

From Admin to Activist

Helping moderators make a difference online and #changethestory for violence against women and girls



the
dash
charity

domestic abuse stops here

From Admin to Activist:

Helping moderators make a difference online and #changethestory for violence against women and girls

Are you a social media manager, either paid or as a volunteer? Are you moderating small or vast online community groups, pages and forums, or are you simply overseeing an informal WhatsApp chat group? If so, then *From Admin to Activist* is for you.

The Dash Charity is a leading charity fighting domestic abuse across Berkshire, South Bucks and beyond. We're marking White Ribbon Day 2023 by making this short and simple guide available to anyone involved with managing or moderating an online community where people comment and share their views.

This short toolkit is here to help you move from admin to tech abuse advocate, by tackling toxic and abusive behaviours and gender-based violence wherever you oversee online communities.

What is White Ribbon Day all about?

White Ribbon Day is a global campaign that calls on individuals, communities, and organisations to take a stand against violence targeting women and girls. White Ribbon Day takes place on 25 November and marks the beginning of the "16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence," a global campaign that runs until December 10th, International Human Rights Day.

The White Ribbon Day campaign is also encouraging everyone to help counter male violence towards women and girls, by challenging abusive attitudes and behaviours, such as cat-calling and sexist remarks to #changethestory.

What do violence and abuse towards women and girls look like online and IRL?

Violence against women and girls can happen anywhere and takes many forms – from sexist jokes online to harassing behaviours on public transport.

Some behaviours may be dismissed as 'small' or 'low-level' acts: sharing sexist 'jokes' in group chats; catcalling in the street; or harassing women on a night out. These all contribute towards creating a culture of fear and misogyny that encourages violence and abuse against women. In spaces where these behaviours are normalised, it can lead to more extreme cases of violence.

Domestic abuse in Berkshire, South Bucks and beyond

Domestic abuse and its effects can be destructive, yet it remains an issue which is hidden, stigmatised and one which makes for uncomfortable conversation.

Last year, there were an average of an average of eight reports a day of domestic abuse-related incidents recorded by police in Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead alone, and 56,000 reported incidents to Thames Valley Police from across the region in the last 12 months.

The Dash Charity provides domestic abuse support services across East Berkshire and South Buckinghamshire, receiving close to 1,000 referrals and enquiries for support throughout the year, the majority still involving men's violence towards women and girls.

Nationally, it is estimated that one in four women and one in six men experience some form of domestic abuse at some point in their life – whether that be physical, sexual, violent or threatening behaviour, controlling or coercive behaviour, economic, psychological, emotional, tech or other abuse.

Why it matters to my role as a social media admin or online moderator?

Cases of abuse and harassment on social media being reported to the Dash Charity team are rising and the picture across the country is similar: technology assisted domestic abuse – or 'tech abuse' - is on the increase.

The most used platforms to perpetrate domestic abuse are Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, according to survivors interviewed by the charity Refuge in 2022. There are some emerging specialist support programmes for survivors of domestic abuse, but reporting related content to social media companies is still not leading to enough of an effective or rapid response. Tech abuse often escalates to, or is being perpetrated alongside, physical and sexual abuse.

Support for online community admins and moderators

This is where moderators and admins can make a difference.

Shutting down and deleting posts or comments, removing members for displaying sexist attitudes, men directing harassment at women and vice versa. Take pride in your ability to play a part as an online activist to #changethestory for violence against women and girls.

We're here to help with some simple tips for time-poor moderators, admins and managers of local social media groups, pages, chat groups, to help #changethestory and make the spaces you oversee a better space that challenges toxic language, misogyny and abusive behaviours that can be early predictors of gender-based violence

1. Refreshing your community standards or group rules

You may have guidelines for people using your group, page or online community, and this is where an addition to these can help you curate a space that is free of toxic or abusive content.

Asking people to not use language or comments that are offensive, misogynistic or of a sexist nature, even if it is meant as banter, and warning them of what will happen if they break these rules should be enough to empower you and your fellow moderators to take control.

2. Applying your community rules

Consider what the consequences will be for those who break this rule. Will they be warned? Do you have time to warn people? If not, consider simply removing comments that break group rules and the people who perpetuate them.

3. Shutting down discussions

Removing comments or posts can be controversial. People want to be able to express their views and associate online spaces and chat groups as a safe space to do so. But rules should still be applied. If someone posted an explicit image or something illegal, it is unlikely you would leave it in place.

If you have shared a community rule, people are expected to abide by these if they want to participate in a discussion.

Be clear about why you are addressing a comment or post. Unless it also breaks another group rule, be confident that the post is not being removed because it criticises or is negative, but because it is toxic, and perpetuates ideas that normalise harassment of women and girls.

4. Being inclusive

Males are likely to experience domestic abuse and are increasingly reporting and sharing their experiences. The rules and guidelines are there to protect people of any gender, so if there is aggressive, harassing or toxic language and behaviours in your group towards men, don't be afraid to address this in the same way.

5. Supporting group members and abuse survivors

Remember, you are an online admin, not a domestic abuse advocate, lawyer or police officer, so don't try to take on someone's personal case or circumstances. Refer people to the services where they can get support they need.

If your group is based in a specific geographical area, you can refer someone to their local authority website, where the commissioned domestic abuse support provider can be identified and approached by them. In East Berkshire and South Bucks, it's The Dash Charity. In West Berkshire, it's Berkshire Women's Aid (for any gender).

6. Remember, the law is on your side

The passing of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 enshrined a Government definition of domestic abuse, meant that "emotional" and "economic" abuse were included in that definition for the first time, along with coercive or controlling behaviour. The law also encourages and recognises that everybody has a role to play in supporting victims and survivors of domestic abuse, with a 'multi-agency' approach.

7. Staying safe online and reporting content

Online safety is as important for community admins and moderators as it is for its other members. Report any threats made against you or members of your online community or if you feel unsafe., to your employer or the police.

Report any illegal or abusive content to the platform you are using, such as Meta (which runs Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter). They have moderating services in place to help address this and take it down if you don't feel confident doing so yourself.

About The Dash Charity:

Dash has supported people experiencing domestic abuse in East Berkshire and South Buckinghamshire for 45 years. We provide specialist support to adults and children experiencing mental health issues, modern slavery, immigration, trafficking, homelessness and complex needs associated with Domestic Abuse, empowering them to live a life beyond crisis and ensuring their voices are heard.

The Dash Charity 551 Fairlie Road Slough Berkshire SL1 4PY

01753 549865 info@thedashcharity.org.uk www.thedashcharity.org.uk

Registered in England and Wales No 06758907. Registered Charity No. 1127126

We also speak up for them and advocate on their behalf with housing teams, police, social care. Dash provides safety devices to help them feel safer in their own home and help source donations of anything they need to make their life a little easier or a little brighter whilst they are trying to stay safe.

Our programmes help women, children and men recognise tactics of abuse, so they can feel more empowered and break the cycle of abuse.

Dash also runs refuges, which are safehouses providing sanctuary and support to those who are escaping domestic abuse and have nowhere else to go.

Further help and useful links:

<https://safelives.org.uk/tech-vs-abuse>

Refuge 'Marked as Unsafe' report: <https://refuge.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Marked-as-Unsafe-FINAL-November-2022.pdf>

If you are a victim of domestic abuse, support is available 24/7. In an emergency, always call 999. If you can't speak, call 999, listen to the call handler and answer questions, either by pushing buttons or coughing. If prompted, press 55 to let the operator know it's a genuine emergency.

If you don't want to speak to the police, The Dash Charity helpline – 01753 549865 – is open Monday-Wednesday from 9.30am-2.30pm and Thursday - Friday 9.30am-4pm.

<https://thedashcharity.org.uk> Alternatively, you can call the National Domestic Abuse Helpline which is free and open 24 hours a day on 0808 2000 247.

www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk

All libraries are designated safe spaces where staff are trained to discreetly seek help for victims. Several local pharmacies also offer safe spaces for victims. See the locations at <https://uksaysnomore.org/safespaces>

Follow us:

Facebook: @TheDashCharity1

Instagram and Twitter: @thedashcharity