



Department  
of Health



# Responding to colleagues experiencing domestic abuse:



Practical guidance for line managers, Human Resources and Employee Assistance Programmes

# Introduction

This resource provides practical guidance to employers on responding to colleagues who are experiencing domestic abuse which is affecting them in the workplace. It should be read alongside the EHRC and CIPD guide, [Managing and Supporting Employees Experiencing Domestic Abuse](#).<sup>12</sup>

The guidance complements any existing employer policies or procedures on:

- Sensitive disclosures.<sup>33</sup>
- Harassment, stalking, violence or abuse: whether from a colleague, family member or anyone else.
- Disciplinary action or misconduct in relation to employees as domestic abusers (whether alleged or convicted).

Employees who experience abuse should be supported regardless of gender and the type of abuse. The workplace can be a lifeline for survivors of domestic abuse as it offers an opportunity to seek help. Good work also provides physical and mental health benefits. Providing opportunities for employees who are affected by abuse to remain in work can therefore support their wellbeing over the long term.

## 1. Recognise the signs:

- What is domestic abuse?
  - The official definition is: “Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality.”
  - In practice domestic abuse is the **abuse of power and control** over one person by another and can take many different forms, including physical, sexual, emotional, verbal and financial abuse.
- Signs that an employee might be experiencing domestic abuse include:
  - Unexplained injuries.
  - Decreased productivity.
  - Frequent lateness or absence.
  - Changes in behaviour.
- These behaviours could reflect a range of issues and at the same time, potentially lead to disciplinary procedures. It is therefore important to establish what is behind them.

A full list of signs is in **Appendix 1**.

## 2. Respond:

- Understand it can be difficult for employees to make a disclosure of domestic abuse, and your support is important:
  - DO be sensitive/non-judgemental/ practical/supportive/discrete.
  - DO prioritise safety over work efficiency.
  - DO allocate some private time and space to listen.
  - DO NOT seek proof of abuse.

<sup>1</sup> This guidance refers principally to women but it applies equally to men. Research shows that women are more likely to suffer more serious injury and ongoing assaults than men. However, it should be acknowledged that men can experience domestic abuse from their female partner and that domestic abuse also occurs in **same-sex relationships**.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.equa\\_lityhumanrights.com/uploaded\\_files/Wales/domesticabuseguide.pdf](http://www.equa_lityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/Wales/domesticabuseguide.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Including compliance with the Equalities Act.

- DO NOT contact the abuser.
  - DO NOT compel a victim to accept support.
  - DO NOT adopt the role of being a support worker yourself.
  - If the employee or any colleagues are in immediate danger, call 999.
- All disclosures of domestic abuse and reported concerns should be treated as strictly confidential.<sup>4</sup> When responding to the employee, line managers should consider using their discretion, in line with existing policies on sensitive disclosures.
  - If the employee is uncomfortable discussing the situation with their line manager, consider offering an appropriate point of contact, possibly of the same gender, to advise the employee directly and on a confidential basis. This might be a colleague from Human Resources or an Employee Assistance Programme. The contact could also advise the line manager on how to manage sensitive disclosures and proceed safely.
  - The recommended option for anyone experiencing domestic abuse is to be referred to specialist practitioners trained to assess risk and advise on safety. Refer or signpost the employee to a domestic abuse helpline, web resource or external specialist domestic abuse service. See the directory for key contacts.
  - If you have concerns about the risk to any employee, you can confidentially seek advice from any of the organisations listed in the directory (without naming the employee experiencing domestic abuse).
  - Risk in domestic abuse situations is dynamic and can change very quickly. In a small number of cases, victims may be at high risk of serious harm or murder from domestic abuse. Named disclosure without consent may be made in exceptional circumstances:
    - If it is believed the employee and /or colleagues are at risk of serious injury or death.
    - If it is believed that there is a substantial risk of harm to any children involved in, or witnessing, the violence / abuse.
  - Employers have an increased legal responsibility to any employee who discloses that they may be at risk of harm.<sup>5</sup> Workplace adjustments may be put in place to reflect this. These should be reviewed periodically to reflect any change in risk. Examples of workplace adjustments include:
    - Making emergency and safe contact arrangements.
    - Improving the safety of the employee whilst they are at work.
    - Adjusting their responsibilities and workload.
    - Reviewing communications and IT safety.

Further examples of workplace adjustments are in **Appendix 2**.

- It may be necessary to inform others within the organisation: for example, to ensure staff can respond safely, to implement any agreed work place adjustments, or when line managers change. This should usually be done with the full knowledge and consent of the victim, and only on a need-to-know basis.

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<sup>4</sup> The employer has a duty of confidentiality towards the employee. Any information on personal matters should not be passed around the organisation without the employee's understanding and consent. All employees should be made aware of their responsibilities in relation to confidentiality.

<sup>5</sup> Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 (the "1974 Act"). Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (the 1999 Regulations). Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995. Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations 1996.

### 3. Record:

- Any written record, including any agreed workplace adjustments, should be held outside of official employee records and stored securely.
- Disclosures should not impact on the employee's work record, provided their performance is maintained as agreed.
- Any decision to disclose without consent (if a colleague is at serious risk of injury or death) should be documented.
- All incidents of violence, threatening behaviour or breaches of security in the workplace should be recorded and retained for evidence purposes if required. The record must be clear, accurate and include dates, times, locations, and any witnesses. Any breaches of orders, for example, non-molestation orders should also be noted.

#### **Anne 's story**

Ann had been a senior nurse at an NHS hospital for five years and a valued member of the team. She approached her line manager about a friend who was suffering abuse.

Her line manager had recently completed accredited domestic violence training and understood the warning signs and appropriate business responses. She also understood that Ann was referring to herself.

By using the tools delivered in the training, Ann's manager empowered Ann to self-disclose. Ann was 8 months pregnant, her abuser was a senior barrister, there were firearms in the house and she had been threatened and choked. Ann's manager understood the real risks and was able to put simple measures in place to offer appropriate support. These included:

- Changed hours and security escort services
- Time off for court hearings and solicitor meetings
- Time off for risk assessment by a third sector domestic abuse specialist
- Further work adjustments as required.

Ann is still with the NHS hospital and has received numerous promotions. She and her son are safe and well. The employer was able to retain top talent and the employee was able to trust her employer.

This resource has been written by SafeLives with the support of the Responsibility Deal domestic violence sub group. Particular thanks to The Corporate Alliance Against Domestic Violence for the case study provided.

# Appendix 1:

*Signs that someone might be experiencing domestic abuse (some of these signs may reflect a range of sensitive issues):*

## **Work productivity signs:**

- Change in the person's working patterns: for example, frequent absence, lateness or needing to leave work early.
- Reduced quality and quantity of work: missing deadlines, a drop in usual performance standards.
- Change in the use of the phone/email: for example, a large number of personal calls/texts, avoiding calls or a strong reaction to calls/texts/emails.
- Spending an increased amount of hours at work for no reason.

## **Changes in behaviour or demeanour**

- Conduct out of character with previous employment history.
- Changes in behaviour: for example, becoming very quiet, anxious, frightened, tearful, aggressive, distracted, depressed etc.
- Isolating themselves from colleagues.
- Obsession with timekeeping.
- Secretive regarding home life.
- Worried about leaving children at home with abuser.

## **Physical signs**

- Visible bruising or single or repeated injury with unlikely explanations.
- Change in the pattern or amount of make-up used.
- Change in the manner of dress: for example, clothes that do not suit the climate which may be used to hide injuries.
- Substance use/misuse.
- Fatigue/sleep disorders.

## **Other signs**

- Partner or ex-partner stalking employee in or around the workplace.
- Partner or ex-partner exerting unusual amount of control or demands over work schedule.
- Flowers/gifts sent to employee for no apparent reason.
- Isolation from family/friends.

# Appendix 2:

*Questions for you to consider in relation to workplace safety and examples of workplace adjustments:*

## **Questions for the employee**

- Q Does the alleged abuser know where the employee works?
- Q Have they ever been followed on their way to/from work?
- Q Is the employee frightened of anything specific that might take place at work or to and from work?
- Q Does the abuser have their work email address and/or work telephone number?
- Q What information can be shared with the wider team or relevant staff to ensure any changes are implemented and they can deliver an appropriate response?

## **Contact arrangements**

- Retain both a work contact and an emergency contact at home (not the abuser).
- Arrange in advance when and who to contact if an employee doesn't come into work (family member/police/neighbour etc.).
- Maintain communication with the individual during any absence, while keeping their whereabouts confidential from the abuser and other agreed persons.

## **Safety to and from work**

- Change the route to and from work (e.g. different bus or train time).
- Change the location of where they work or consider a transfer.
- Change the start and finish time of work hours.
- Provide a security escort to and from a car / transport links.

## **Safety while at work**

- Change the locks/codes to enter the workplace.
- Consider a personal or workstation alarm.
- Consider an alternative entrance to, or exit from the workplace.
- Consider screening access to the workplace. If possible and required, enable reception/security to identify the abuser (photo, car registration), and advise them on what to do if the abuser arrives at the workplace.

## **Communication safety**

- Review the security of all employee records and personal information.
- Change email addresses/work phone number or divert incoming phone calls and emails.
- Issue instructions to all staff **NOT** to reveal the employee's personal details or their whereabouts to anyone, including family members.

## **Managing responsibilities at work**

- Consider flexible working or changing work patterns.
- Adjust workload (extend deadlines, reassign responsibilities).
- Consider additional support /supervision/debriefing sessions.
- Provide special leave or time off during the day to attend appointments or court.

## Resource: Domestic abuse services directory

Service	Description	Contact
<b>NATIONAL SERVICES</b>		
<b>24-hour National Domestic Violence Helpline</b> Freephone	A service for women experiencing domestic violence, their family, friends, colleagues and others calling on their behalf. It is run in partnership between Women's Aid and Refuge. Callers may first of all hear an answerphone message before speaking to a person.	0808 2000 247 <a href="http://www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk">www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk</a>
<b>Men's Advice Line</b> Freephone	A confidential helpline for all men experiencing domestic violence by a current or ex-partner. Caters for all men: whether in heterosexual or same-sex relationships. Offers emotional support, practical advice and information on a wide range of services for further help and support.	0808 801 0327 Days and times of phone support vary. <a href="http://www.mensadvice.org.uk">www.mensadvice.org.uk</a>
<b>Respect Phonenumber</b> Freephone	A confidential helpline for people who are abusive and/or violent towards their current or ex-partner. Offers information and advice to support perpetrators to stop their violence and change their abusive behaviours. The main focus is to increase the safety of those experiencing domestic violence.	0808 802 4040 Days and times of phone support vary. <a href="http://www.respectphonenumber.org.uk">www.respectphonenumber.org.uk</a>
<b>Broken Rainbow</b>	National LGBT Domestic Violence Helpline providing confidential support to all members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans (LGBT) communities, their family and friends, and agencies supporting them.	0300 999 5428 <a href="mailto:help@brokenrainbow.org.uk">help@brokenrainbow.org.uk</a> <a href="http://www.brokenrainbow.org.uk">www.brokenrainbow.org.uk</a>
<b>Karma Nirvana</b>	Helpline: supports victims and survivors of forced marriage and honour based abuse	0800 599 9247 <a href="http://www.karmanirvana.org.uk/">www.karmanirvana.org.uk/</a>
<b>Man Kind Initiative</b>	The Man Kind Initiative is a national charity that provides help and support for male victims of domestic abuse.	<a href="http://www.mankind.org.uk">www.mankind.org.uk</a>
<b>Southall Black Sisters</b>	Southall Black Sisters provide advice and information on domestic abuse, racial harassment, welfare and immigration, primarily for Asian, African and African-Caribbean women.	<a href="http://www.southallblacksisters.org.uk">www.southallblacksisters.org.uk</a>
<b>Charity for Civil Servants</b>	The Charity for Civil Servants, providing support and advice for thousands of current, former, and retired civil servants, employees of those who work in our Associated Organisations, and their dependants, when they need it.	0800 056 2424 <a href="http://www.foryoubyyou.org.uk/hel ping-you/support-and-advice/domestic-abuse">www.foryoubyyou.org.uk/hel ping-you/support-and-advice/domestic-abuse</a>

<b>EAPA UK</b>	The UK Employee Assistance Professionals Association is the body that represents the interests of professionals concerned with employee assistance, psychological health and wellbeing in the UK. Our mission is to promote the highest standards of practice and the continuing development of employee assistance programmes (EAPs) and services in the UK.	<a href="http://www.eapa.org.uk/">www.eapa.org.uk/</a>
<b>National Stalking Helpline</b>	National Stalking Helpline provides information and guidance to anyone affected by harassment or stalking. Our helpline is open 9.30 a.m. – 4 p.m. Monday – Friday (except Wednesday when we open at 1p.m.) We also offer advice via email and on our Forum which can be found on our website.	0808 802 0300 <a href="mailto:advice@stalkinghelpline.org">advice@stalkinghelpline.org</a> <a href="http://www.stalkinghelpline.org/">www.stalkinghelpline.org/</a>
<b>SUPPORT FOR EMPLOYERS AND PROFESSIONALS</b>		
<b>Corporate Alliance Against Domestic Violence</b>	The Corporate Alliance Against Domestic Violence (the Alliance) is the nationally recognized membership charity working with employers addressing the impact of domestic violence in the workplace. The vision at the Alliance is to work with every employer to respond effectively in a business appropriate manner to domestic violence. The collaborative work with employers throughout the country has not only saved lives and addressed the needs of employees who endure, perpetrate and witness violence, but also successfully assisted in the reduction in the calculated cost domestic violence has to the UK economy. The Alliance is a business within business organisation providing accredited training, consultancy, business appropriate risk assessment, strategic response, support and tools to employers, HR teams and line managers that are proven to save lives.	07917228760 <a href="http://www.caadv.org.uk">www.caadv.org.uk</a> <a href="mailto:support@caadv.org.uk">support@caadv.org.uk</a>
<b>SafeLives</b>	SafeLives is a national charity dedicated to ending domestic abuse. Previously called Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse (Caada), we chose our new name because we're here for one simple reason: to make sure all families are safe. Our experts find out what works to stop domestic abuse. We gather evidence, and we spread great new approaches across the UK. We work with everyone who wants to stop domestic abuse.	0117 317 8750 <a href="http://www.safelives.org.uk">www.safelives.org.uk</a> <a href="mailto:info@safelives.org.uk">info@safelives.org.uk</a>
<b>Women's Aid</b>	Women's Aid is the national domestic abuse charity that coordinates and supports a network of over 500 local services working to end domestic violence against women and children. The Women's Aid National Training Centre, an accredited National Open College Network Centre, provides a variety of training and awareness raising courses addressing domestic abuse that respond to individual training requirements as well as tailor made training packages for the workplace to suit employers. Women's Aid also runs the UK Gold Book Online which provides up to date information for professionals on services for survivors of domestic violence. A range of information and support services are available on Women's Aid's website including a forum for survivors.	0117 915 7450 <a href="http://www.womensaid.org.uk">www.womensaid.org.uk</a> <a href="mailto:J.Kilburn@womensaid.org.uk">J.Kilburn@womensaid.org.uk</a>