



# MANAGING AND SUPPORTING EMPLOYEES EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC ABUSE

A guide for employers

The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. The registered charity champions better work and working lives and has been setting the benchmark for excellence in people and organisation development for more than 100 years. It has more than 150,000 members across the world, provides thought leadership through independent research on the world of work, and offers professional training and accreditation for those working in HR and learning and development.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), established under the Equality Act 2006, is an independent statutory body that works to encourage equality and diversity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, and protect and promote human rights across England, Scotland and Wales.

Ensuring that people have equal access to the labour market and are treated fairly at work is one of the EHRC's priority aims, as set out in its 2019–22 Strategic Plan. This is in recognition that there is still significant inequality in the UK labour market, and that people with protected characteristics, that is, 'protected groups', still face barriers in accessing the workplace (EHRC 2019).

## Guide

# Managing and supporting employees experiencing domestic abuse: a guide for employers

## Contents

Foreword from the CIPD	2
Foreword from the EHRC	4
Introduction: why act now on domestic abuse?	5
Why is domestic abuse a workplace issue?	8
Developing an effective framework around domestic abuse support	11
The role of HR, people managers and employees	14
Signposting to supportive services, charities and organisations	18
Further resources and guidance for employers	21
Appendix 1: Frequently asked questions	22
Appendix 2: Case study: Vodafone	24
Appendix 3: What should a domestic abuse policy contain?	26
Notes	29

## Acknowledgements

The CIPD and the EHRC are incredibly grateful to the organisations and individuals who gave their time and expertise to provide feedback to help inform this guide. These include:

- Jacqui Kilburn, National Training Centre Manager, and Lauren Owen, HR and Operations Manager, Women's Aid
- Dr Jane Pillinger, a global expert on gender equality and gender-based violence at work
- Dr Jasna Magić, National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Project Manager, Galop.

## 1 Foreword from the CIPD

Domestic abuse can destroy lives, leaving physical and emotional scars. Survivors can find themselves isolated from friends and family and lose their independence. It can take many forms: it is not just physical abuse; it can also be financial, emotional and psychological.

Most survivors are women with a male perpetrator, but it's important to remember that men can also be subject to abuse, and domestic abuse can happen in same-sex relationships. A key learning in producing this guidance is that we should not make assumptions about who the abuser may be or what a survivor may be experiencing, but to listen and respond in a supportive way.

Domestic abuse has an impact at work. Research shows that a high proportion of those enduring domestic abuse are targeted at work. Domestic abuse can negatively affect workplace colleagues as well as the person experiencing the abuse. However, importantly, the workplace can often be one of the few places that a person experiencing abuse can be separate from their abuser, and therefore can be the place where people are able to ask for and access support. It's essential that employers are knowledgeable about domestic abuse as they are ideally placed to offer a lifeline to those experiencing it. The aim of this guidance is to encourage more employers to take an active supporting role, which can make a huge difference to survivors and their future, with practical recommendations of how to do that.

We are pleased to produce this guidance together with the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), whose role is to promote and uphold equality and human rights ideals and laws across England, Scotland and Wales. Together we believe that individuals have a right to live free of abuse, and employers have a duty of care towards their staff to provide a safe working environment. Providing a safe and supportive workplace culture should be a priority.

A CIPD survey of UK employees<sup>1</sup> suggests that just under a quarter (24%) are aware of their employer having a policy or support in place on domestic abuse. We recommend employers have a clear policy in place on supporting employees experiencing domestic abuse, but also an effective framework of support. Most importantly, though, employees need to be made aware of the policy and how to access support if they need it. We propose what such a framework of employer support could look like, comprising four steps. Within each step we detail points to consider and suggest supportive actions:

- Recognise the problem.
- Respond appropriately to disclosure.
- Provide support.
- Refer to the appropriate help.

It's essential to note that with the changing nature of work as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions, more people are working from home, meaning escape routes or time apart from an abuser may be dramatically curtailed. Employers need to think about how support can be maintained as we all work in different ways. An empathetic, non-judgemental approach and flexibility (for example in working hours or concerning work tasks) are two key areas employers should focus on.

It's not for employers to 'solve' the problem, but to enable their employees to access professional support, whether that be legal advice, financial advice, housing support, counselling or arranging childcare. Someone's circumstances can change very quickly, with their whole life turned upside down – having a supportive employer can make an

unparalleled difference to them and their family. At the end of this guidance we provide a list of supportive services, charities and organisations to signpost people to.

Some large, forward-thinking organisations are providing paid leave for those experiencing domestic abuse to enable them to get the help they need. We support the call from [UN Women](#) for more employers to offer paid leave, in addition to the comprehensive framework of support we have outlined, if a person is struggling to do their work or needs to access essential services *'to seek protection, attend court or police appointments, attend counselling or other specialized services'*. We also call on policy-makers to support this call to employers.

We outline our key recommendations for employers below, which we expand on within the guide:

### Ten key recommendations

- Develop a domestic abuse policy and create an effective framework around domestic abuse support.
- Where an organisation has a recognised trade union, policies should be reviewed and agreed with union representatives.
- Employers have a duty of care for the health, safety and wellbeing of their staff and are in a strong position to create a safe and supportive workplace environment.
- Think about the safety/security measures that may be required.
- Treat everyone as an individual as everyone's situation will be different. It's important not to make assumptions about what someone is experiencing or what they need, or the gender of the perpetrator.
- Create open work cultures that help to break the silence around this important issue and ensure people know that the organisation will support people experiencing domestic abuse to seek help.
- Offer flexibility to enable people to attend counselling, legal and finance appointments, get support from professional organisations and make arrangements, for example concerning childcare and housing.
- Outline people's different roles and responsibilities when it comes to supporting employees experiencing domestic abuse. For example:
  - **HR** should take central responsibility for developing a policy and procedures on domestic abuse and facilitating awareness-raising training.
  - **Line managers** should receive appropriate training on how to effectively support someone experiencing domestic abuse. They need to be clear on the practical steps outlined in this guidance to encourage and appropriately respond to the disclosure of abuse and signpost people to professional support. They also have an obligation to prioritise confidentiality wherever possible.
  - Supportive and empathetic **employees** and **co-workers** can assist an affected colleague in gaining confidence to seek support.
- Make it clear that abusive behaviour is the responsibility of the perpetrator and misconduct inside and outside of work is viewed seriously – and can lead to disciplinary action.
- Signpost to supportive services, charities and organisations and outline the types of support that someone might need, such as: legal support, housing support, support with childcare, support in dealing with financial abuse, specialist counselling.

**Dr Jill Miller and Claire McCartney**  
**Senior Policy Advisers, Diversity and Inclusion, CIPD**

## 2 Foreword from the EHRC

The COVID-19 pandemic has reminded us that we all depend on each other. It should also remind us of just how important it is to place equality and human rights at the heart of British society so that we ensure people are supported and lives protected during times like these.

The pandemic-led increase in homeworking has further blurred the lines between domestic and working lives and shown that employers can no longer ignore the issue of domestic abuse. During lockdown, as more people work from home, abuse has sadly increased because abusers have more opportunities to exert power and control. This has also made it more difficult for people to seek help.

Over 2 million people experienced domestic abuse in the last year alone, the majority of them women (although men can and do also experience domestic abuse). This means that the chances are someone in your workplace is currently experiencing, or will one day experience it. Domestic abuse affects people working in a range of different settings, whether that be a shop, an office or working remotely. As an employer, you have a legal responsibility under health and safety legislation to protect your staff, but this is the legal minimum. We hope that this guidance supports you in identifying ways that enable you to go above and beyond to be a best practice employer, creating an inclusive workplace, where staff feel safe and supported. That's why, alongside the CIPD, we also support the call from UN Women for more employers to offer paid leave to employees who are survivors of domestic abuse. Having an effective domestic abuse prevention policy can also help to increase productivity and staff retention by providing a supportive work environment and building trust and confidence amongst your workforce.

We hope that this practical guide helps you navigate personal conversations and take steps to ensure your staff experiencing domestic abuse feel supported and able to ask for help, both during the pandemic, and in the longer term. Action is needed now: if you're waiting for something to happen, you've waited too long already.

**Caroline Waters, OBE**  
**Interim Chair, EHRC**

### 3 Introduction: why act now on domestic abuse?

- Women are most likely to experience domestic abuse, but men also experience it and domestic abuse also occurs in same-sex relationships.
- Domestic abuse is not limited to physical violence. It can include repeated patterns of abusive behaviour to maintain power and control in a relationship, including economic/financial abuse.
- The Government is introducing a Domestic Abuse Bill to create a more effective approach to tackling domestic abuse and protecting those experiencing abuse. It has also launched an awareness campaign as well as a review of employment rights for survivors of domestic abuse.
- The Welsh Government introduced the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act in 2015 and launched an additional awareness campaign in May 2020.
- COVID-19 has led to incidences of domestic abuse increasing and escape routes for some being cut off.
- We need to build a society that has zero tolerance for domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse is cruel and complex and can affect anyone, leaving physical and emotional scars that can last a lifetime. Domestic abuse associated crimes remain one of the most prevalent crimes in England and Wales. An estimated 2.4 million adults aged 16 to 74 experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2019, two-thirds of whom were women.<sup>2</sup> In Scotland in 2018/19, there were 60,641 total incidents of domestic abuse reported to the police. Roughly, where sex was recorded, in four out of every five incidents of domestic abuse in 2018/19, the victim was a woman and the accused was a man. However, 16% of incidents involved a male victim and a female accused.

Men are much more likely to be perpetrators,<sup>3</sup> and the majority of domestic homicide victims are most often women, killed by men.<sup>4</sup> However, men also experience domestic abuse and domestic abuse also occurs in same-sex relationships. Disabled women are almost twice as likely as non-disabled women to be affected by domestic abuse, and some ethnic minority groups are also more at risk.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, evidence suggests that transgender people may be at particularly high risk of domestic abuse.<sup>6</sup>

All employees who experience abuse should be supported, regardless of sex and the type of abuse. It's important not to make assumptions about what someone might be experiencing or the sex of the perpetrator.

Domestic abuse is often a pattern of abusive behaviour/incidents that goes on for a number of years. It is also not limited to physical violence. Domestic abuse can include repeated patterns of abusive behaviour to maintain power and control in a relationship, known as coercive control. The UK Government currently uses a non-statutory definition of domestic violence and abuse which recognises this and defines domestic abuse as:

*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. It can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse: psychological; physical; sexual; financial; emotional.*

It is worth noting that this definition currently varies – for example, the Scottish Government’s definition is limited to partners or ex-partners, but is not limited to people aged 16 or over.<sup>7</sup>

### Scotland and Wales

The governments in Scotland and Wales have already legislated on domestic abuse. [The Domestic Abuse \(Scotland\) Act 2018](#) came into effect on 1 April 2019, and the Scottish Government includes domestic abuse within its [Equally Safe strategy](#). In Wales, the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 came into force in 2015 and the Welsh Government produced a National Strategy from 2016 to 2021. Since then, there have been annual National Advisers’ Annual Plans and Reports, a Cross Government Delivery Framework and National Indicators in Wales.

### Domestic abuse and COVID-19

One of a number of health and wellbeing concerns relating to the impact of COVID-19 is that incidences of domestic abuse are increasing and that escape routes could be cut off and people may feel isolated from their support network.

Women’s Aid states:

*Covid-19 does not cause domestic abuse, only abusers are responsible for their actions. The pandemic does, however, threaten to escalate abuse and close down routes to safety for women to escape.*

*Survivors contacting Women’s Aid’s direct services have reported escalating abuse and having to live in lockdown with an abuser due to Covid-19. Women in lockdown with their abuser will be less able to get breathing space. It will be harder to text or phone to get support from friends and family, and from specialist support services. Child survivors will no longer have the respite of school or nursery, which can often be a safe space to access support.*

The National Domestic Abuse helpline, run by the charity Refuge, reported a concerning increase in calls and online requests for help since the 2020 lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. And according to new data published by the [UN Population Fund](#) (UNFPA), ‘For every 3 months the lockdown continues, an additional 15 million cases of gender-based violence are expected.’

[Scottish Women’s Aid](#) also recognises that lockdown likely made it more difficult for women to seek support while they spend extended periods of time at home with their abuser. [Usage data](#) on Welsh Women’s Aid’s Live Fear Free Helpline, which is funded by the Welsh Government, revealed a decrease in calls at the beginning of lockdown; however, by the end of March and into April, the charity saw a 49% increase in contact with the helpline. Furthermore, a [Welsh Government press release](#) on 30 June 2020 reported that:

*There is a definite link between life pressures – for example economic hardship, fears about employment, and the frustration arising from current lockdown restrictions – and abuse, though there is never an excuse. During lockdown, calls to domestic abuse helplines have changed significantly, becoming more complex, and more lengthy (now nearly twice the 3.18-minute pre-COVID-19 average). Services are beginning to hear from victims who tell them that once lockdown is over they intend to leave their abusers.*



Refuge's chief executive stated that:

*Self-isolation has the potential to aggravate pre-existing abusive behaviours by perpetrators. While in lockdown or self-isolation, women and children are likely to be spending concentrated periods of time with perpetrators, potentially escalating the threat of domestic abuse and further restricting their freedom.*

*Domestic abuse isn't always physical – it's a pattern of controlling, threatening and coercive behaviour, which can also be emotional, economic, psychological or sexual. Abuse is a choice a perpetrator makes, and isolation is already used by many perpetrators as a tool of control.*

The Home Office has created a domestic abuse campaign, #YouAreNotAlone, to raise awareness that if anyone is at risk of, or experiencing, domestic abuse, they are still able to leave and seek support. This campaign is to support people through and coming out of the pandemic and to reassure people that support services remain available during this difficult time.

The Scottish Government has published guidance on COVID-19 and domestic abuse. The Welsh Government launched the 'Home shouldn't be a place of fear' campaign with Welsh Women's Aid on 7 May 2020 and an online e-learning course to help people recognise the signs of domestic abuse and understand how they can help, as well as producing guidance.

Domestic abuse charities predicted an increase in people seeking safety as lockdown eased.<sup>8</sup> A report by UN Women says, 'Being confined and isolated during a lockdown, along with added stresses, tension and financial insecurity, may exacerbate existing abuse and control or it may occur for the first time.'

And in a similar vein, Equally Safe at Work, a programme to support local government in Scotland to support its staff, says:

*Significant changes to workplaces and working lives are creating further challenges for victim-survivors. Therefore, employers still have a key role in supporting women affected by VAW [violence against women] during the COVID-19 lockdown and recovery period. Employers and line managers may be the only consistent contact for victim-survivors during this time.*

Therefore, it follows that the new ways of working and economic climate we face post-pandemic, such as increased homeworking and threat of redundancies, may also have the potential to exacerbate domestic abuse. It's essential that employers have support in place for their staff.

The UN Women report explains:

*The COVID-19 pandemic adds greater health and safety risks for an employee working from home during a lockdown. These are relevant issues for the immediate future as lockdowns are lifted and in the longer-term where remote working is likely to be a more common feature of the future world of work. Keeping women safely in their employment, including when working remotely, with the possibility of financial independence, is critical to enabling women to survive domestic violence.*

### **The Domestic Abuse Bill**

The Government is introducing the Domestic Abuse Bill and a wider programme of work, with the key purpose of the prevention of abuse and the protection of survivors. The bill is currently undergoing scrutiny in Parliament and, if passed, will introduce measures such

as a new all-purpose statutory definition of domestic abuse that will include economic abuse and the establishment of a Domestic Abuse Commissioner to champion victims and survivors.

In June 2020 the Government also announced a [review](#) into the employment rights of people experiencing domestic abuse to look at what more can be done to help them in the workplace. The review will look at issues such as the availability of flexible working and unplanned leave, and how employers can help prevent economic abuse of their employees.

This guide will support any new legislation by providing practical guidance for employers, and managers in particular, about how they can support staff within the workplace who are experiencing domestic abuse.

### **Building a society that has zero tolerance towards domestic abuse**

Far too many people have their lives destroyed by abuse. As the [Government](#) outlines, we need to build a society that has zero tolerance towards domestic abuse and actively empowers survivors, communities and professionals to confront and challenge it and to provide survivors with the support they deserve.

We hope through this guidance we can support the drive to build a society that has zero tolerance towards domestic abuse.

As we outline in the next section, domestic abuse can affect the workplace. Employers are in a strong position to create a safe and supportive workplace culture by following good practice, for example, by raising awareness of domestic abuse, having a policy on the issue, providing guidance for managers and employees, and signposting employees to sources of support.

## **4 Why is domestic abuse a workplace issue?**

- Domestic abuse has an impact at work.
- Research shows that 75% of those enduring domestic abuse are targeted at work.
- Domestic abuse can negatively affect those abused as well as workplace colleagues around them.
- Employers are in a strong position to create a safe and supportive workplace culture.

### **Domestic abuse has an impact at work**

Research finds that 75% of those enduring domestic abuse are targeted at work.<sup>9</sup> This abuse can range from harassing phone calls to abusive partners arriving at the office unannounced and physical assaults, for example.

[Research by the TUC](#) has highlighted that of those who had experienced domestic abuse, over 40% were prevented from getting to work by their abuser, most commonly through physical violence or restraint (72%) followed by threats (68%).

Domestic abuse can negatively affect those being abused while they are at work, as well as workplace colleagues around them. For example:

- An employee can experience domestic abuse while they are at work through threatening phone calls and emails.
- An employee may experience abuse when travelling to and from work.
- Domestic abuse can affect an employee's performance, attendance, career prospects and job security.
- Colleagues can experience threatening or intimidating behaviour from the perpetrator.

However, importantly, the workplace can also be one of the few places that a person experiencing abuse can be separate from their abuser. Therefore, it can be the place where someone can ask for support and access information.

## **Employers are in a strong position to create a safe and supportive workplace culture**

### **A duty of care**

Employers have a duty of care for the health, safety and wellbeing of their staff and are in a strong position to create a safe and supportive workplace environment.

Further, the recent [UN Women guidance](#) on domestic abuse in light of the COVID-19 pandemic recommends that an example of a good practice workplace policy on domestic abuse would include a domestic abuse workplace risk assessment and safety planning as an integral part of occupational safety and health within organisations. If an organisation does not have in-house specialist knowledge on domestic abuse and the appropriate safety planning, it would be a good idea to enlist the help of domestic abuse services/professionals to carry out any such risk assessment.

If domestic abuse is disclosed, where possible, working environments should provide flexible and adaptable measures that meet the needs of people experiencing domestic abuse. This may include considerations on personal safety, working hours, enhanced needs in respect of confidentiality (for example when an individual identifies as LGBT+) and appropriateness of response and support services in terms of, for example, sex, ethnic background, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation and language.

It is important to note each person's needs are different and that any measures should only be used with the authorisation/consent of the individual concerned.

Employers should in particular take reasonable steps to prevent an employee from being targeted by their abuser at work. While there is no specific legislative protection against abuse or harassment by third parties under the Equality Act 2010, employers who do not take reasonable steps to prevent or respond to third party harassment could potentially be held liable in other ways, depending on the circumstances – for example, for direct or indirect discrimination under the Equality Act 2010 or for constructive dismissal under the Employment Rights Act 1996. Detailed guidance on when employers may find themselves liable in relation to abuse or harassment of employees by third parties at work can be found at paragraphs 4.34–4.51 of the EHRC's technical guidance: [Sexual Harassment and Harassment at Work](#).

### **Good people management**

Being a good employer includes supporting staff through new or difficult periods in their lives. People experiencing domestic abuse can be subject to disciplinary action or performance management and lose their jobs because their behaviour, such as being late

for work or underperformance, is misinterpreted. However, a steady income is often key to a survivor's economic independence and their opportunities to escape from an abusive relationship. Employees may feel unable to raise domestic abuse in a formal disciplinary or performance hearing. So, it is important that managers know how to spot the signs of domestic abuse and that employees are given a full opportunity in an appropriate setting to raise any underlying issues that may be causing their behaviour or underperformance.

Just as all people management approaches should be inclusive, it's important to look at your domestic abuse policy and the support you provide with an inclusion lens. There may be additional barriers to disclosure, unique to certain communities (such as race, disability, [LGBT+](#)), which may make it harder for people to feel comfortable coming forward to talk about domestic abuse. If organisations build open cultures that are supportive of diversity and inclusion, this will help people to have the confidence to disclose personal information around domestic abuse to their organisation and managers. It also means that they will be more confident asking for support, they know the issue will be treated seriously and they will be treated in a supportive and fair way.

People manager and HR roles are very important here. This guide will help to increase your awareness and knowledge on the issue and outline how to respond as well as steps you can consider taking to support staff. However, it's important to remember that every individual case will be different and an individual's needs will also differ.

It is important to also be clear on the role and responsibilities of both HR and people managers and set boundaries. For example, managers should not adopt the role of counsellor, but instead should signpost employees to specialist help.

### **Effective frameworks around domestic abuse support**

We recommend that organisations have a domestic abuse policy in place, develop an effective framework around domestic abuse support and create open cultures that help to break the silence around this important issue. Where an organisation has a recognised trade union, policies should be reviewed and agreed with union representatives.

Having a domestic abuse workplace framework or policy and widely communicating it, as well as what support is available, can clearly demonstrate domestic abuse is not tolerated within or outside the workplace. It also shows a commitment to provide support for staff and take action against perpetrators (see the section on 'A commitment to challenge employees who perpetrate domestic abuse' on [page 17](#)).

The next section of this guide outlines what a framework of support may look like.

## 5 Developing an effective framework around domestic abuse support

- An effective framework of support should have four key steps:
  - Recognise the problem.
  - Respond appropriately to disclosure.
  - Provide support.
  - Refer to the appropriate help.
- Note that some measures should only be used with the authorisation of the individual concerned.
- All support options should be survivor-oriented, and the person's wishes, safety and wellbeing should take priority in all matters and procedures.

Having a domestic abuse workplace policy is a good first step, setting out the organisation's position on domestic abuse and letting employees experiencing abuse know they will be supported and that their safety is of concern to their employer.

Here we suggest a framework of support consisting of four key steps:

- Recognise the problem.
- Respond appropriately to disclosure.
- Provide support.
- Refer to the appropriate help.

Under each step of the framework we propose some actions businesses can take to manage domestic abuse in the workplace, with benefits for both employees and businesses.

In many cases the support needed is about being aware, offering flexibility and signposting to the organisations that provide specialist support. Large budgets aren't required, so even with limited resources there are steps that small business owners can take to address the effects of domestic abuse in the workplace.

### Recognise the problem

- Look for sudden changes in behaviour and/or changes in the quality of work performance for unexplained reasons despite a previously strong record.
- Look for changes in the way an employee dresses, for example excessive clothing on hot days, changes in the amount of make-up worn. This is obviously not as easy to do with remote working, which may have increased during COVID-19 and continue to be implemented going forward, but could be picked up in video meetings.
- Domestic abuse is often a hidden problem and individuals can find it very difficult to disclose. Some employees might not think they are experiencing domestic abuse and might not use these words to describe their experiences. However, they might talk about behaviour from their partner that is violent, abusive or coercively controlling. Ask open and empathetic questions, such as:

- How are you doing at the moment?
- How are things at home?
- Are there any issues you'd like to discuss with me?
- I have noticed recently that you are not yourself. Is anything the matter?
- In some cases employees may make a disclosure to their union representative – make sure that your organisation has a set process for involving unions, where relevant, in the development of their domestic abuse policies and how to support employees if they disclose to a union representative.
- Treat everyone as an individual as everyone's situation will be different. It's important not to make assumptions about what someone is experiencing or what they need. Domestic abuse can happen to anyone, and although more women are affected, it can happen to men and in same-sex relationships.
- Be really careful when raising things with people working from home, as the abuser might be monitoring the employee's email or other methods of communication. Even asking open questions in an email, or in a call when it's not known who else is listening, might ring alarm bells with the abuser and cause more abuse.

### **Respond appropriately to disclosure**

- Show empathy and compassion when responding to an employee's disclosure of experiencing domestic abuse. Think about how you might best be able to do this if you can't be physically together and how you might continue to show that support when you aren't sharing a workspace.
- Believe an employee if they disclose experiencing domestic abuse – do not ask for proof.
- Don't make assumptions about what someone is experiencing or what they need. This includes not assuming the gender of someone's partner.
- Reassure the employee that the organisation understands how domestic abuse may affect their work performance and outline the support that can be offered.
- If the survivor and perpetrator work in the same business, the perpetrator could have access to personal information, depending on their role. So, in this circumstance, it's good practice to immediately make personal records case-sensitive and set a request for permission to access records associated with the survivor.

### **Provide support**

- Make sure that line managers are checking in frequently with employees so that they can raise any concerns or worries, offer support such as flexibility, and signpost them to professional support. This is even more important for remote workers, and those who are continuing to work from home following COVID-19, who are likely to feel more isolated and potentially vulnerable.
- Line managers should ask the individual about what support they need and regularly check in with that question, as the support they need may change over time as the individual's circumstances change. Let the individual take the lead in what they want to talk about and what they think the problem is.
- Ask the individual about the best way to keep in contact with them, for example which communication methods are private and which they have easy access to.
- Offer flexibility in working hours to enable an employee to sort out financial, housing, legal and childcare issues. The flexibility required may differ in the short and longer term.
- Offer paid leave (up to ten days per year is offered by some forward-thinking companies) in addition to other leave entitlements.
- Divert phone calls and email messages and look to change a phone extension if an employee is receiving harassing calls.
- Look at how non-employees access the building to ensure people can't just walk in.

- Agree with the employee what to tell colleagues and how they should respond if their ex/partner telephones or visits the workplace or is present during a virtual meeting.
- Ensure the employee does not work alone or in an isolated area and check that staff have arrangements for getting safely to and from home.
- Support an individual's request to get advice on where and how to obtain a protection/barring order that covers the workplace.
- Think about specific areas of the work environment where the survivor's physical safety may be at risk, for example the workplace car park.
- With the consent of the employee, you could agree code words, or hand signals in video calls, so if they don't come into the office, or if they are in a threatening situation while working at home, there are set phrases both parties can say to enable them to flag if they are in danger. Also agree what action a signal requires, for example if to call the police, or if to provide information about available support.
- Keep a record of any incidents of abuse in the workplace, including persistent telephone calls, emails or visits to the workplace or any concerns that the employee reports, as well as anything that occurs around the workplace, such as during travel to and from work or to meetings not held in the usual place of work. Also record the support offered.
- Share domestic abuse helpline posters in physical and virtual spaces (such as on the back of toilet doors, your intranet, and so on). Refuge poster resources are listed in the further sources of information in section 7 of this guide.
- Consider if there are ways that you can offer financial support, such as providing interest-free loans to cover immediate financial costs, like deposits for new housing. Also think about providing emergency financial support to help someone facing an immediate crisis, such as through a salary advance.
- Give employees you know are experiencing domestic abuse at home first refusal to return to the work environment when it is safe to do so.
- Employees experiencing domestic abuse may need to leave their area of usual work in order to escape the perpetrator, and/or to receive additional support. In these cases, managers should work with the employee and senior staff to find ways for the survivor to keep their role, or move to a comparable one. This may involve working in a different office, from home, and so on.

It's important to note that some of these measures should only be used with the authorisation of the individual concerned. All support options should be survivor-oriented, and the person's wishes, safety and wellbeing should take priority in all matters and procedures.

### **Refer to the appropriate help**

- It is important to be clear on the role and responsibilities of both HR and people managers and set boundaries. For example, managers should not adopt the role of counsellor, but rather they should signpost employees to specialist help.
- Have a list of the support services offered in your area that is easily accessible and refer employees to appropriate organisations that deal with domestic abuse. Some of these organisations that offer support and resources are listed in section 7.
- HR and line managers may want to research local sources of support themselves to gain a better understanding of what is available.
- Those supporting domestic abuse survivors may need some support themselves. Many of the specialist organisations listed at the end of this report also provide advice and guidance for these key support staff.

## 6 The role of HR, people managers and employees

- Outline people's different roles and responsibilities when it comes to supporting employees experiencing domestic abuse.
- **HR** should take central responsibility for developing a policy and procedures on domestic abuse and facilitating awareness-raising training.
- **Line managers** should be clear on the practical steps outlined in this guidance to encourage the disclosure and discussion of abuse and identify appropriate support that individuals might need. They also have an obligation to prioritise confidentiality wherever possible.
- **Managers** should not try to solve people's problems or act as counsellors, as they are not trained professionals in this area.
- Supportive and empathetic **employees** and **co-workers** can assist an affected colleague in gaining confidence to tackle and report the problems that they might experience.
- Employers should make clear that abusive behaviour is the responsibility of the **perpetrator** and misconduct inside and outside of work is viewed seriously – and can lead to disciplinary action.

### Outline different roles and responsibilities

It's important to outline people's different roles and responsibilities in relation to supporting employees experiencing domestic abuse. This will mean that everyone is clear on how they can provide support.

#### HR

HR should take central responsibility for developing a policy and procedures on domestic abuse.

The HR team should also review and update other policies, procedures and practices that are linked and could affect the implementation of a domestic abuse policy, for example a diversity and inclusion policy (which should help support people to disclose any domestic abuse issues, no matter their background, identity or circumstance) and a flexible working policy (which could be used to make adjustments to work patterns, where helpful).

HR should also seek to provide ad hoc advice about supporting people experiencing domestic abuse to line managers and employees, as necessary.

HR should also introduce training, wherever possible, to raise awareness of the issues relating to domestic abuse and highlight the support the organisation offers. Training can give HR and managers an appreciation of how disruptive it can be to come out of an abusive relationship, often leaving with nothing, leaving the local area, their routine, support networks and the person may be taking children with them too.

HR may want to complement formal training with a 'lunch and learn' style awareness session for staff to inform people about the issue in general as well as the organisation's approach and the support available. It's also important to regularly remind staff of the domestic abuse policy.



## People managers

People managers should be familiar with the organisation's policy and guidance on supporting employees experiencing domestic abuse and understand their own and the organisation's responsibilities in relation to it.

They should also be clear on the practical steps outlined in this guidance to encourage the disclosure and discussion of abuse and identify appropriate support that individuals might need. But there should also be a point of contact in HR for advice and guidance when required.

Managers can also assist in recording details of incidents in the workplace. In addition, they need to ensure that all employees are aware of the organisation's approach.

As mentioned in section 5, domestic abuse is often a hidden problem and individuals can find it very difficult to disclose. Individuals may also not recognise they are in an abusive relationship, especially if the abuse is not physical. Managers should ask open and empathetic questions to give people the opportunity to disclose, such as:

- How are you doing at the moment?
- Are there any issues you'd like to discuss with me?
- I have noticed recently that you are not yourself. Is anything the matter?

Tips on how to ask difficult and sensitive questions are included below.

### Tips on asking difficult and sensitive questions

If a manager suspects that an employee is experiencing domestic abuse, they should facilitate a conversation to be able to discuss this and identify and implement appropriate support. Shying away from the subject can perpetuate fear of stigma and increase feelings of anxiety:

- Often employees will not feel confident in speaking up, so a manager making the first move to begin a conversation can be key.
- Managers should ask the employee indirect questions, to help establish a relationship with the employee and develop empathy.

Here are some examples of questions that could be used:

- How are you doing at the moment? Are there any issues you would like to discuss with me?
- I have noticed recently that you are not yourself. Is anything the matter?
- Are there any problems or reasons that may be contributing to your frequent sickness absence/underperformance at work?
- Is everything alright at home?
- What support do you think might help? What would you like to happen? How?
- Avoid victim-blaming. It is important that managers are able to provide a non-judgemental and supportive environment.
- Respecting the employee's boundaries and privacy is essential.
- Respect an employee's decisions about their relationship and understand that a victim of domestic abuse may make a number of attempts to leave their partner before they are finally able to do so. It's important that managers are aware of the effects of coercive control.
- Your role as a manager is not to deal with the abuse itself but to address the workplace effects of domestic abuse by making it clear to employees that they will be supported, making them aware of the workplace policy, outlining what help is available, and signposting them to professional sources of support.

**Refuge's national Domestic Abuse Helpline as well as other national and subject-specific sources can provide further information and advice on discussing domestic abuse with employees (see further sources of information in section 7 of this guide).**

Managers should endeavour to support those experiencing domestic abuse in a sympathetic, non-judgemental and confident manner. They have a key role in signposting affected employees to both internal support and sources of external support. Managers might also want to look up local services themselves, so they understand what they do. However, it is important to be clear that their role is not to solve people's problems, as they are unlikely to be trained professionals in this area.

Where possible, the employer should respect the wishes of the employee if they want the information to remain confidential. Managers are responsible for ensuring information is not disclosed to colleagues and that all employees are aware of their responsibilities in relation to confidentiality. This is particularly important for members of the LGBT+ community, where individuals might not have disclosed their sexual orientation and/or gender identity to their work colleagues.

If information is disclosed against the wishes of the employee, this could compound any harm caused by the abuse and have a detrimental effect on future disclosures from any other staff members.

However, confidentiality is a complex matter and there may be circumstances in which confidentiality cannot be assured but where the employer should take action because the risk of not taking action is so significant. These situations occur when there are concerns about children or vulnerable adults, or where the employer needs to act to protect the safety of employees. In circumstances where the employer has to breach confidentiality, it should seek specialist advice before doing so. If the employer decides to proceed in breaching confidentiality after having taken advice, the employer should discuss with the employee why it is doing so, and that it will seek the employee's agreement where possible. Ideally the employer will have a domestic abuse policy that should address confidentiality and when the employer may need to breach this.

Even without a policy in place, when assessing the relative risk of the options, the employer should ask:

- Have they considered and exhausted all other possible options?
- What will the impact be of overriding the employee's wishes on them?
- What are the potential risks to the employee, their colleagues and others such as the employee's children if the employer does not take further action?
- What are the potential risks in the workplace that may affect colleagues?
- What is the likelihood of the matter being resolved without intervention by the employer?

Although not necessarily drafted with domestic abuse in mind, there is helpful guidance on how to generally deal with maintaining confidentiality and dealing with criminal conduct during investigations into complaints of harassment at paragraphs 5.47–5.56 of the EHRC's technical guidance: [Sexual Harassment and Harassment at Work](#).

### **Employees**

Organisations should support employees to take basic steps to assist friends and colleagues where employees feel able to do so. By behaving in a supportive and empathetic manner, an employee can assist an affected colleague in gaining confidence to tackle and report the problems that they might experience. See also Women's Aid's helpful advice around '[I'm worried about someone else](#)'.

Some organisations have introduced domestic abuse allies/champions in their workplaces. They are colleagues who have been specially trained in dealing with disclosures of

domestic abuse and will be able to offer confidential support to those experiencing domestic abuse. They will support an individual to speak with their line manager or HR team, either on their behalf or attending meetings with the individual. They will also signpost the individual to specialist agencies. However, as with line managers and HR, they are not trained specialists or counsellors and should not assume those roles or try to solve the individual's problems.

### **A commitment to challenge employees who perpetrate domestic abuse**

Organisations should communicate a zero-tolerance policy in relation to domestic abuse which includes this commitment. This commitment recognises that abusive behaviour is the responsibility of the perpetrator. Employees should be aware that misconduct inside and outside of work is viewed extremely seriously – and can lead to disciplinary action being taken and potential dismissals.

As regards misconduct outside work, it may be possible for disciplinary action to be taken in response to this, up to and including dismissal. However, in most cases, and to ensure that any dismissal is found to be fair, it will still be necessary for an employer to carry out an investigation of the facts and hold a disciplinary hearing. Ideally employers will have a domestic abuse policy which works in conjunction with the disciplinary and dismissal policy and makes clear the circumstances in which misconduct may lead to disciplinary action being taken against the employee. This will help avoid allegations that they have treated the employee unfairly.

The key points that should be considered are whether the employee's misconduct was linked to work in any way, or if conduct outside work has destroyed the employer's trust in the employee to perform their role. Some abuse may undermine the employee's suitability to perform their role, has rendered the employee unable to perform their role (for example due to a custodial sentence), or it has brought the employer into disrepute.

In summary, even if an employee is convicted for criminal conduct, this does not automatically mean that the employee can be dismissed for gross misconduct. Employers should review the employee's contract and relevant policies. All of these should make it clear that gross misconduct includes committing a criminal offence; it will then be easier for the employer to instigate disciplinary proceedings. If criminal conduct is not deemed gross misconduct, it will be more difficult for an employer to justify disciplinary action.

Although employers should still act, they need to consider the perpetrator's possible response that any conduct is not relevant to the employee's work and there must be a fair procedure that gives the employee an opportunity to explain their case. The domestic abuse policy must link to other workplace policies and needs to cover a wide range of matters; even employer's equipment could be used for online abuse or stalking an ex-partner during working time, so employers need to protect themselves from accusations of potential vicarious liability as far as possible.

It is important to note, though, that the Acas Code of Practice states that being charged with or convicted of a criminal offence is not normally in itself a reason for disciplinary action. Consideration will need to be given as to what effect the charge or conviction has had on the employment relationship, as set out above.

In some situations, the abuser and the survivor may work together and work-related abuse may occur, including verbal abuse and threats, as well as any form of physical violence. Employers have a responsibility to all employees to make sure that they are reasonably safe at work and that work premises are safe. If an employer knows that a fellow

employee regularly threatens another (whether they are in a relationship or not) and does not take action to prevent the abuse, this would constitute a breach of contract and may result in many potential claims, including a constructive unfair dismissal or even a personal injury claim.

Employees need to be aware that domestic abuse is a serious matter that can lead to disciplinary action. However, employers have a duty of care to all employees, and alleged perpetrators of domestic abuse should be dealt with in a fair way. As with other criminal offences, the perpetrator may be protected from having their conviction disclosed. It may also be appropriate to support an employee who is seeking help to address their behaviour. [Respect](#) provides confidential and honest advice to help perpetrators stop being violent.

### Legal duties

There are many legal duties that must be taken into account surrounding an employee who has perpetrated domestic abuse as well as the survivors of it. In addition, some aspects of the law affecting employees convicted of domestic abuse offences and provisions protecting the survivors are currently changing.

It is also worth considering that in some industries, the behaviour of a domestic abuse perpetrator might need to be reported to a regulator. For example, special rules apply in financial services and serious violent and sexual offences should be disclosed to the Financial Conduct Authority. In other cases, where the individual is a regulated professional, for example a health or social care worker, their behaviour is a potential risk to patients and/or a breach of their code of conduct. There might also be a higher obligation to disclose information to the employer or the regulator if the employee is charged or convicted for an offence. Employers also need to be aware of strict data protection requirements when processing sensitive personal data. The legal provisions are complex and employers can contact the DBS or take specialist advice elsewhere.

### Supporting the wellbeing of employees involved in supporting domestic abuse survivors

It's also important to think about how organisations can support the wellbeing of all employees (whether HR, people managers, or colleagues/friends) involved in supporting domestic abuse survivors. It's worth emphasising what specific support is available to them and what they can do to look after their own wellbeing during this period (such as accessing employee assistance programmes/occupational health services if organisations have them or making use of different external helplines, (such as the [Mind](#) Infoline).

## 7 Signposting to supportive services, charities and organisations

We include here a range of useful services, charities and organisations for employers to signpost to, including those offering general, specialist and regional support. Employees experiencing domestic abuse may need support with a range of issues, including but not limited to, legal support, housing support, support with childcare, support in dealing with financial abuse and specialist counselling.

### General

**National Domestic Abuse Helpline** (Freephone, 24 hour) – 0808 2000 247

The helpline is run by Refuge and a [live online chat](#) is also available.

### **Women's Aid**

Women's Aid is the national charity working to end domestic abuse against women and children. They provide local support services, training for organisations and [information if you are worried about someone else](#). They also have a [live chat](#) facility.

### **Rape Crisis**

They have a network of independent Rape Crisis centres that provide specialist support and services for victims and survivors of sexual violence. They have a **National Rape Crisis Helpline** – 0808 802 9999 and a [live chat](#).

### **Rights of Women**

Provides advice to women on family, criminal and immigration law issues. Different phone lines for family, criminal and immigration law issues are listed [here](#).

### **Specialist**

#### **Jewish Women's Aid**: 0800 591203

Jewish Women's Aid supports Jewish women and children affected by domestic abuse and sexual violence.

#### **Women with learning difficulties**: 020 8522 0675

#### **Southall Black Sisters**: 020 8571 9595

Advice and information on domestic abuse, racial harassment, welfare and immigration, primarily for Asian, African and African-Caribbean women.

#### **Muslim Women's Helpline**: 020 8904 8193 or 020 8908 6715

The Muslim Women's Helpline aims to provide any Muslim girl or woman in a crisis with a free, confidential listening service and referral to Islamic consultants, plus practical help and information where required.

#### **Asian Women's Resource Centre**: 020 8961 6549

The Asian Women's Resource Centre provides a domestic violence and advocacy service. They provide support to women in need in the following languages: Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Hinko, Konkani, Marathi, Pashto, Patwari, Punjabi, Urdu, Farsi, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Kurdish, Turkish and Azerbaijani. They also offer support services around housing, welfare benefits, debt (signposting) and employment, as well as running immigration surgeries for those in need of specialist immigration advice.

#### **IKWRO**: Women's rights organisation – 020 7920 6460 (Monday to Friday, 9.30–17.30)

Specialist advice and help to Middle Eastern and Afghan women and girls who are at risk of 'honour' based violence, forced marriage, child marriage, female genital mutilation and domestic violence.

#### **Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice on forced marriages**: 020 7008 0151

Information and practical guidelines for professionals on how to protect, advise and support victims of forced marriage. There is also [information](#) for people directly affected by forced marriage.

#### **Stay Safe East**: 020 8519 7241; SMS/Text: 07587 134 122

Stay Safe East is a user-led organisation run by disabled people, providing specialist and holistic advocacy and support services to disabled people from diverse communities in London who are victims/survivors of domestic or sexual violence, hate crime, harassment and other forms of abuse.

**Galop:** 0800 999 5428; live chat is also available

Galop, the LGBT+ anti-violence charity, provides hate crime, domestic abuse and sexual violence support services to lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans+ victims/survivors by telephone, email, text and WhatsApp.

### **Support for domestic abuse perpetrators and those supporting them**

**Respect phonenumber:** 0808 802 4040

An anonymous and confidential helpline for men and women who are harming their partners and families. Concerned friends or family members and front-line workers assisting abusers can also call for information and support.

### **Domestic abuse against men**

**ManKind Initiative:** 01823 334 244

A national charity that provides help and support for male survivors of domestic abuse and domestic violence.

**Respect Men's Advice Line:** 0808 801 0327; a webchat is available at certain times

The Men's Advice Line is a confidential helpline for male victims of domestic abuse and those supporting them.

**The Dyn Project:** 0808 801 0321 or email [support@dynwales.org](mailto:support@dynwales.org)

The Safer Wales Dyn Project provides support to heterosexual, gay, bisexual and trans men across Wales who are experiencing domestic abuse from a partner.

### **Other numbers**

**Samaritans:** 116 123 or email [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org) (response time 24 hours)

### **Scotland**

**Scottish Women's Aid:** 24-hour domestic abuse and forced marriage helpline – 0800 027 1234; online chat available

**Shakti Women's Aid:** 0131 475 2399

Shakti Women's Aid helps BME women, children and young people experiencing, or who have experienced, domestic abuse from a partner, ex-partner, and/or other members of the household. Staff speak many different languages, and if they don't speak your language they will arrange an interpreter.

### **Wales**

**Welsh Women's Aid:** 0808 80 10 800 (24/7)

For women who have experienced domestic abuse, sexual violence and/or violence, or if you are worried about a friend or relative who is experiencing any form of violence or abuse.

**BAWSO:** 0800 7318 147 (24-hour)

Information, advice and support for black and minority ethnic people in Wales on domestic abuse, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, human trafficking, honour-based violence and modern slavery.

### **Republic of Ireland**

**Women's Aid:** 1800 341900 (24/7)

Providing free and confidential support to women experiencing domestic violence, family and friends and professionals supporting victims of abuse. They have a telephone interpretation service facility covering 170 languages for callers needing interpreting services.

## Northern Ireland

**Women's Aid:** 0808 802 1414

Women's Aid is the lead voluntary organisation in Northern Ireland addressing domestic and sexual violence and providing services for women and children. The 24-hour helpline is open to both women and men affected by domestic and sexual violence.

## 8 Further resources and guidance for employers

**Business in the Community**, in association with Public Health England, have produced a [toolkit](#) for employers to help them make a commitment to respond to the risk of domestic abuse and build an approach that ensures all employees feel supported and empowered by their workplace to deal with domestic abuse.

**Business Fights Poverty action toolkit on ending gender-based violence:** This [Business and COVID-19 Response Centre](#) is designed to accelerate global learning and local action to support the most vulnerable in companies' value chains, communities and beyond. These resources have been developed by Business Fights Poverty in partnership with the Harvard Kennedy School Corporate Responsibility Initiative and other partners and are funded with UK aid from the UK Government and a core group of supporting companies.

**Think business, think equality** have developed [resources](#) for small and medium-sized businesses to help them support staff who are experiencing domestic abuse. The resources are produced by Close the Gap, a Scottish policy advocacy organisation focusing on women's labour market participation. The [guidance](#) outlines the impact of COVID-19 on women's experiences of domestic abuse, as well as setting out simple steps employers can take to respond to domestic abuse to ensure the safety and wellbeing of staff. There is also an [online self-assessment](#).

**Equally Safe at Work** is an innovative and world-leading accreditation programme that is being piloted in Scotland's local government. It supports councils to progress their work on gender equality at work and prevent violence at work, both in the workplace and in the wider community. [Guidance](#) for councils has been produced as part of this programme that outlines the impact of COVID-19 on women's experiences of violence at work, provides information on how to recognise signs of violence at work, and sets out best practice for responding to and supporting employees disclosing or reporting violence at work.

**The UK Government** has produced guidance on domestic abuse and getting help during the COVID-19 outbreak. This includes help around: recognising domestic abuse; reporting it; getting help if you, or someone you know, is a victim; economic abuse; technological abuse; and support for employers and professionals.

**UN Women** have produced a report looking at how private sector companies are supporting survivors of domestic violence during the COVID-19 crisis and provides recommendations on the immediate and long-term measures they can take to support their staff. You can download the report here: [The COVID-19 Shadow Pandemic: Domestic Violence in the World of Work – A Call to Action for the Private Sector](#).

**UN Women Handbook** aims to bring together the literature, policies and practices surrounding violence and harassment in the workplace, providing promising examples from countries across the globe. It articulates relevant international and regional frameworks,

provides guidance on the role of state and non-state actors and social dialogue, and includes practical information on how to prevent and respond to violence and harassment in workplaces.

**Galop, the LGBT+ anti-violence charity**, has produced a [factsheet](#) on domestic violence and abuse and the LGBT+ community. The factsheet offers advice on what constitutes domestic violence and abuse, and outlines some of the [unique aspects](#) of domestic abuse as experienced by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT+) people. Other [helpful factsheets](#) focus on barriers in access to services, and on myths and stereotypes.

**Vodafone's toolkit on domestic violence and abuse at work:** This [toolkit](#) was produced for the Vodafone Foundation by Dr Jane Pillinger, independent gender expert.

**The Council of Europe Istanbul Convention** is a human rights treaty to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence. It has been signed by all EU member states. At the time of writing it has been signed but not yet ratified by the UK, although the UK has expressed commitment to ratification.

**The TUC Domestic Abuse Toolkit:** The TUC have developed a [toolkit](#) on domestic abuse in response to the rise in domestic abuse cases and the rise in people working from home.

## 9 Appendix 1: Frequently asked questions

**Q: Why is domestic abuse a workplace issue? Isn't it something that is private to the individual, and if employers get involved, aren't we invading on right to private life?**

Domestic abuse can be a workplace issue. Experiencing domestic abuse can have a direct impact on someone's ability to participate and be well at work and can also have an impact on colleagues. Creating inclusive policies that support staff and make them feel safe is in the interest of all employers. Employers are in a strong position to create a safe and supportive workplace culture by raising awareness and through providing the right policies and guidance for managers and employees, as well as signposting sources of support. Employers also need to consider their duty of care, particularly to employees who are working remotely from home. It is helpful if employers articulate and communicate a zero-tolerance policy on domestic abuse that encourages and supports people to get the help they need.

**Q: Isn't domestic abuse a legal matter? Wouldn't we always report anything to the police?**

In some cases, an employee may seek to confide in a colleague or HR representative about domestic abuse that they are suffering, but ask that this be kept confidential and that no further action be taken. It's crucial that confidentiality is maintained wherever possible. Confidentiality is a complex matter and confidentiality from colleagues is different from confidentiality from appropriate authorities.

In the first instance, an employee should be encouraged to contact a specialised domestic abuse support service to address the issue directly or with support.

**Policy:** Employers are encouraged to implement a domestic abuse policy that should address confidentiality. The moral and legal duty to take care of employees' health and safety makes a policy advisable. Employers have policies on many different issues,



including harassment, violent behaviour and substance abuse; domestic abuse can be treated in the same way as these other issues because it has an impact on staff safety, work standards and the employer's reputation. At the very least, domestic abuse affects productivity, absenteeism and staff turnover.

**Confidentiality:** A domestic abuse policy will normally state that discussions will be held in confidence, especially from other employees, but that there are some scenarios in which confidentiality may have to be broken. This occurs where there are concerns about safeguarding children or vulnerable adults or where the employer needs to protect the safety of employees.

In cases where it has been deemed necessary to breach confidentiality, an employer should agree to take specialist advice first, discuss this with the employee and explain why it has come to that decision, and seek agreement with the employee where possible. The employee should be reassured that as far as possible, information will be shared on a need-to-know basis only.

**Q: What should I do if I think my employee is being abused, but they aren't disclosing to me, despite me exploring it sensitively with them?**

Employees may not feel secure, may not recognise they are in an abusive situation or may choose not to tell you about their abuse – that is their choice and their right and should be respected. They may choose not to disclose for a number of reasons, and these might also relate to the abuse they are suffering. Continue to provide sensitive opportunities for the individual to disclose to you, but don't put any pressure on them to do so. It might be worth exploring other options to allow space for disclosure, such as domestic abuse champions, who aren't related to the HR/line management relationship.

You should not make assumptions or act any differently towards the individual – aside from giving opportunities for support – because you suspect they are suffering from domestic abuse.

**Q: What is my duty of care once I have referred my employee who is being abused to a third party, such as a domestic abuse charity or an employee assistance programme? Should I follow up on that?**

Referring an employee to a domestic abuse charity or other professional support system is crucial, but an employer's duty of care will not end there. You should follow up with the employee on a regular basis to check in with them and, as appropriate, keep up to date on their situation and any additional support they may require.

**Q: What if I am unable to support a member of staff who is being abused because it is a topic that triggers me?**

You should still handle any disclosures with sensitivity and be careful not to make the employee feel like their disclosure is a bad thing or has done any damage, as this may exacerbate the issue and cause them to retreat from support.

You are not under any obligation to tell the member of staff that the topic is difficult for you, but you might want to consider how you sensitively get another member of management/ staff to support that staff member – for example by explaining that they are more experienced to support and seeking permission from the staff member to let them know.

Remember, your employer is also under a duty of care to support you if you have been affected by a disclosure, so talk to your line manager to see what can be put in place to help you.

**Q: What should I do if I think or know that my employee is a perpetrator of domestic abuse?**

If you suspect that an employee is a perpetrator of domestic abuse, for example due to indicators they may be using abusive behaviour, this should be raised in a safe and constructive way. An employer's duty of care extends to all employees, which includes potential perpetrators. You should discuss your zero-tolerance stance on domestic abuse and it may also be appropriate to notify the employee that such behaviour, whether it takes place inside or outside of the workplace, is treated very seriously and may result in disciplinary action being taken. You should also encourage the employee to seek support.

## 10 Appendix 2: Case study: Vodafone

### **Championing change around workplace domestic abuse support**

Vodafone is one of the world's leading mobile communications providers, operating in 26 countries and in partnership with networks in over 55 more. Across the world, they have almost 444 million customers and around 19.5 million in the UK. Vodafone made the first ever mobile phone call on 1 January 1985 from London to their Newbury headquarters. Still located in Newbury, they now employ over 13,000 people across the UK.

### **A focus on gender equality**

In 2015 Vodafone became a HeForShe Champion for gender equality. This created a great platform to make important commitments that would have positive impacts for both their own employees and their customers and the communities they serve. Some examples of this included the launch of their ground-breaking global maternity policy in 2015, their 2017 Reconnect programme – helping women returners back into the workplace – and their proactive use of mobile technology to connect women (and particularly young refugee girls) in developing countries to essential services, including education, health, safety and jobs.

Vodafone's commitment to gender equality has continued to build through the years and is reflected in the support provided through Vodafone Foundation. This provided a basis from which to understand the impact of domestic abuse in the workplace.

### **Championing domestic abuse support externally with customers and communities**

In 2010, Vodafone Foundation created an innovative tech solution – 'TecSOS' – for high-risk domestic abuse victims to connect to the emergency services. This is now used across all police forces in the UK as well as by police in Spain, Portugal, Germany and Ireland for use by high-risk victims. To provide support and information to a broader range of people affected by domestic abuse, in 2018 Vodafone launched its BrightSky app, in partnership with UK charity Hestia. The app helps people experiencing domestic abuse to collect evidence of perpetrator behaviour and connect them to local services. The app has been downloaded by thousands of people and has seen a 75% increase in downloads since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **A comprehensive framework of support for employees around domestic abuse**

Internally, Vodafone have developed a comprehensive framework and policy to support their employees around domestic abuse. This includes the provision of ten days' paid 'safe leave' for those experiencing abuse to use in a flexible way, potentially to spend with children, seek professional support or to give them some time to start to recover from their experiences.

Alongside the policy, specialist training is made available to HR and line managers to help them gain a better understanding of a complex area and to recognise some of the signs that someone might be experiencing domestic abuse and how best to respond.

They have developed a practical toolkit that managers and HR can refer to which supports the training, and this has been refreshed in the light of the changes to personal circumstances and ways of working in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Vodafone have thoroughly communicated their framework of support around domestic abuse to their employees and have made use of visual assets to help raise awareness, start conversations and build trust on this important area. They have also made their domestic abuse policy available to other companies and have also created [specific guidance](#) on this for other organisations, which is freely available

In tandem with this work, and building on the success of Bright Sky, Vodafone Foundation has created its Apps Against Abuse programme with services or apps in many of Vodafone's markets to support people affected by domestic abuse.

### **Inclusion**

While the organisation's focus on domestic abuse was initially driven by the organisation's commitment to gender equality, inclusion is very important to the organisation. Vodafone pay careful attention to the language they use when it comes to domestic abuse, recognising that men can also be affected by this issue and that domestic abuse can happen in same-sex relationships. As Sarah Kemp, senior communications manager, maintains: *'Ultimately we want to make sure that all our employees can feel safe and are able to fulfil their potential at work.'* They recently ran a webinar as part of their PRIDE and LGBT+ activities looking at domestic abuse in same-sex partnerships.

### **Impact of their work and future plans**

Vodafone's work on domestic abuse has been impactful. Other organisations have looked at the Vodafone policy as a blueprint for their own work in this area. Their work has also been picked up by the media and contributed to raising awareness and supporting open conversations on this important area.

Vodafone have also received lots of positive information anecdotally about the difference the policy has made to employees' personal situations, which makes the work so worthwhile.

Looking to the future, Vodafone will continue to drive home the importance of this issue and encourage people to undertake the training for HR and managers. They will also continue to refresh their guidance and are planning further research exploring how domestic abuse workplace frameworks of support can help people.

Finally, Vodafone's leaders continue to show great commitment to the issue, have contributed to a series of interviews and webinars on the topic and have spoken at the UN's Shadow Pandemic Campaign Conference.

### **Key learnings for other employers**

- Help people to understand that domestic abuse can be a workplace issue.
- Use research to illustrate the business case around this and gain buy-in.
- A framework of support and a policy are incredibly helpful, but they also need to be accompanied by awareness-raising (for those experiencing abuse, friends, families, colleagues) and building a supportive, open culture.
- It's really important to build trust with those experiencing domestic abuse – so that they feel able to talk about what has been happening and to let their organisations know what support would be most helpful.

- Proactive participation from senior leaders is powerful – Vodafone’s CEO and head of HR continue to show vociferous support internally and externally on this topic.

### Resources

- Vodafone’s toolkit on domestic abuse at work: [Recognise, Respond and Refer](#)
- Vodafone’s domestic violence and abuse policy guide: [A Briefing for Business](#)
- [Apps Against Abuse programme](#)
- KPMG [study](#) on the impact of domestic abuse in the workplace and [blog](#) about the study

## 11 Appendix 3: What should a domestic abuse policy contain?

Below are key areas that can be included within a domestic abuse workplace policy. It is important that all organisations develop their own workplace policy to reflect the needs of their employees.

### General points

- Adopt a supportive tone.
- Recognise that everyone’s circumstances and experiences will be different.
- Keep the language gender neutral and don’t make assumptions about the gender of someone’s partner.
- Get feedback on your policy from minority groups and specialist organisations to ensure it’s inclusive.

### To raise awareness

- **A policy statement and/or organisation commitment which opposes all forms of domestic abuse**

This can include a commitment to treat domestic abuse seriously, understand the risks and consequences in the workplace, fully support colleagues and take action against perpetrators of domestic abuse.

- **A clear definition of what domestic abuse is**

It’s important to adopt an inclusive stance, for example saying that although the majority of those experiencing domestic abuse are women, men can also be abused, and it can happen in same-sex relationships as well as opposite-sex relationships.

- **Statistics to demonstrate the extent and prevalence of domestic abuse**

National statistics can be used, and by involving local voluntary groups it may be possible to get statistics for your region or area.

- **Clear indicators to identify domestic abuse**

On average a woman will experience 35 episodes of domestic abuse before seeking help.<sup>10</sup> Using clear examples and indicators of domestic abuse can make managers aware of the possibility that domestic abuse may be the cause of a number of workplace issues. For example, a possible sign of domestic abuse could be a high absenteeism rate without an explanation or a dip in performance. Although this should not be used as a checklist, and managers should not jump to conclusions, indicators can act as a prompt for managers to ask open-ended questions about an employee’s wellbeing and for appropriate support to be offered.

- **Review the policy on a regular basis**

This will gauge how the policy is working for employees and managers. However, it may be difficult to monitor the uptake of this policy because of the need to maintain confidentiality.

### To identify responsibilities

- **Clarify the specific roles and responsibilities for managers**

This can include practical steps to encourage the disclosure and discussion of abuse and identify appropriate support. Managers should endeavour to support those experiencing domestic abuse in a sympathetic, non-judgemental and confident manner. They can also assist in recording details of incidents in the workplace.

- **Clarify the specific roles and responsibilities for the HR team**

This can ensure a central responsibility for developing a policy and procedures on domestic abuse. The HR team can pledge to review and update other policies, procedures and practices that are linked and could affect the implementation of a domestic abuse policy.

- **Clarify the specific roles and responsibilities of employees**

If they feel able to, this can allow employees to take basic steps to assist friends and colleagues. By behaving in a supportive manner, an employee can assist an affected colleague in gaining confidence to tackle and report the problems that they might experience.

- **A commitment to challenge employees who perpetrate domestic abuse**

This recognises that abusive behaviour is the responsibility of the perpetrator. Employees should be aware that misconduct inside and outside of work is viewed seriously – and that domestic abuse is a serious matter that can lead to disciplinary action being taken. However, it may also be appropriate to support an employee who is seeking help to address their behaviour.

- **An obligation to prioritise confidentiality wherever possible**

Managers are responsible for ensuring information is not disclosed and that all employees are aware of their responsibilities in relation to confidentiality. It should be made clear that improper disclosure of information by any member of staff will be taken very seriously and may be subject to disciplinary action. There are exceptions when confidentiality can be broken, for example when there are safety concerns. See section 7 of this guidance for more details.

### To ensure provision of support and safety

- **Clear information on practical and supportive measures in the workplace**

There can be a number of clear steps identified which will ensure that those experiencing domestic abuse are able to work in a safe and supported workplace. This may include diverting phone calls or alerting reception and security staff. Links can also be made to an employee assistance programme.

- **An assurance to prioritise health and safety at work**

The dangers of domestic abuse should not be underestimated. Employers should make an assessment of risks relating to domestic abuse. Existing risk management frameworks, traditionally used in the workplace health and safety context, could be used for this process. Assessments should identify the risks and the control measures identified to minimise the risks. Risks may include, for example, employees working from home, or the workplace being open to the public.

If domestic abuse is disclosed, undertaking a risk assessment can ensure that the potential risk to employees and colleagues is lessened. It is important to note each person's needs are different and that any measures should only be used with the authorisation/consent of the individual concerned.

- **Link the domestic abuse policy to other workplace policies**

Making links with existing policies (for example a flexible working policy and a diversity and inclusion policy) can allow, for example, individuals to change working patterns; special leave may help to facilitate any practical arrangements, or can encourage people with any identity, background or circumstance to come forward and ask for support.

- **Appoint domestic abuse link staff and provide contact details**

This recognises that staff may not wish to go through line managers or HR advisers. Having key link staff means they can be approached in confidence to discuss issues relating to domestic abuse. They would not be counsellors but be provided with specific training and have clear responsibilities to be able to signpost people to get help.

- **A clear commitment to provide training to all staff on the implications of domestic abuse in the workplace and what the domestic abuse policy offers**

This will ensure that all staff are aware of domestic abuse, the policy and the support it offers. Local domestic abuse experts are key partners to assist in providing this training. More detailed training can be provided to managers.

- **A commitment to distribute the policy to all employees**

Through training, awareness sessions and the intranet, all staff should be made aware of the policy and its aims. This can include displaying posters and including information on domestic abuse within other training sessions, for example harassment and bullying.

- **Relocation**

Women's Aid suggest that survivors may need to leave their area of usual work in order to escape the perpetrator, and/or to receive additional support. In these cases, managers should work with the employee and senior staff to find ways for the survivor to keep their role, or move to a comparable one. This may involve working in a different office, from home, and so on.

- **Financial support**

Women's Aid suggest that employees experiencing domestic abuse may face considerable financial hardship. Abusers may be denying them access to their finances, or they may have concerns about leaving a violent relationship and finding alternative accommodation. A salary advancement or making changes to the method of salary payment should be considered in such cases. Referral to a financial advisor may also be made with the employee's consent.

- **A list of local and national support and advice agency contacts**

This will give staff experiencing domestic abuse the opportunity to access vital advice on financial, health and housing issues as well as legal assistance.

- **A designated contact for further information on the policy**

This will allow employees to identify a person who can signpost colleagues to the most appropriate sources of advice.

## 12 Notes

- 1 Data was collected as part of the CIPD's COVID-19 *Working Lives* survey and is based on responses from 1,080 working adults. The survey was conducted online by YouGov in June 2020. Figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK working adults (aged 18+).
- 2 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabuseprevalenceandtrendsendlandandwales/yearendingmarch2019>
- 3 Office for National Statistics. (2017) *Domestic abuse in England and Wales*. Crown Prosecution Service. (2017) *Violence against women and girls report*. 10th edition.
- 4 Office for National Statistics. (2016) *Crime Statistics: Focus on Violent Crime and Sexual Offences, Year ending March 2016*. Chapter 2: Homicide.
- 5 Crime Survey England and Wales 2019.
- 6 Galop. (2020) *Recognise and respond: strengthening advocacy for LGBT+ survivors of domestic abuse*.
- 7 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2018/5/contents/enacted>
- 8 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-52981834>
- 9 Corporate Alliance Against Domestic Violence. (2012) *Why is CAADV important?* London: CAADV.
- 10 Jaffe et al. (1986)



# CIPD

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development  
151 The Broadway London SW19 1JQ United Kingdom  
**T** +44 (0)20 8612 6200 **F** +44 (0)20 8612 6201  
**E** [cipd@cipd.co.uk](mailto:cipd@cipd.co.uk) **W** [cipd.co.uk](http://cipd.co.uk)

Incorporated by Royal Charter  
Registered as a charity in England and Wales (1079797)  
Scotland (SC045154) and Ireland (20100827)

Issued: September 2020 Reference: 8047 © CIPD 2020