



HM Government



**ASK FOR ANI**  
**DOMESTIC ABUSE**  
**CODEWORD SCHEME**  
**GUIDANCE FOR**  
**PHARMACIES USING**  
**THE UK SAYS NO MORE**  
**SAFE SPACES SCHEME**

**#YouAreNotAlone**



# What is the Ask for ANI domestic abuse codeword scheme?

The government has launched the Ask for ANI (Action Needed Immediately) codeword scheme to enable victims of domestic abuse to access immediate help from the police or other support services, from the safety of their local pharmacy.

If you are already using the UK SAYS NO MORE [Safe Spaces scheme](#) in your pharmacy, you can adopt Ask for ANI as a way of providing immediate support to victims.

Safe Spaces already enables victims of domestic abuse to access information and contact specialist services in a quiet, private space.

Where a victim needs immediate, emergency assistance, Ask for ANI provides a way for victims to discreetly tell pharmacy staff that they need their help to either call the police on 999 or contact specialist services.



# What guidance is available for pharmacies who want to adopt Ask for ANI?

This guide has been written for pharmacists, pharmacy technicians and pharmacy assistants, and outlines the principles to consider when an individual uses the codeword, and the formal response required to direct the victim to the right support in a safe and supportive way.

An additional guide has been produced to help members of staff [understand and define domestic abuse](#). All staff should read this information in addition to the guidance provided here. The guidance will offer you a deeper understanding of domestic abuse and how it impacts victims, how abusers and victims may behave, and the impact it has on all involved. This will enhance the response you give to victims at a crucial time.

## Promotional materials

Co-branded Ask for ANI and Safe Spaces marketing materials have been produced to inform your customers that you are operating the codeword scheme as well as providing a Safe Space, and that staff are prepared to deliver a suitable response. More details are [available here](#)

Thank you for supporting this initiative and for providing this vital service for victims of domestic abuse. If you have any questions, please contact [AskforANI@homeoffice.gov.uk](mailto:AskforANI@homeoffice.gov.uk).



# What should pharmacies do when the Ask for ANI codeword has been used?

**Disclosing domestic abuse is difficult for many victims, not only because it is potentially dangerous, but also because of the stigma and shame that is too often attached. We also need to recognise and acknowledge that when an individual uses the codeword and discloses domestic abuse, it can be difficult for the member of staff hearing it.**

Regardless of circumstances or setting, there are some broad principles that can guide your response, which can make a real difference. Victims who feel believed are more likely to seek help and support.

Hearing an individual use the codeword, especially for the first time, may cause you to feel anxious about not saying the right thing or doing something wrong. This guidance provides the relevant information and training to ensure you know what to do. Remember they chose you – there is something already about you that means they are willing to try this. It may be difficult not to be shocked or surprised when someone uses Ask for ANI, to help avoid this have a run through with colleagues, just like you would a fire practice, so when the time comes it won't be your first time.

The following principles should be front of mind when responding to a victim using Ask for ANI.

## **Believe what you are being told**

Many victims will be unsure whether you will believe they need help. Ideally you want to demonstrate with body language and words your willingness to listen to what help they need and be there for them whatever they choose to do. Remember, though, your role is not to ask or enquire about the details of the abuse.

## **Listen non-judgementally**

Take your cue from the victim. Simple acknowledgements can help assure the person disclosing that you understand and care, and that they are not alone. Try not to criticise the abuser – this can make some victims go into defence mode. Often the victim still loves the abuser and wants the abuse to end rather than the relationship, so their feelings may be ambivalent and complicated.

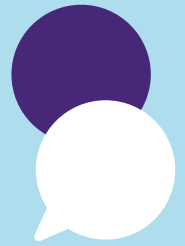


# Ask for ANI step-by-step process

1

## Clarify they are asking for ANI

If you think someone has used the codeword, **acknowledge** and check by using a phrase like “So you’d like to speak to ANI? OK, please come with me” or “Yes, ANI is available. Please come with me to the consultation room.”

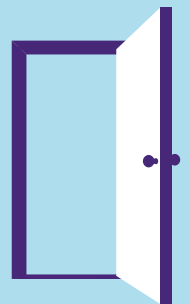


2

## Offer a private space

If the person is alone, **respond** by offering to accompany them to the consultation room.

If they’re with another adult, ask if they are able to come to the consultation room on their own.



3

## Explain confidentiality

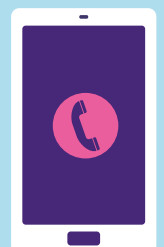
Explain how you will treat information disclosed to you or in front of you.



4

## Explain what you can offer

Explain that you can help them access immediate support from the police, a national helpline or a local support service.



National Domestic Abuse Helpline (England)

**0808 2000 247**

Live Fear Free Helpline (Wales)

**0808 8010 800**



Confirm whether they would like a police response, or support from a national helpline or local support service. Ask if they are comfortable making the call or if they would prefer you to make the call on their behalf.

5

**Ask what they would like to happen**



**Act** by calling the police or a support service. If the individual is able to make the call, provide a phone and the relevant number. If they want you to make the call, explain to the call handler that you are calling on behalf of someone using the ANI codeword.

6

**Offer the phone to make the call**



**Record** use of the codeword on the **online form**.

7

**Record the incident**



To protect your wellbeing, talk to someone you trust about your experience and be kind to yourself.

8

**Debrief with a colleague**

Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline (Scotland)

**0800 027 1234**

Domestic and Sexual Abuse Helpline (Northern Ireland)

**0808 802 1414**

# Ask for ANI step-by-step process

The following information provides the formal **step-by-step process** of responding to the use of the codeword in your pharmacy. This guidance should be followed alongside local safeguarding procedures.



## 1. Clarify they are asking for ANI

There are many potential ways in which a person may communicate to you that they need assistance. We shouldn't rely on the fact that all will use the codeword correctly.

The person may ask to see ANI, ask if ANI is available or just say "ANI". They may even write ANI on a piece of paper, e.g. their prescription form. We also have to consider that English might not be their first language, or they may have hearing difficulties.

You may find that the codeword isn't used at all and that the individual says something along the lines of "I don't feel safe right now", "I don't feel safe at home" or "I'm scared/frightened of my (ex) partner/family member/carer."

There are other similar schemes across the UK, such as Ask for Angela and Safe Spaces, so these may be asked for instead of ANI.

They may not be able to verbalise anything and appear upset, angry, frustrated or cry. It's important to stay calm and follow the process set out in the guidance.

To show that you have heard the codeword you could use a phrase like "So you'd like to speak to ANI? OK, please come with me" or "Yes, ANI is available. Please come with me to the consultation room."



## 2. Offer a safe space

To adopt Ask for ANI, your pharmacy needs to be able to offer a quiet, private space for victims to go. This safe space should be a private room – ideally the consultation room.

If the consultation room is occupied or unavailable when the victim uses the codeword, you should consider providing them with an alternative private space. This space must be free from others using it, so not a staff room or break room. Ideally there should be a comfortable space for them to sit, so not a cupboard or utility area. The space also needs to be confidential, so it should be a separate room – not behind a curtain, for example.

### **If you think the abuser may be with the individual,**

it may be dangerous if you intervene or ask the abuser to leave. If you can, wait for a time when the possible abuser is out of earshot, and ask the individual who has used the codeword if it would be safe for them to come with you. If they say yes, then follow the instructions above. If they say no, ask them if they want you to call the police.

# Ask for ANI step-by-step process

If the consultation room is occupied and no suitable alternative space is available, you should explain that you understand what they are asking for but unfortunately ANI is currently busy. Ask if they would mind waiting until ANI is free or coming back at an agreed time. This ensures the individual knows they are being taken seriously and that they will be offered assistance as soon as possible.

This is where your role ends – you should not feel that you need to do anything further. The individual knows best what is safest for them, and it is not your responsibility.

**If the person is with children**, you should still offer the quiet and private space to both the victim and children, but all efforts should be made to ensure children (apart from very young infants) do not overhear the conversation due to the risk they may repeat it at a later point. You can ask the person to write down what help they need. Don't ask the parent to leave their children.

If a child or young person under 18 uses the codeword, you should seek to understand what help they need and follow your pharmacy's safeguarding procedure.



## 3. Explain confidentiality

Please follow your organisation's confidentiality and safeguarding policies to ensure that you are familiar with circumstances where confidentiality may need to be breached (e.g. if a victim is high risk or a crime has been, or may be, committed). Where a safeguarding referral is needed, you can share the victim's details with police or social services so that they can take appropriate action to keep the victim safe.

Remember to maintain your own privacy and confidentiality. This may feel more difficult in rural or smaller areas where pharmacy staff and customers are known to each other so providing reassurance about confidentiality will be particularly important for victims in these communities.



# Ask for ANI step-by-step process



## 4. Explain what you can offer

Your role is to:

- offer a space that is safe for victims
- assist the individual in calling police on 999/101, or a national or local domestic abuse support helpline or services
- provide the individual with telephone numbers or information on support to use at another time

If the individual asks for more help, gently explain that you have been trained to offer a phone call, and that professionals such as domestic abuse agencies or helplines or the police, will be able to help.

You may wish to download the free [Bright Sky app](#) onto your work phone or device. The app also provides a UK-wide directory of specialist domestic abuse support services with contact details.



## 5. Ask what they would like to happen

Ask them what they need/want and be guided by them. The victim is always the expert in their own life. It is important to be patient and allow them to set the pace.

You should first check whether they are in danger or need immediate help because of domestic abuse and want the police to be called. Where it is not possible to check if the victim wants the police to be called, staff should follow their pharmacy's safeguarding procedures.



## 6. Offer the phone to make the call

If the individual is able to make the call, encourage them to do so. They may want you to stay for assistance or prefer to be alone. If they tell you that they want you to make the call, explain to the person at the organisation that you are calling on behalf of someone who has used the ANI codeword.

If calling 999, let the police call handler know that an Ask for ANI codeword has been used. The call handler will take the details of the situation and assess whether police officers need to be dispatched.

# Ask for ANI step-by-step process

If the victim would like support from a national helpline, you can call or signpost to the following helplines, which are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week:

<b>National Domestic Abuse Helpline (England)</b> <b>0808 2000 247</b>	<b>Live Fear Free Helpline (Wales)</b> <b>0808 8010 800</b>
<b>Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline (Scotland)</b> <b>0800 027 1234</b>	<b>Domestic and Sexual Abuse Helpline (Northern Ireland)</b> <b>0808 802 1414</b>

If you call a helpline, they may offer a call back at a time and on a number convenient and safe for the person using the codeword. You can find details of local support services on Hestia's [Bright Sky App](#), which provides a UK-wide directory of local services.

**If the victim can't call because of a language barrier**, there are telephone interpretation services available that may be able to provide support. The National Domestic Abuse Helpline can offer an interpreter service and the Karma Nirvana helpline also offers support on domestic abuse, honour-based abuse and forced marriage in Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu. Hestia's [Bright Sky app](#) provides information on domestic abuse in Polish, Punjabi, Urdu and Welsh, as well as English. Bright Sky can be downloaded for free as an app on your phone or a webpage via your internet browser.



# Ask for ANI step-by-step process

## What to do in an emergency

In an emergency where there is an immediate risk to someone's safety – such as someone using violence or threatening violence – or if you need police assistance, you should call 999. You don't need to get consent from the victim at this point.

You can also report a crime by calling the police on 101, or anonymously report a crime by calling Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111 or online. You may feel worried about what will happen if the abuser suspects you reported them to the police. Never confront the abuser and ensure you take steps to protect your own safety too. Inform your safeguarding lead about the disclosure.

If the police have been called and have confirmed that officers will be dispatched to the pharmacy, you should ensure that the individual is able to wait somewhere private until officers arrive. This could be the consultation room, or, if the consultation room is unavailable, a quiet space away from other members of the public.

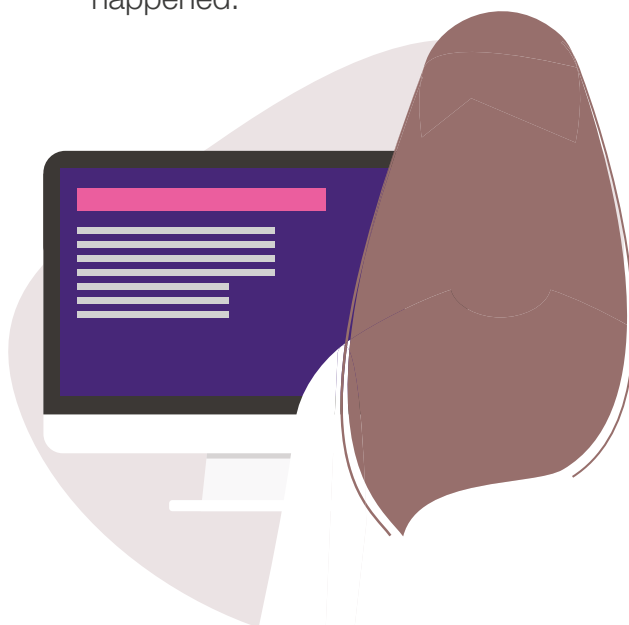


## 7. Record the incident

Record any use of the codeword on this [online form](#). A printable version of the form is also available to download and complete in hard copy, however we request that the information is then also recorded on the online form. The anonymised information you provide will be used to help us understand how the scheme is working.

Remember:

- **Acknowledge:** the staff member should acknowledge that they heard the codeword.
- **Respond:** staff should respond with kindness and understanding.
- **Act:** staff should take the victim to the consultation room and ask what they would like to happen. If an urgent response is needed, a 999 call should be made.
- **Record:** staff should make an anonymous record of what has happened.



# Ask for ANI step-by-step process



## 8. Debrief with a colleague

Talking to someone or hearing about their experience of domestic abuse can be distressing for you too. It's important to care for your mental health and wellbeing after responding to a domestic abuse disclosure. Some ways of doing this include:

- Debrief with someone you trust in a way that maintains the individual's or family's confidentiality (by not including names or personal details).
- Take a break and do something that takes your mind off what you've just heard – e.g. take a walk, make a cup of tea or coffee.
- Be kind to yourself. Talking to someone about their experience while being kind and non-judgemental, and informing them of the available support, is one of the best ways you can help them, but ultimately you alone can't make them safe.
- Acknowledge the limits of your role and that what you've done is enough.



### If you are experiencing domestic abuse

You too may be affected personally by domestic abuse, either as a victim or survivor, as someone who uses abusive behaviour, or as a friend or family member of someone affected. You are not alone and there is support available. Please see the full list of national resources, including services in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, at [GOV.UK/domestic-abuse](https://gov.uk/domestic-abuse). Call 999 if you or someone else is at an immediate risk of harm and speak to a trusted family member or friend about your experience.

# Responding to domestic abuse victims who are being stalked

Victims of domestic abuse may also be stalked by a partner or ex-partner. Stalking victims may not be in a current relationship with the stalker, but they may still feel that their movement is limited. In particular, victims may want to access help through the scheme because they are worried about being watched by a stalker and would like to use the private space offered by the scheme. They may be concerned that their personal phone is being monitored. Stalking may include behaviours that in isolation can appear harmless, for example, sending messages or gifts, but that can form part of a pattern of unwanted and abusive behaviour towards the victim.

If a victim asks to make a call about stalking, the National Stalking Helpline UK can be also contacted on **0808 802 0300**.

Information on stalking support services in Scotland and Northern Ireland is available at: [www.mygov.scot/victim-support-stalking/](http://www.mygov.scot/victim-support-stalking/) and <https://www.stalkingni.com/>.



# Responding to people who are deaf or hearing impaired

Deaf people, like many marginalised communities, face systemic barriers which prevent them from easily accessing appropriate support services in times of need. The compulsory wearing of masks in shops is also an extra barrier for communication. Deaf people's first language is mostly British Sign Language or another signed language or international sign (with English potentially their third or fourth language).

In particular, Deaf people who rely on facial expressions and lipreading to communicate are finding communication difficult during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is even more difficult for Deaf domestic abuse victims because they will find it hard to ask for support and may feel anxious about how to communicate.

Following the best practice guidelines below can make it easier for staff.

- Be calm, never give up if the communication is not efficient. It takes courage for a Deaf person to ask for support.
- Make sure you are facing the person you are talking to and speak clearly. Do not shout, speak too fast or very slow.
- If they don't understand you, repeat or rephrase – use plain English language.
- Move to a quiet area where they can communicate with you.
- Use simple gestures such as pointing and waving.
- Write things down in plain English – use paper and pen or mobile phone to text.
- Do not rely on another person such as a child or other family member to communicate with the Deaf person who is asking for help. They are not interpreters and may give wrong information. The family member could also be their abuser.
- Use BSL Health Access, 24/7 online interpreting service. More information is available at <https://bslhealthaccess.co.uk/>. In Scotland, individuals can also contact Scotland's 24/7 National BSL Interpreting Video Relay Service. Details are available at [contactscotland-bsl.org](https://contactscotland-bsl.org)

Also let victims who are Deaf know about the [emergency SMS service](#). Victims can register for the service by texting REGISTER to 999. They will get a text telling them what to do next.

# How to provide the Ask for ANI codeword service

**You can build on the support you are already providing to victims of domestic abuse through Safe Spaces by letting victims know that they can ask for help by using the ANI codeword.**

Once the decision has been made to adopt the scheme, you should follow these easy steps to start offering the service.

- 1. Let us know you are adopting the codeword scheme.** If you have not already been in touch about adopting the scheme, email [AskforANI@homeoffice.gov.uk](mailto:AskforANI@homeoffice.gov.uk).
- 2. Talk to your staff.** Before the scheme 'goes live' in your business, you should be confident that all members of staff working with customers are aware of the scheme, and they know what to do if someone uses the codeword. The training package available is intended for staff to help them understand domestic abuse and how to respond to domestic abuse disclosures.

Pharmacy staff in Wales will be aware that 'Ask and Act' has been introduced in Wales to provide a process for targeted engagement across public services to identify violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDSV). [VAWDSV training](#) is available for health professionals in Wales.

In Scotland, the [Domestic Abuse Awareness Raising Tool \(DAART\)](#) is a free learning resource available for professionals. It's an awareness-raising resource and serves as an introduction to domestic abuse and coercive control.

The tool provides an overview of the main considerations when responding to domestic abuse, however it does not replace specialist domestic abuse training.

- 3. Print and put up posters.** [Cobranded customer facing posters](#) will let victims know that they can ask for emergency help via Ask for ANI and/or use the consultation room to access specialist services via Safe Spaces. A specific consultation room poster is provided as part of the [Safe Spaces scheme](#).
- 4. Record any use of the codeword on the online form.** You will be asked to provide anonymised information to help us understand how the scheme is working.
- 5. Keep talking to staff about the scheme.** Keep up staff awareness about the codeword scheme through your team meetings and staff communications. You should ensure all new staff and any locums are told about the scheme and should consider building it into inductions. Staff should feel reassured that if they react to the codeword being used, managers will support them.
- 6. Any questions or queries** about the scheme can be directed to [AskforANI@homeoffice.gov.uk](mailto:AskforANI@homeoffice.gov.uk). For specific questions about Safe Spaces, please email [UKSAYSNOMORE@hestia.org](mailto:UKSAYSNOMORE@hestia.org)

To access additional training resources, posters and the form to record any use of the codeword, visit: [gov.uk/home-office/pharmacy-codeword-safespaces-scheme](https://gov.uk/home-office/pharmacy-codeword-safespaces-scheme)

