

**Crisis Planning for
Gypsy and
Traveller Families:**

*When Leaving
Isn't Just Leaving*

Crisis Planning for Gypsy and Traveller Families

Professional Briefing

Purpose

This briefing accompanies the community crisis-planning toolkit. It was developed through a small funded community research project exploring what happens when domestic abuse, site insecurity, planning controls and institutional discretion meet. It is for professionals, commissioners and decision-makers who need a concise explanation of the approach, the power dynamics described by families, and the safeguards needed.

Core principle: harm reduction

The plan prioritises immediate safety, de-escalation, child protection and the least harmful available option. It recognises that an ideal or policy-led solution may not be available in the first hours or days of a domestic-abuse crisis.

Project focus: power, planning and discretion

Families described situations in which temporary safety depended on discretion: whether a daughter and grandchildren could stay on a parent's pitch, whether an extra caravan could remain for a short period, or whether enforcement would be delayed. Families also highlighted planning controls as a barrier. Conditions attached to both local-authority and private Gypsy & Traveller sites can restrict who may live or stay there, or how many caravans may be stationed. A relative may have physical space but still be unable to offer it without risking breach or enforcement.

When those decisions feel dependent on goodwill, people can feel pressure to avoid complaints and to “stay in” with council employees or site staff in case they later need help.

Important

This does not suggest that every council or employee behaves unfairly. It records how unclear rules, restrictive planning controls and dependence on individual discretion can create a power imbalance that shapes people's choices.

The power imbalance this project is trying to show

Community research for this project repeatedly raised a specific concern on local-authority sites: residents may experience day-to-day relationships with site managers, wardens or other council employees as connected to whether discretion will be shown later in a crisis.

Families also described planning controls as a second layer of restriction. Even where parents or relatives have a pitch or private family site, conditions may limit who can live or stay there, who is named, or how many caravans are allowed. That can close off the very place a woman and children would otherwise go in an emergency.

Why this matters in a crisis

- A survivor may have no safe authorised place to move to immediately.
- A family may have land or a pitch, but planning or occupancy conditions can make it unavailable as an emergency refuge.
- Parents may fear that helping an adult daughter or son could expose the wider family site to breach or enforcement.
- Residents may delay complaints or challenge because they fear losing future discretion or goodwill.
- Informal decisions can feel more powerful than written policy when a family needs an answer quickly.

Professional responsibilities

- Use transparent written criteria for emergency flexibility wherever possible.
- Where a planning or site restriction blocks an otherwise safe family-based crisis option, consider urgent and proportionate temporary flexibility and record the reasons.
- Record decisions and reasons, including safeguarding and domestic-abuse factors.
- Keep complaints about conditions or staff conduct separate from later crisis decisions.
- Do not make access to safety dependent on a resident being seen as compliant or grateful.
- Involve an independent domestic-abuse, housing or Gypsy & Traveller advocate where helpful.

Crisis Planning for Gypsy and Traveller Families

When Leaving Isn't Just Leaving

1. Crisis Plan Overview

Leaving an abusive situation is rarely simple. For some Gypsy and Traveller families, leaving can increase other risks - especially where there is a shortage of lawful stopping places, where family support depends on being able to stay temporarily on a pitch, or where site rules and enforcement are applied through individual decisions.

Who this is for

This crisis plan is for:

- Adult sons and daughters within Gypsy and Traveller communities who need to flee domestic abuse with their own children.
- Parents or relatives who may need to provide temporary safety on a pitch, yard or family site.
- Families whose options are affected by site rules, planning conditions, enforcement or a shortage of authorised accommodation.
- Trusted community supporters, advocates and professionals helping a family through the immediate crisis.

What we mean by “adult children”

The original project used the phrase adult children because, within many Gypsy and Traveller families, a person does not stop being someone's son or daughter when they become an adult or have children of their own. Returning to parents during danger can be a protective family response, not evidence of dependence or failure.

For a survivor with children, that family safety net only works if there is somewhere they are actually permitted to stay. This is why accommodation rules, planning decisions and the balance of power on sites belong inside a domestic-abuse crisis plan.



What this plan is (and isn't)

This plan does not promise safe, authorised or permanent accommodation where none exists.

It aims to:

- Reduce immediate danger
- Buy time during crisis
- Protect children
- Avoid unnecessary escalation
- Make power, planning restrictions and gatekeeping visible
- Help families document decisions and seek independent support

2. Key Reality Statement

A truth this project starts from

Families involved in this work described needing to “stay in” with people who held practical power over a local-authority site. The phrase describes a perceived dependence on goodwill: if a crisis happens tomorrow, will a daughter be allowed to stay with her children, will an extra caravan be permitted for a few nights, or will enforcement begin?

Families also described planning control as a structural barrier. Even where parents or relatives have a pitch or private site, occupancy conditions, named-person conditions, limits on caravans or other restrictions can mean that a survivor and children cannot simply stay there. A physical space may exist while a lawful or secure crisis option does not.

That can create a structural dilemma. A resident may want to challenge blocked facilities, racism, poor treatment or an unfair decision, but also fear that being labelled difficult will reduce the chance of flexibility later. Whether or not a written policy intends this, the perception itself changes behaviour.

Harm reduction in that context can mean:

- Prioritising immediate physical safety
- Using one trusted spokesperson or advocate
- Asking for temporary flexibility without giving up longer-term rights
- Keeping records privately
- Returning to complaints or challenge when the immediate crisis is safer

Harm reduction is not agreement with an unfair system, and it should never be used by a service to justify inaction, enforcement or reduced support.



Crisis-Planning Table

Examples are indicative only. They are not fixed time limits, conditions or thresholds for support.

Quick reference: safety, power and next steps

Situation	Power / risk	Immediate step	Ask for / next step	Support / record
Immediate danger	Physical, coercive or economic harm	Move to the safest available place; call 999 if danger is immediate	Contact specialist domestic-abuse and housing support	Trusted advocate; keep location private where needed
Need to stay temporarily with parents / family	Site rules or discretion may affect the wider family	Explain that this is an emergency safeguarding arrangement	Ask for short-term flexibility and the decision in writing	Domestic-abuse advocate; Gypsy & Traveller advocate; keep records
Extra caravan needed for safety	Planning or site-rule breach may be threatened	Ask for time-limited emergency discretion	If refused, ask for reasons and a safe alternative	Council housing/site team plus independent advocate
Complaint or poor treatment during crisis	Fear that challenging staff will damage future goodwill	Prioritise immediate safety; preserve evidence privately	Use an independent advocate and return to the complaint when safer	Keep dates, names, messages and written decisions
Enforcement / notice	Loss of lawful place; homelessness for survivor or wider family	Get urgent independent advice and explain domestic-abuse risk	Request a homelessness assessment and written reasons	Housing options; Shelter; specialist DA and GT advocacy

The central question is not simply “where can she go?” but “who has the power to allow a safe temporary option, and is that decision transparent, reviewable and free from retaliation?”

Key reminders

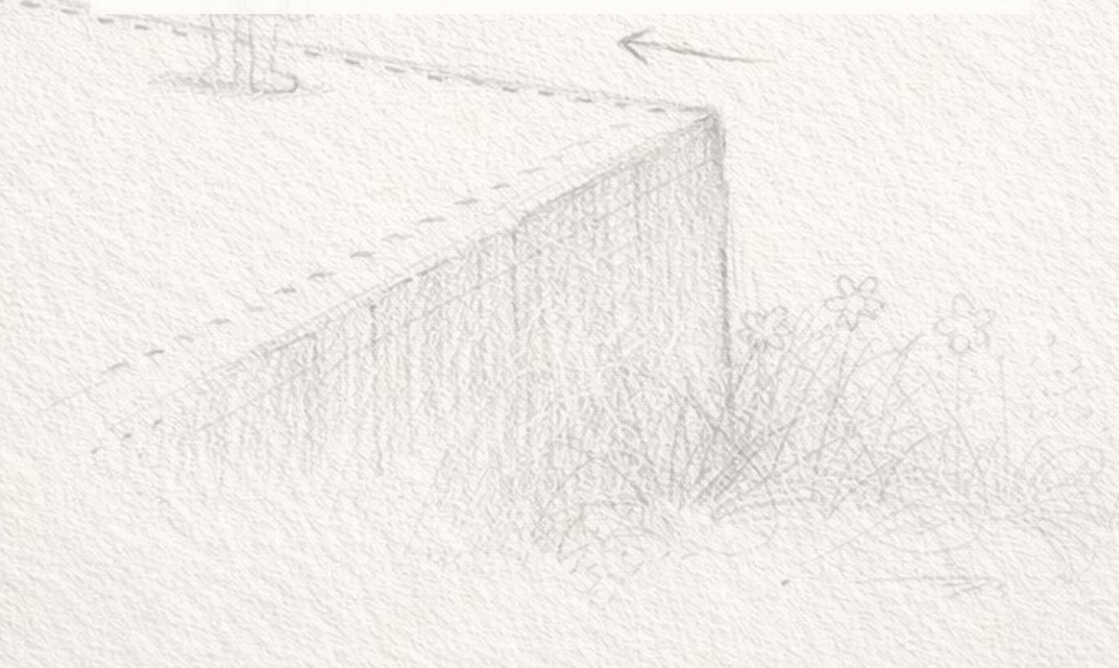
- Safety first. If there is immediate danger, call 999.
- A temporary stay with family can be a safeguarding response, not overcrowding "by choice".
- Ask for decisions, discretion and reasons in writing where it is safe to do so.
- Keep records privately: dates, names, messages, notices and what was said.
- Avoid confrontations that are likely to increase immediate risk; this does not mean giving up rights or ignoring danger.
- Specialist domestic-abuse support does not replace local-authority housing or safeguarding duties.

Support

Use a local specialist domestic-abuse service. In Yorkshire and North Yorkshire, IDAS is one option.

National Domestic Abuse Helpline (24 hours): 0808 2000 247

If site management is part of the difficulty, try to involve an advocate who is independent of the site-management team.



help



Coun

Scripts & Self-Protection Language

For moments when words matter

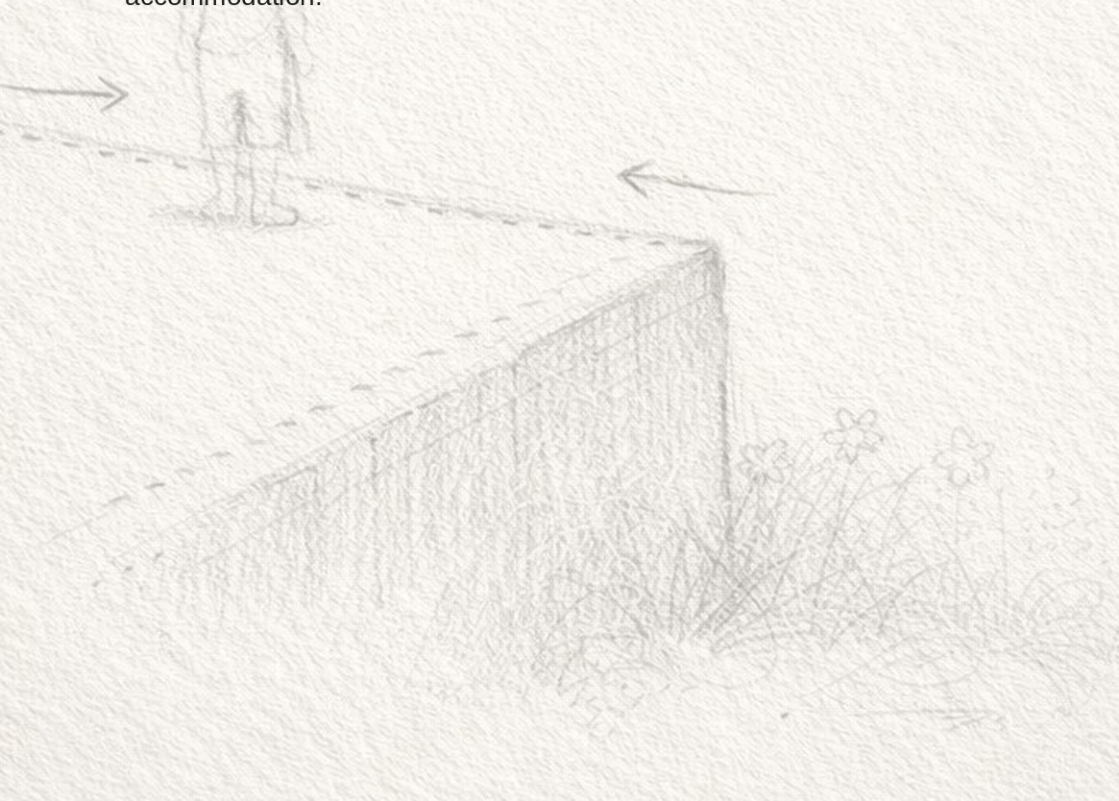
These scripts are optional and can be adapted. Their purpose is to reduce stress and avoid escalation.

Site manager / site owner

"We've had a family emergency. This is temporary while we arrange safe accommodation. We're trying to keep things calm and avoid problems."

Council / housing department

"It is not safe or reasonable for us to remain where we are due to domestic abuse. We are homeless and need emergency accommodation."



School or children's services

"There is a family safety issue. We're doing our best to keep things stable for the children."

Domestic abuse service

"I am at risk due to domestic abuse and housing instability. I need support to keep myself and my children safe."

Police

"I am at risk due to domestic abuse. I cannot safely remain where I am and need help to protect myself and my children."



Quiet Documentation Plan

Protect now, challenge later

During crisis

- Keep private notes: dates, names, and what was said
- Save texts, letters, notices, or voicemails
- Do not escalate complaints unless safety improves

If safe, consider having a trusted person on the phone as a witness (only if this does not increase risk).

After crisis

- Share records with a trusted advocate
- Decide if and when to raise complaints

Choosing safety over confrontation is not failure.

Additional safety option: Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (Clare's Law)

In England and Wales, a person - or in some circumstances a concerned third party - can ask the police whether a current or former partner has a known history of abusive or violent behaviour. The police decide whether information can lawfully be disclosed. Search GOV.UK for "Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme" or "Clare's Law".

Pre-crisis planning checklist

This is where options are created before pressure is at its highest.

- Copies or photos of ID, birth certificates and NHS numbers
- Children's school and health details
- Benefits information and essential medication
- Trusted contacts: family, domestic-abuse service and independent advocate
- Transport and safe-phone plan
- Know who can make or escalate an emergency decision about the pitch or site
- Know how to contact housing/homelessness separately from site management
- Identify an independent advocate if the site-management relationship is part of the problem



Safeguarding and use of this document

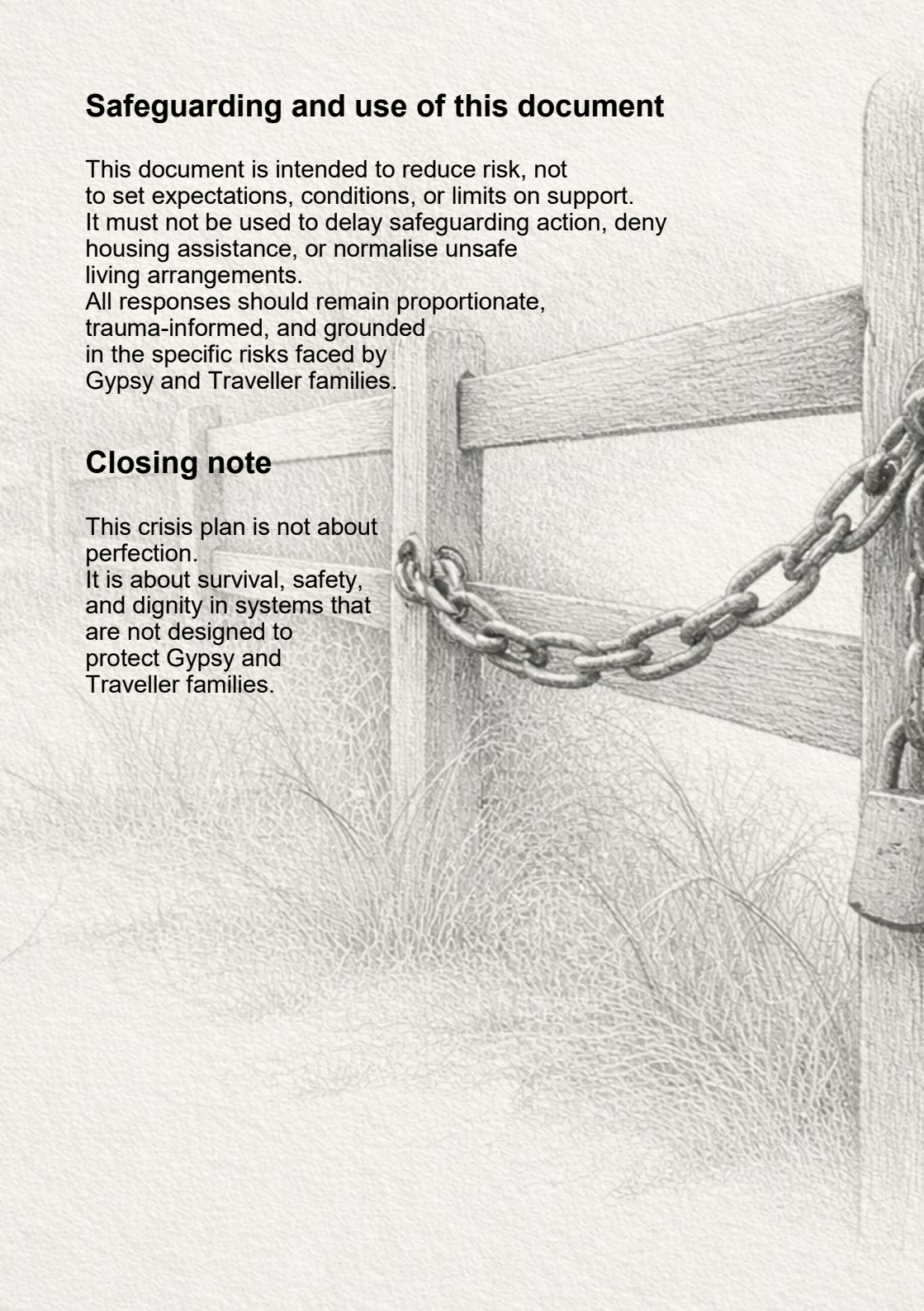
This document is intended to reduce risk, not to set expectations, conditions, or limits on support. It must not be used to delay safeguarding action, deny housing assistance, or normalise unsafe living arrangements.

All responses should remain proportionate, trauma-informed, and grounded in the specific risks faced by Gypsy and Traveller families.

Closing note

This crisis plan is not about perfection.

It is about survival, safety, and dignity in systems that are not designed to protect Gypsy and Traveller families.



WHAT THIS PROJECT IS SHOWING

A professional summary

1. Crisis can be institutional as well as interpersonal

Domestic abuse may trigger a second crisis: where the survivor and children can lawfully and safely stay.

2. Planning controls can remove otherwise safe family options

Conditions on local-authority and private Gypsy & Traveller sites may mean a relative has space but cannot take in a survivor and children without risking breach or enforcement.

3. Discretion can become a form of practical power

Where emergency flexibility is not clear in policy, families may feel dependent on individual staff relationships and goodwill.

4. Fear of losing goodwill can suppress complaints

Residents may tolerate poor conditions, racism or unfair treatment because they fear being labelled difficult before a future crisis.

5. Temporary family stays can be protective

Doubling-up for a short period may be the safest available option and should be understood in its safeguarding context.

6. Transparent decisions reduce harm

Written criteria, recorded reasons, independent advocacy and clear review routes reduce reliance on informal gatekeeping.

7. Harm reduction is not consent

A family choosing the least harmful option has not agreed that the system is fair, safe or lawful.

Use this resource as a prompt for safer, more transparent decision-making - not as a checklist for limiting support or normalising unsafe arrangements.

leave

Blue Eyes of Water

I am a Gypsy woman, and I was raised to believe that marriage is something you honour even when it costs you, that respectability is survival, and that leaving is a failure carried by more than just one person.

Marriage was never just love. It was family, reputation, site politics, who speaks to who, who keeps their mouth shut, and who is marked as trouble long before they ever ask for help.

I did what my heart told me, not what my family would have chosen, and I paid for that choice quietly, daily, by convincing myself that this was normal, that this was what staying looked like.

For years I told myself to go and then told myself to wait, because waiting felt safer than the consequences of leaving, and because my body bruises heal faster than the damage done by being talked about.

Silence was learned behaviour. A fist of iron is an effective teacher.

You don't forget the lesson, you just stop naming it.

And my child saw it. Took it in. Stored it. Those eyes of blue water watched what adults do to survive and what children are expected to carry.

When the moment came, the one people talk about like it's clear and brave, I chose him, because that choice had been rehearsed my whole life.

My child did not choose that.



leave

Those blue eyes of water will see no more.

And now everything is about risk management. Not safety, risk. What can be said. What cannot. Who must not be upset. Who might remember your name when you need them to look the other way.

I hope my mother hasn't complained to the site manager about the toilets being blocked again, because complaints are currency too, and they are spent against you later.

I hope she didn't go to his boss about the moment that word nearly slipped out, gypso, because even unspoken racism gets tallied somewhere, quietly, under your family's name.

People call this keeping the peace. What it really is, is managing power.

Because when a crisis comes, it is not policy that decides whether you can stay for a few nights, add a caravan, keep your children close. It is men with keys, men with clipboards, men who remember who caused problems and who stayed grateful.

This is what planning looks like when there are no authorised sites left, when doubling up is only allowed if your face fits, when private land comes with conditions designed to keep families small and controllable.

So you learn to stay quiet. You learn to smile. You learn to swallow injustice today so your children might sleep safely tomorrow.



leave

And I wonder what my child will learn next. How long before blue turned to grey? How long before their mouth learned silence too, not from fists this time, but from grey suits, red pens, planning notices, and systems that pretend neutrality while doing violence in paperwork.

Do not call this a choice.

Do not call this resilience.

This is survival inside a system that offers no clean exits and then blames women for not taking them.

This is not a story about leaving.

This is a record of what it costs to stay alive when every option is dangerous and when crisis planning means choosing the least damaging harm and hoping it holds.



leave

This prose sits beside the crisis-planning table because it is not abstract advice, but the practical decisions made in the aftermath of everything described above. The table does not offer safety where none exists; it records how women and families reduce harm inside systems that hold power over them. It reflects the calculations, silences, negotiations, and compromises people make to keep children safe when policy, planning law, and site rules leave no protected route out. Read together, the poem names the cost, and the table shows how survival is planned anyway.



Developed by Proud Gypsy Traveller CIC
In partnership with *Story Of The Changing*.



**STORY OF
THE CHANGING**

About this resource

This toolkit was produced through a small funded community research project by Proud Gypsy Traveller CIC in partnership with Story Of The Changing. It draws on lived experience and community conversations to make visible the interaction between domestic abuse, site insecurity, institutional discretion and the balance of power on local-authority sites.

It is not a comprehensive research study, a statutory protocol, legal advice or a substitute for specialist domestic-abuse, safeguarding or housing support. Its purpose is to help families and professionals recognise risks that can disappear when crisis planning looks only at the abusive relationship and not at where a person is actually able to go.

Content note

Contains references to domestic abuse, coercive control, racism, planning enforcement and site insecurity.

Useful official references: GOV.UK Homelessness Code of Guidance, Chapter 21 (Domestic abuse); GOV.UK Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme.