not have been sublet and all accommodation must meet the**[**Housing Benefit conditions**](https://www.gov.uk/housing-benefit/what-youll-get)**.**

**It will be paid:**

* **for up to 52 weeks within England, Scotland and Wales**
* **for up to 26 weeks outside England, Scotland and Wales**

**If you do not intend to return to your former home, you can receive Housing Benefit for up to 4 weeks if you have an unavoidable rental liability on the former home.**

**4. Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)**

**If you have been a victim of domestic violence and abuse, you can have a break from job seeking and work preparation requirements for up to 13 weeks to give you the space and time needed to stabilise your life.**

**The break is split into 2 parts:**

* **an initial 4 week period starting on the day you tell the jobcentre that you have been threatened with or subject to domestic violence and abuse**
* **an extension from 4 to 13 weeks if you provide evidence during the initial 4 week period**

**You must tell a jobcentre about the domestic violence and abuse in an interview with a work coach, either face-to-face or by telephone. The initial 4 week break starts on this date.**

**To be eligible for this initial 4 week break, all of the following must apply:**

* **you’re claiming JSA or are part of the ESA work-related activity group (WRAG)**
* **the incident of domestic violence or abuse occurred in the last 26 weeks**
* **the incident must meet the**[**definition of domestic violence**](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/domestic-abuse-how-to-get-help)
* **you must not be living at the same address as the abuser**
* **you have not had another break due to domestic violence or abuse within the last 12 months**

**When you tell the jobcentre about the domestic violence and abuse, a work coach will tell you what evidence you must provide to get the full 13-week break.**

**The 4 or 13 week breaks will only be available once in any 12 month period. It will run for 4 or 13 weeks consecutively whether or not you’re entitled to JSA or ESA for the whole of that period.**

**In extreme cases, it may be necessary to extend the length of the break. This will be decided by the work coach on a case by case basis.**

**5. Universal Credit**

**5.1 Your Universal Credit account**

**If you’ve left an abusive relationship, your work coach can help you to open a new claim as a single claimant. From this moment your ex-partner will not have access to any information about your new claim.**

**5.2 Rapid advance**

**If you’ve left an abusive relationship, you can get a rapid advance of up to 100% of your expected Universal Credit monthly entitlement. Talk to your work coach about this. You may get a decision on the same day.**

**5.3 Work-related requirements**

**If you have been a victim of domestic violence and abuse when claiming Universal Credit, you will not have to take on any work-related requirements for 13 weeks, providing:**

* **the domestic violence and abuse occurred within the previous 6 months**
* **the incident meets the definition of domestic violence**
* **you are not living at the same address as the abuser**
* **you have not had a 13-week break from work-related requirements as a result of previous domestic violence within the last 12 months**
* **you can provide written evidence within one month of the date you discussed the matter with a work coach**

**The 13-week break starts on the date you tell a work coach at a jobcentre. The break will be extended to 26 weeks if you’re the main carer of a child up to 16 years of age.**

**If you need more time after the 13 or 26 week break for reasons directly or indirectly related to your experience of domestic abuse and violence, inform your work coach. The work coach will decide if the break can be extended.**

**5.4 Child distress**

**If you’re the main carer of a child up to 16 years of age, who is in considerable distress due to domestic violence and abuse, you can have a temporary break from work-related requirements. For example, if there is significant disruption to your normal childcare responsibilities and there is a need to provide additional care and support because the child is:**

* **experiencing or witnessing domestic violence or abuse (where a police report may be available)**
* **experiencing or witnessing violence and abuse other than domestic violence**

**The break from work-related requirements when caring for distressed child will occur for a maximum of one month every 6 months for a period of 2 years following the incident of domestic violence or abuse.**

**5.5 Housing element**

**There is special provision for the housing element of Universal Credit when you’re temporarily absent from your home through fear of domestic violence and abuse.**

**If you intend to return to your former home, you can receive the housing element of Universal Credit for both a former permanent home and temporary accommodation. Your former home must not have been sublet and all accommodation must meet the**[**Universal Credit housing element conditions**](https://www.gov.uk/housing-and-universal-credit)**.**

**It will be paid:**

* **for up to 12 months within England, Scotland and Wales**
* **for up to 6 months outside England, Scotland and Wales**

**5.6 Alternative Payment Arrangements**

**If you claim Universal Credit as a couple and because of fear of domestic violence and abuse, you wish to manage your money yourself, you can apply for an**[**Alternative Payment Arrangement**](https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit/other-financial-support)**.**

**Universal Credit payments will be split into 2 bank accounts instead of one. A higher percentage could be allocated to the person with primary caring responsibility. This will be done to ensure the health and well-being of most of the household.**

**Alternative Payment Arrangements can be considered at any point during the Universal Credit claim.**

**5.7 Families with more than 2 children**

**Universal Credit does not pay you an additional amount for a third or subsequent child born on or after 6 April 2017, unless**[**special circumstances apply**](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/universal-credit-and-families-with-more-than-2-children-information-for-claimants#special-circumstances)**.**

**You can get extra Universal Credit for third or subsequent children in your household who are likely to have been conceived as a result of a sexual act to which you did not or could not consent.**

**This relates to a child who either:**

* **is likely to have been conceived as a result of a non-consensual sexual act (including rape)**
* **was conceived at or around a time when your relationship with the other biological parent of the child was abusive and you were subject to ongoing control or coercion**

**To qualify for this exception for a third or subsequent child you must no longer be living with the child’s biological parent. You’ll be asked to confirm this.**

**We recognise that the handling of this exception is extremely sensitive. However, it is very important to have this exception in place to support you if you’re in this position.**

**6. Benefit cap**

**Housing support for exempt accommodation will be excluded from the calculation of the benefit cap for victims for domestic violence and abuse.**

**Examples of exempt accommodation include:**

* **refuges**
* **hostels**
* **managed properties**

**The accommodation must be provided by a county council, housing association, registered charity or voluntary organisation and you must be provided with care, support or supervision.**

**7. Removal of the spare room subsidy**

**The removal of the spare room subsidy will not be applied to victims of domestic violence and abuse who are staying in exempt accommodation (see above).**

**If your home has had additional security installed under a**[**sanctuary scheme**](https://www.dahalliance.org.uk/media/10661/15_-wha-sanctuary-scheme.pdf)**because you, or a member of your household, have been a victim of domestic violence and abuse then you may be entitled to an exemption from the removal of the spare room subsidy. Please speak to your work coach or case manager if this applies to you.**

**8. Discretionary Housing Payments**

**DWP provides funding for**[**Discretionary Housing Payments**](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/claiming-discretionary-housing-payments)**which are available from your local authority and are aimed at a number of groups likely to be affected by welfare reforms, including individuals or families fleeing domestic violence and abuse. Discretionary Housing Payments may also be given to victims that have remained in their home, which has been adapted under a sanctuary scheme.**

**9. Migrant partner support**

**If you have come to the UK on a family visa as a spouse, civil partner or unmarried partner and you need to leave home through fear of domestic violence and abuse, you can apply for a**[**Destitution Domestic Violence (DDV) concession**](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/application-for-benefits-for-visa-holder-domestic-violence)**. This will allow you to claim benefits for up to 3 months while UK Visas and Immigration considers your application to settle in the UK.**

**10. Child Maintenance Service application fee**

**You do not have to pay the Child Maintenance Service application fee, which is currently £20, if you’re a victim of domestic violence and abuse.**

**In addition, the Child Maintenance Service can help victims to set up a**[**‘Direct Pay’ child maintenance arrangement**](https://www.gov.uk/child-maintenance/how-to-pay)**without contact with the other parent by acting as an intermediary and transferring bank details between parents. There are no charges for using the ‘Direct Pay’ service.**

**Read the**[**Child Maintenance Service guidance**](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/proposed-child-maintenance-fees-exemption-for-victims-of-domestic-violence)**to make sure you’re eligible and to find out how to inform us of your situation.**