



An overview

Violence and abuse in any form is unacceptable. Anyone who experiences violence against women, gender based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence must be provided with an effective and timely response by relevant authorities.

“Ask and Act” is a process of targeted enquiry to be practiced across the Public Service to identify violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

The term targeted enquiry describes the recognition of indicators of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence as a prompt for a professional to ask their client whether they have been affected by any of these issues.

The aims of “Ask and Act” are:

- to increase identification of those experiencing violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence
- to offer referrals and interventions for those identified which provide specialist support based on the risk and need of the client
- to begin to create a culture across the Public Service where addressing violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence is understood in the correct context, where disclosure is accepted and facilitated and support is appropriate and consistent

- to improve the response to those who experience violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence with other complex needs such as substance misuse and mental health; and
- to pro-actively engage with those who are vulnerable and hidden, at the earliest opportunity, rather than only reactively engaging with those who are in crisis or at imminent risk of serious harm.

“Ask and Act” is one of the most significant practice changes, facilitated through the National Training Framework on violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

These two Welsh Government policies are integrated, in that local delivery of the National Training Framework also delivers key aspects of “Ask and Act”.

The National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and the World Health Organisation recommend a system of targeted clinical enquiry across Health and Social Care to better identify and therefore respond to domestic abuse.^{1,2}

¹ Responding to Intimate partner violence and sexual violence against women. World Health Organisation clinical and policy guidelines (2013)

² Domestic violence and abuse: how health services, social care and the organisations they work with can respond effectively. NICE public health guidance 50 (February 2014)

The Welsh Government takes this recommendation and identified good practice further by supporting the use of such enquiry across the Public Service (to include those in a safeguarding role, education, Fire and Rescue and those within housing services). It also proposes a slightly wider focus on violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

It is the role of the entire Public Service to provide an effective response to those experiencing violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence. This involves collaboration in its broadest sense to create consistency and standardisation of response, no matter which gateway (housing, health, social care etc.) a client uses to access service provision. Leadership and strategic co-ordination are key in establishing a process which is suitable to the workforce, the organisation and above all, the client.

The working practices through which to offer a consistent response will, of course, differ depending on organisational structure and client group. **It is not expected that the same process of "Ask and Act" will**

be implemented by each organisation but each organisation should consider how best to offer "Ask and Act" within their varying functions and professional roles.

However, one fundamental statement must support every variation of process:

Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence require a Public Service response. Professional confidence to identify these issues, to ask about them and to respond effectively is fundamental for good clinical and social care practice.

Any proposed model of work should be tested against the following four key principles. **No matter how a process of "Ask and Act" is operationalised it should address each of these.**

1. Culture and leadership
2. Clarity and confidence
3. Recognition and response
4. Follow up and monitoring

The diagram below further defines these principles.

The principles of 'Ask and Act'

Culture and leadership

Aim: A working culture which acknowledges "Ask and Act" as core to the organisational purpose.

Requirements:

- Identification of leadership and strong management
- Potential barriers to the implementation of "Ask and Act" considered and addressed
- Potential impact to staff recognised and addressed.

Recognition and response

Aim: An organisationally tailored process involving recognition, targeted enquiry and intervention to those who are experiencing violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

Requirements:

- Staff aware of the indicators of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence
- A clear internal process which follows recognition and includes targeted enquiry
- A response which ensures efficient, positive intervention for the client
- Partnership and collaborative processes which offer efficient client access to specialist support.



Clarity and confidence

Aim: A well equipped workforce; confident and accountable, supported by clear policies and procedures.

Requirements:

- Confidentiality and information sharing policies which are fit for purpose
- Clear lines of accountability between staff, management and leaders
- "Relevant" staff identified, trained, with clarity of responsibility.

Follow up and monitoring

Aim: Strategic oversight and evaluation of a process which maps disclosure to population and uses local data and collaboration to further develop.

Requirements:

- Clear record keeping guidance for disclosure
- The establishment of baseline data from which to monitor disclosure
- Strategic oversight of the process and regular monitoring
- Consideration of process application in relation to equality and diversity.