



Department  
of Health



# Responding to colleagues experiencing domestic abuse:



Practical guidance for employees experiencing domestic abuse

# What is this guidance about?

If you are experiencing domestic abuse and it's causing problems for you at work, it can be really difficult to talk to your employer about what's happening. You might feel embarrassed or afraid to tell anyone, or you might worry about whether your work record will be affected.

This guidance makes clear what support is available if this is happening to you. Your employer has provided this because the health and safety of their employees is important. They have signed a pledge to support any colleague who is experiencing domestic abuse which may be affecting them in the workplace. This means that they will listen to you, not judge, and they will support the decisions you make.

## What is domestic abuse?

- Domestic abuse is defined by the Government 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.*"
- Domestic abuse is the abuse of **power and control** over one person by another. It can take many different forms, including physical, sexual, emotional, verbal and financial abuse.
- Research shows that women are more likely to suffer more serious injury and ongoing assaults than men. However, men also experience domestic abuse. Everyone can expect equal support regardless of their gender or the type of abuse they experience.

## What help and support is available?

- It's recommended that you get specialist support from trained advisers who can assess your risk and offer confidential advice on safety. See the directory for key contacts.
- If you think you are in immediate danger, call 999.
- If you want it, there is support for you at work. Your line manager can offer direct support or, if you prefer, you can get support from Human Resources or an Employee Assistance Programme.

Your Employee Assistance Provider is:

## Should I tell someone at work?

- Whether or not you tell someone at work is entirely your decision. However you should consider it, especially if the abuse is affecting your work, or you think you might be harmed as a result of the abuse.

- People who are being abused at home can sometimes experience disciplinary action or lose their jobs because their behaviour at work is misinterpreted. For example, you may find that, as a result of the abuse:
  - Your productivity decreases.
  - You are frequently late or absent.
  - The abuse affects your behaviour in the workplace.

By telling someone at work, you can expect support from your employer.

Further signs that someone might be experiencing domestic abuse are in **Appendix 1**.

- If you choose to tell your line manager or Human Resources, you can expect them to:
  - Be non-judgemental, supportive, sensitive and discrete.
  - Prioritise your safety over your work efficiency.
  - Respect your experience and allocate time to talk.
  - Observe confidentiality except in extreme circumstances.
- The person you choose to tell should not:
  - Ask for proof of abuse.
  - Contact the abuser.
  - Force you to accept support.
- If you tell your line manager, they will have an increased legal duty to ensure your health and safety at work. This means they may be able to make workplace adjustments to support you, for example, assistance with:
  - Making emergency and safe contact arrangements.
  - Managing your responsibilities and workload.
  - Improving your safety while you are at work.
  - Reviewing communications and IT safety.

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

## Will my privacy be respected?

- In almost every case, your personal circumstances will be treated as strictly confidential. Any written record of your disclosure and any agreed workplace adjustments will be securely stored outside of official employee records.
- Telling someone at work should not impact on your employee's work record, provided your performance is maintained as agreed.
- Sometimes the person you tell may need to inform others within the organisation to make sure staff can respond safely, or to put in place any agreed workplace adjustments, or to let new line managers know what arrangements are in place. This will be done with your full knowledge and consent, and only on a 'need to know' basis.
- In exceptional circumstances, your employer may need to discuss the situation with others without your consent. This will only happen if:
  - It's believed you or any colleagues are at risk of serious injury or death.
  - If it's believed that there is a substantial risk of harm to any children who are witnessing the violence or abuse.

All violence, threatening behaviour or breaches of security in the workplace will be recorded and retained for evidence purposes, if required. The record will be clear and accurate and include dates, times, locations, and any witnesses. Breaches of orders, for example, non-molestation orders will also be noted.

## If you are the abuser

Domestic abuse is a serious matter that can lead to a criminal conviction. Misconduct inside and outside the workplace can lead to disciplinary action, including dismissal, in line with normal policy and procedures on misconduct. You can choose to manage your abusive behaviour and advice is available to help you with this. See links in the directory below.

### **False allegations by employees**

- Research shows that false allegations of domestic abuse are extremely rare. If you choose to disclose abuse to your employer, you can expect them to believe and support you.
- However, if you are not experiencing domestic abuse and you make a false allegation, this may be regarded as misconduct, and could lead to disciplinary action.

#### **Barbara's Story**

For over 10 years, Barbara worked as HR Director for one of the UK's largest banks. The Corporate Alliance Against Domestic Violence (CAADV) provides accredited domestic violence training for management and employees and she was responsible for implementing this in her bank.

Several months after the launch, Barbara emailed CAADV and self-disclosed her situation. Her husband had never been physically abusive but had verbally terrorised her for years. The situation was now impacting on her young children who were displaying signs of verbal abuse. When Barbara brought the domestic violence work to her firm, she never thought it was relevant to her. But she was now concerned about her family's safety and also how she would be perceived by her colleagues.

By working with CAADV, Barbara accessed safety planning, took steps to protect her family and included her employer in the solutions based approach. A combination of management, operations and HR provided:

- Time off for risk assessment and safety planning with third sector services
- Children's passports kept at the place of employment
- Records of calls and emails retained by IT which could be used as evidence
- Security having a picture of her husband in case he arrived at the office
- Time off for counselling with children

Today Barbara and her family are safe and well. Barbara remains a leader within the firm. Her husband has worked with specialists on his abusive behaviour and lives elsewhere. Barbara continues in her role and the bank was able to retain a valued employee.

This resource has been written by The Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse 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/helping-you/support-and-advice/domestic-abuse">www.foryoubyyou.org.uk/helping-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>Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse (CAADA)</b>	A national charity supporting a strong multi-agency response to domestic abuse. CAADA provides practical support to professionals and organisations working with domestic abuse victims. General training and consultancy on domestic abuse, risk and effective multi- agency working is available.	0117 317 8750 <a href="http://www.caada.org.uk">www.caada.org.uk</a> <a href="mailto:enquiries@caada.org.uk">enquiries@caada.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>