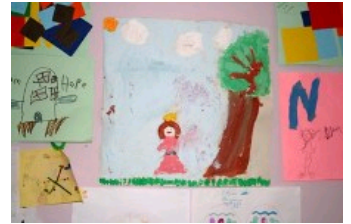


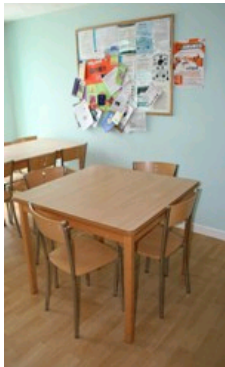
Safe and sound

Refuges are one of several options available to women to help them start a life free from fear and violence.

The Government defines domestic violence as "Any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality." This includes issues of concern to black and minority ethnic (BME) communities such as so called 'honour killings'.



There are a number of ways a woman can end up in refuge, including self-referral, or via the police, social care or a voluntary or community group. Either way it is highly unlikely a woman will end up in a refuge local to where she lives. This is critical for her own safety but it can also make the decision harder. Women, who have done nothing wrong, feel that they are losing everything: their home, their belongings, their friends and family, even pets. But although no one would every say it was going to be easy, it is true to say that refuges help to empower abused women to lead safe and happy lives.

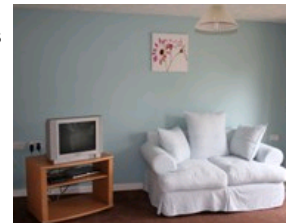


The manager of one DCHA refuge acknowledges how hard it is to leave things behind, it feels very unfair, but possessions can be replaced and we encourage the women to think about their options. To return to their home is to return to the abuse. And at this stage, if they have children they may even risk losing them by returning to a place of danger, which is sometimes seen as failure to protect by Social Services. It is a horrible situation to be in, but it is only temporary. Within a few months it can be possible to find more permanent accommodation and start life again in safety and peace

DCHA run two refuges. They are bright, well equipped and friendly places. And they make an effort to look like any other home with pictures, comfortable sofas, toys and books in the playroom, and pot plants in the kitchen. The refuges are run by passionate and knowledgeable staff, and they understand that a women may arrive in crisis with children and only the clothes they're wearing. Other women might arrive after waking up one morning, packing a bag and deciding that enough is enough. There is no right way to leave an abusive relationship, and women are not judged by the staff about their experiences and the choices they may have made, instead they are listened to, and receive empathy, kindness, advice and a safe place to stay perhaps the first safe place they may have ever known.

Women on average stay between 4 and 5 months. But at no time will a woman be forced to leave if she doesn't feel willing and able to live independently. Everything is done in partnership with her key worker. A key worker will help with everything from benefits, access to counselling, getting children back into school, showing them round the refuge and introducing them to the other residents, registering with a GP, showing them where the supermarkets are and more. They will do as much or as little is needed. And when someone does move on, they get a resettlement worker for up to six months to help support their transition back to independent living.

Every woman will get a private room and shower room. Unfortunately, if she has children they will often have to share a room. It's not ideal, and it can add to the frustration, anger and despair that she may be feeling. And it's to be expected that survivors will feel incredibly conflicted at this emotional time. They may still love their abusive partners, they may feel guilty that they have taken the children away, and they may feel bitter that they have had to flee; leaving behind their home and all their things. Abuse is not just about being kicked and punched, it's about being controlled and dominated. And while all these worries and fears may be exhausting, women can at least be reassured that they are in a safe space, and with all the support they need, to process them.



Both of DCHA's refuges work with women through support plans to recognise abusive relationships and change the patterns that have not kept them safe in the past. East Cornwall Women's Refuge, run the Freedom Programme, which has demonstrable success in helping women recognise and avoid abusive relationships, while at the same time helping them to recognise their own self-worth.

Domestic violence is still a controversial subject. Some people don't understand why people stay with abusive partners, but refuges do. They also understand why eventually, some victims just get up and walk out with no real trigger, but perhaps after years of abuse. In any one year, there are 13 million separate incidents of physical violence or threats of violence against women from partners or former partners and the estimated total cost of domestic violence to society in monetary terms is £23 billion per annum. This figure includes an estimated £3.1 billion as the cost to the state and £1.3 billion as the cost to employers and human suffering cost of £17 billion. This figure is another example of the devastating impact that domestic violence has, and can continue to have as children who have seen or heard a parent being abused begin to exhibit behavioral and emotional problems which they also need help to resolve...

It is not easy breaking the cycle of abuse. It takes bravery and determination at a time when you may not feel brave or determined, but you're not on your own. The refuge manager sums it up by saying, 'stick with it. It might not be easy but there is hope. You will get the support you need and you will finally know what it feels like to feel safe and happy.'

Get out. That's my advice, says a former victim of domestic violence, it's not your fault and you don't have to live that way.

95% of domestic violence victims are women and we have referred to women throughout this article, however, we realise that men can be victims and well as people in same-sex relationships. If you need help, please click [here](#) for a list of support services.

If you're worried about someone finding that you have visited sites about domestic violence, click [here](#) to learn more about Internet safety.