**Unconscious bias** makes it hard for us to recognise when someone might be vulnerable. Unconscious bias happens when our brains make incredibly quick judgments and assessments of people and situations without us realising. Often these are based on social stereotypes, which we may not even realise we hold. For example, sometimes the things that appear to make someone strong - status, profession, wealth - might actually make them vulnerable. The following provides us with things to consider for protected characteristics and domestic abuse:

* Disability - people with disabilities are more vulnerable to the effects of violence and abuse and of the controlling behaviour normally used by abusers. This can place victims with disabilities at greater risk of harm and less able to access support and advice. Disability cases within the elderly population can be of particular high risk.
* Age- while women under the age of 30 are at considerably greater risk of suffering domestic violence and abuse than those over the age of 40 years, this does not mean that older people do not suffer domestic abuse, especially if linked to disabilities (see above). Similarly, older people can and do cause serious harm through perpetrating violence and abuse. The evidence also shows that young people between the ages of 16 and 19 are also an age group to experience relationship abuse, but as often considered to still be children, this may not receive a domestic abuse response.
* Gender- (Sex) while there is no doubt that women are at greater risk from domestic violence and abuse, males can also be victims of domestic abuse
* Pregnancy and Maternity -this has been identified as being a time for considerable increase in domestic abuse.
* Race and Ethnicity - There is no identified difference in risk of suffering abuse between different ethnic groups, however ethnic minority groups may face greater barriers to seeking support (such as language barriers) and may also be at greater risk of specific types of domestic violence and abuse such as so called Honour Based violence, Forced Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation.
* Religion and Belief - There is no identified difference in risk of suffering abuse between different religious groups; however perceptions of honour and shame within certain religious communities may stop others from identifying and responding to domestic violence and abuse and can place victims at high risk of harm and homicide.
* Marriage and Civil Partnership - There is some evidence to suggest that single (recently separated) or unmarried women are at greater risk of violence than married women.
* Gender Reassignment - individuals may face additional barriers to reporting and seeking help and may be at risk of specific types of domestic violence and abuse.
* Sexual Orientation - 1 in 4 lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) people will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime, the same as the number of women affected in their lifetime. There are specific barriers to seeking support for LGBT people and the abuse they suffer may be specific, such as threats to ‘out’ them.

**Intersectionality-** Protected characteristics do not exist individually, so there is a need to consider that the identity of someone being for example, ‘black and male’ links characteristics that create their own complexity that can then contribute to an individual’s unique experience of discrimination and oppression.