

## Guidance and Support for Employees Experiencing Domestic Abuse

### Introduction

The Council promotes the view that abuse against any individual is totally unacceptable and that every employee who is experiencing domestic abuse can raise the issue and be assured that the Council will support him or her. The aim of this guidance is to support employees' health and wellbeing at work, signpost the support available to all employees and provide advice and guidance to managers.

Domestic abuse can impact on an employee's attendance, performance and wellbeing at work. In addition to providing the support outlined the Council will take due account of the impact of domestic abuse when applying any HR related procedures.

The facts:

- Nearly 1 million women experience at least one incident of domestic abuse each year<sup>1</sup>
- At least 750,000 children witness domestic violence each year<sup>2</sup>
- Two women are killed each week by their partner or ex-partner<sup>3</sup>
- Women experience at least 35 incidents of domestic abuse before reporting it<sup>4</sup>
- 40% of gay and bisexual men have experienced domestic abuse from a family member<sup>5</sup>
- Almost one in four gay men have experienced domestic abuse from a family member<sup>6</sup>

### Scope

This guidance applies to all employees of the Council with the exception of schools based staff. This guidance will be recommended to schools for adoption.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.cps.gov.uk/news/articles/domestic\\_violence\\_the\\_facts\\_the\\_issues\\_the\\_future](http://www.cps.gov.uk/news/articles/domestic_violence_the_facts_the_issues_the_future)

<sup>2</sup> ibid

<sup>3</sup> ibid

<sup>4</sup> ibid

<sup>5</sup> [www.stonewall.org.uk/documents/domestic\\_violence\\_resource\\_for\\_gay\\_men1.1.pdf](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/documents/domestic_violence_resource_for_gay_men1.1.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> ibid

<sup>7</sup> [www.ons.gov.uk](http://www.ons.gov.uk)

## Definition

Domestic abuse is not limited to cases of domestic violence. This guidance covers all forms of domestic abuse, the Home Office definition of which is:

“Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional abuse

**Controlling behaviour** is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

**Coercive behaviour** is: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.” \*

This definition, which is not a legal definition, includes so called ‘honour’ based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage, and is clear that victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group”

It is impossible to know with certainty what goes on behind closed doors, but there are some tell-tale signs and symptoms of domestic violence and abuse. If you witness a number of warning signs in a colleague, you can reasonably suspect domestic abuse. These may include:

- Frequent injuries, with the excuse of “accidents”
- Frequent and sudden absences from work
- Frequent, harassing phone calls from the family member or family members
- Fear of the family member(s), references to the family member(s)' anger
- Personality changes (e.g. an outgoing person becomes withdrawn)
- Excessive fear of conflict
- Reluctance to finish work, starting work earlier
- Submissive behaviour, lack of assertiveness
- Isolation from friends and family
- Insufficient resources to live (money, credit cards, car)
- Depression, crying, low self-esteem, lack of confidence

It is important to be aware of the signs so that you may approach the subject with the person sensitively if you have concerns either as a colleague or as a line manager. You may for example wish to approach the subject at a return to work meeting after persistent or sudden absences if some of the other signs are also present.

It is also important to remember that most research also suggests that domestic abuse occurs in all sections of society irrespective of race, gender, culture, nationality, religion, sexuality, disability, age, marital status, class or educational level. Whilst predominantly affecting women, there is evidence that the incidents of abuse is growing in same sex relationships, from women to men, from children to parents and relatives to their carers, for example.

## **Internal Support**

Internal support is available as follows:

- A confidential first point of contact for those experiencing domestic abuse (see Appendix 1)
- Offer employees experiencing domestic abuse access to counselling, and publicise the availability of this support regularly through notice boards, the intranet and ongoing health and wellbeing initiatives;
- Offer access to counselling and other support as appropriate, to employees perpetrating domestic abuse who seek help from the employer; and
- Undertake to raise workplace awareness of domestic abuse issues through a programme of regular information initiatives.
- Provide training for managers so they understand domestic abuse and how to support staff, especially around honour crimes.
- Appoint specific staff who can be mentors for managers (see Appendix 1)

Some employees may find it difficult to raise these types of issues with their immediate line manager. If this is the case, the employee can raise the issues with the appointed person as a confidential first point of contact. Support is also available through HR and trade union representatives.

## **External Support**

Details of organisations providing external support are attached at Appendix 2.

## **Managers' Role**

Line managers have a crucial role to play in enabling employees experiencing domestic abuse to seek help. HR Services can also provide advice and guidance.

The role of the line manager is to:

- Foster an open management culture that enables team members to disclose sensitive issues;
- Be sympathetic and non-judgemental;
- Provide support in the first instance, including specific advice on the options available; the Domestic Abuse Discussion Checklist (Appendix 3) can facilitate this and must be used. Managers must also recognise the limitations of their role as they are not professional counsellors or experts;
- Protect confidentiality in all instances except where to do so would leave children of the relationship at risk of harm or place a vulnerable adult at risk of significant harm/danger;
- Refer the individual to the appropriate internal or external source of help and support, for example the organisation's confidential point of contact or external agency;
- Ensure that the safety of all employees in the team is protected; and
- Enable the affected employee to remain productive and at work during a difficult period in his/her domestic life, for example by using the organisation's flexible working and special leave policies and procedures.

If the line manager or anyone else supporting the employee considers that any children in the family or

vulnerable adult may also be at risk of abuse, they must contact Children's Social Care of the relevant local authority for advice.

To support managers, or others to whom an employee approached regarding domestic abuse, a checklist of issues to discuss is attached as Appendix 3. This provides a framework for discussion, ensures consistency in advice and support offered and can be reviewed as situations develop and change. It can also give the employee the confidence that they are being treated seriously and sincerely.

### **Attendance**

The Council recognises that those experiencing domestic abuse may need to be absent from work at times and the arrangements for this will be managed on a case by case basis.

### **Security and Safety**

As far as possible, the Council will protect the safety and security of all employees at work, including those affected by domestic abuse and their colleagues.

### **Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse**

The Council will treat any criminal convictions related to domestic abuse as potential gross misconduct and employees will therefore be subject to the Council's disciplinary procedure, which could result in the termination of their employment.

In cases where abusers are genuinely looking for help and support to change their behaviour etc, the Council will "signpost" them to organisations that can offer this very specialised support. Information given will be treated in confidence unless it affects children or vulnerable adults.

## **Appendix 1 - Internal Support Contact Details**

Deborah Simpson  
Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence Strategy Manager  
020 3045 3058

## **Appendix 2 - Organisations Providing External Support**

**24 hour National Domestic Violence Helpline** 0808 2000 247

**Bexley Women's Aid** 0208 301 1536 9-3pm Monday to Friday <https://bexleywomensaid.org.uk/>

Provides support and refuge to women and children experiencing domestic abuse.

**Victim Support** 0808 168 9291 [www.victimsupport.org.uk](http://www.victimsupport.org.uk)

Independent charity providing support to victims to any crime. Support is tailored to the needs of the client.

**National Stalking Helpline:** 0808 802 0300 [www.stalkinghelpline.org](http://www.stalkinghelpline.org)

An information and guidance line for anyone who is affected by stalking or harassment. The service provides guidance on relevant laws, evidence gathering, personal safety and options that are open to each caller. The helpline is open Monday – Friday, 9:30am – 4pm (except Wednesday when the Helpline opens at 1pm).

**Suzy Lamplugh Trust:** [www.suzylamplugh.org](http://www.suzylamplugh.org)

Suzy Lamplugh Trust provides advice, information and training about personal safety, enabling people to avoid becoming victims of violence and aggression. They are also able to offer in house and open access courses on personal safety, lone working and stalking.

**Digital Stalking:** [www.digital-stalking.com](http://www.digital-stalking.com)

The site provides advice and information about cyberstalking.

**Karma Nirvana:** 0800 5999 247 [www.karmanirvana.org.uk](http://www.karmanirvana.org.uk)

Karma Nirvana provides support to all victims of honour-based violence and forced marriage. They also run a national helpline that provides support and guidance.

## **Appendix 3 - Domestic Abuse Discussion Checklist**

This checklist should be used every time a manager is presented with a disclosure of domestic abuse from a member of staff. It is important to ensure that the manager has done everything they should have, and considered all angles in which the organisation could support and help the member of staff.

Please note, due to the very nature of domestic abuse, situations and risk can change, develop or escalate very quickly and therefore the Discussion Checklist and the plan of action should be revisited on a regular basis in order to best help the victim and keep them safe.

## Domestic Abuse Discussion Checklist

## Section I

<b>NAME OF EMPLOYEE:</b>	<b>REPORTED TO (NAME):</b>	<b>DATE:</b>
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	<b>TASK</b>	<b>ACTION / NOTES</b>	<b>DATE COMPLET</b>
1	<p>Ensure that any discussion about the employee's situation takes place in privacy and that their <b>confidentiality</b> is respected as far as possible (unless there are overriding concerns such as child protection concerns – please see Para 9. 4 of policy for safeguarding contacts)</p>		
2	<p>What does the employee want to do?</p> <p>What measures do they feel could help them at work?</p> <p>Suggestions –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Temporary flexibility on start/finish times</li> <li>• Change of work location</li> <li>• Screening of external calls/emails from abuser</li> <li>• Stress risk assessment</li> <li>• Share brief information with any colleagues as additional form of support</li> <li>• Prevent lone working</li> <li>• Manager to create log of contact/incidents they are aware of</li> </ul>		

	<b>TASK</b>	<b>ACTION / NOTES</b>	<b>DATE COMPLET</b>
3	<p>Discuss whether to <b>report</b> the abuse to the police. Highlight the benefits of doing this.</p> <p><i>Remember; do not pressure them if they do not want to report it!</i></p>		
4	<p>Does the employee need to see Occupational Health, a GP or other professional for <b>medical attention</b>?</p>		
5	<p>What methods of <b>support</b> have been discussed and explored regarding the work place?</p> <p>Has work performance or attendance been affected?</p>		
6	<p>Give the employee <b>information</b> about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Care First</li> <li>▪ Local refuges</li> <li>▪ Help lines</li> </ul>		

	<b>TASK</b>	<b>ACTION / NOTES</b>	<b>DATE COMPLET</b>
7	<p>Has a <b>referral</b> been made to an Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA), Housing or the Police for risk assessment and/or further support? Which agency will be involved?</p> <p>Has the employee consented to this?</p> <p>NB: Normally consent should be obtained from the employee unless, in your professional judgement, there is a risk of serious harm or murder</p>		
8	<p>Has a <b>safety plan</b> (see section 2 of this document) been discussed and drawn up:</p> <p>a) Regarding the workplace b) Regarding the home?</p>		

	<b>TASK</b>	<b>ACTION / NOTES</b>	<b>DATE COMPLET</b>
9	<p>Have you given the employee information about <b>local advice/support</b> agencies and how to contact them?</p> <p>Has the employee been given a copy of <b>'organisations providing external support' – Appendix I of the policy?</b></p> <p><i>It may be useful to offer help in contacting agencies if the employee would feel more comfortable that way.</i></p>		
10	<p>If the person completing the checklist is not the employee's line manager, consideration should be given to informing the line manager. Describe to the employee the possible difficulties that could arise from the line manager not knowing, e.g. performance or absence monitoring.</p>		
11	<p>When will the employee's situation next be reviewed?</p>		

## Employer's Safety Plan Checklist

## Section 2

Please discuss and complete all of the following fields to help an employee consider their options and plan for their safety.

### Ask some of the following questions:

	Action
In what way can I (and others) help you?	
What do you feel would help you keep safe?	
Do you have any concerns about your children's safety?	
What have you tried in the past to protect yourself and your children?	
Did any of these strategies help?	

### Safety considerations at work:

Advise employee to keep emergency numbers at hand where possible.	
Emergency contact person and details in case you can't contact the employee.	
Have you identified the organisation's contact and given their details to the employee?	
Offer, if possible, changes to the employee's workplace location and work hours, especially if they do front line work or can be seen in the building.	
Consider changing / increasing workplace security:	

Change keypad numbers/ door access codes	
Remind front line staff not to give out personal information, including contact details and working hours.	
Ensure the HR information is secure.	
Review parking arrangements – does someone need to escort the employee to their car?	
If the employee is experiencing any form of domestic abuse, stalking or harassment, discuss the possibility of getting a restraining order for the workplace/surrounding environment	
If the employee consents, advise colleagues (on a need to know basis) what they should do to help.  <b>Do I have the employee's consent?</b>	
Are there any other measures that could help?  Discuss with employee.	

**General safety advice:**

- Talk through the Safety Plan Handout.
- Suggestive appropriate, that the employee talks in more detail about safety outside the workplace with the police.

## Domestic Abuse Personal Safety Plan Handout

### Safety considerations at work:

1	Keep emergency numbers easily accessible – consider the use of a mobile phone that connects directly to the police.
2	Know who your contact person is in your organisation if you need help or advice.
3	Give your organisation the name and number of an emergency contact person for you.
4	Tell someone if you are receiving any sort of threat or harassment at work
5	Think about how you travel to and from work – try to make sure that you are not travelling alone or in the dark.
6	If there is anything you think your employer can do to help increase your safety, ask as soon as possible.

### General safety advice:

1	Arrange where you might go if you have to leave urgently.
2	Find places where you can quickly and safely use the phone.
3	Always carry a list of numbers with you in case of an emergency.
4	Try to save money so that you have bus or taxi fares in an emergency.
5	Get an extra set of keys for the house / car.
6	Keep the keys, money and anything else you may need in a safe place, should you have to leave quickly.
7	Talk to your children. Let them know it's not their fault. Children do not have to see abuse to be affected by it. They hear it, sense it and can be sad and frightened by it.
8	Talk to friends, relatives, your doctor, nurse or others about how you feel.

### If you decide to leave home, consider taking:

Birth certificates	Marriage certificate	School records
Medical records	Driving Licence	Car documents
Money	Credit cards	Cheque books
Benefit books	Rent books	Passports
Work permits	Visa	Medications
Several days clothing	Personal possessions with sentimental value	Children's favourite toys