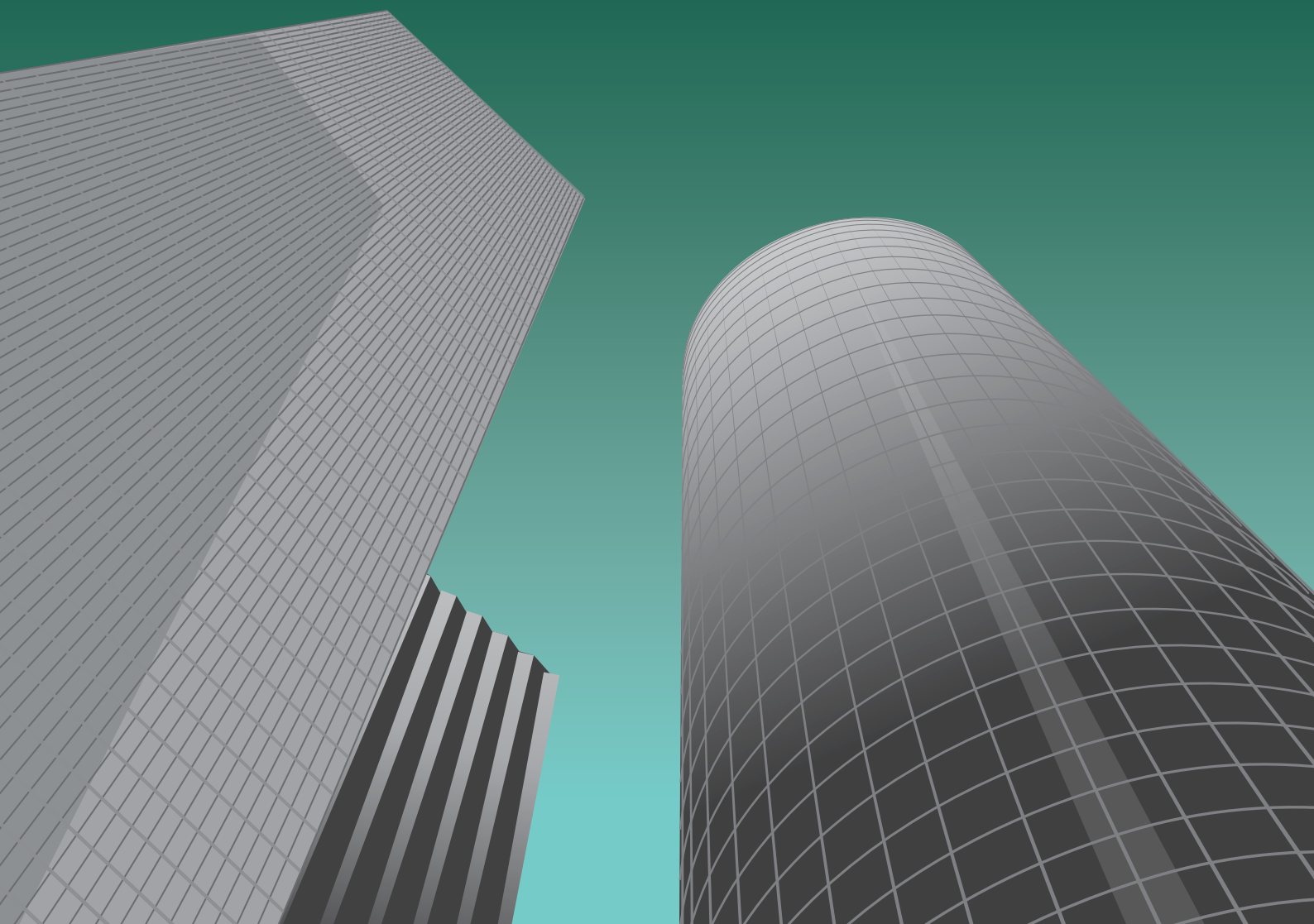


A guide for employers  
March 2013



# MANAGING AND SUPPORTING EMPLOYEES EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC ABUSE



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# FOREWORD

The CIPD is pleased to support this guidance for employers on how to respond if an employee is affected by domestic abuse. The guidance is designed to enable employers to develop a domestic abuse workplace policy and to provide tips for managers on how to manage and support an employee suffering from domestic abuse. The guidance makes clear that there are simple steps employers can take to respond to this sensitive issue. To a large degree this is about basic good people management involving managers listening, empathising and showing concern for employees. However, it is important that managers are aware of the warning signs that might suggest a member of staff may be suffering from abuse, as well as the sources of support available to victims.

**Ben Willmott**

**Head of Public Policy**

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development

Domestic abuse is an issue that can follow women to work and affects thousands of working women every day. Given that one in four women will experience domestic abuse at some point in their lifetime, it is very likely that all workplaces have staff that have experienced or are experiencing domestic abuse.

As Commissioner for the Equality and Human Rights Commission, my aim is that every employer benefits from taking effective action in the workplace to ensure their staff experiencing domestic abuse feel safe and supported at work.

This guidance includes low-cost, common-sense practical tips through to steps on developing an effective domestic abuse workplace policy. Therefore, whether a large company or an SME, there are steps you can take to help managers facilitate conversations about domestic abuse and put in place support for employees.

I welcome the support of the CIPD, CBI, FSB, IoD and others on this. Domestic abuse is an issue that costs the UK economy £1.9 billion in lost economic output every year and leads to decreased productivity, increased absenteeism and increased employee turnover.

Make it your business to ensure that you can act speedily and appropriately if you detect that one of your workforce is affected by domestic abuse.

**Ann Beynon**

EHRC Commissioner for Wales

# INTRODUCTION

Domestic abuse not only impacts on the well-being of women, but it affects the **financial strength** and **success** of the companies for which they work. **Seventy-five per cent** of those experiencing domestic abuse are **targeted at work** and it is often possible for perpetrators to use workplace resources such as phones, email and other means to threaten, harass or abuse their current or former partner (CAADV 2012).

# WHAT IS DOMESTIC ABUSE?

**One in four women** will experience domestic abuse at some point in their lifetime. This means it is likely that all workplaces will have staff that have experienced or are experiencing domestic abuse as well as those who are perpetrators of abuse.

Domestic abuse is the **abuse of power and control** over one person by another and can take many different forms, including physical, sexual, emotional, verbal and financial abuse.

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

All employees who experience abuse should be supported regardless of gender and the type of abuse. More information can be found at the relevant support agencies listed in the 'Getting further information' section.

# WHY IS DOMESTIC ABUSE A WORKPLACE ISSUE?

## Good people management

Being a good employer includes **supporting staff** through new or difficult periods in their lives. Domestic abuse has a devastating impact on individuals and their families. In 2008–09 domestic abuse accounted for 68% of female homicides and 15% of male homicides (Walby et al 2010).

People experiencing domestic abuse are often subject to disciplinary action and lose their jobs because their behaviour, being late for example, is misinterpreted. However, a steady income is often key to a survivor's economic independence and their opportunities to escape from an abusive relationship. Employers have a responsibility to provide all staff with a **safe and effective work environment**. For some employees the workplace is a safe haven and the only place that offers routes to safety.

Having a domestic abuse workplace policy can clearly demonstrate domestic abuse is **not tolerated** within or outside the workplace. It will show a commitment to provide support for staff and **take action** against perpetrators.

## The business case

Supporting staff who have experienced or are experiencing domestic abuse makes business sense. Not only will this be a reflection of good management practice but also corporate social responsibility. In England and Wales **£1.9 billion a year** (Walby 2009) in economic output is lost due to decreased productivity, administrative difficulties from unplanned time off, lost wages and sick pay. Domestic abuse can cause employees to be distracted at work, arrive late, leave early or miss work, and can increase employee turnover.

Colleagues may also be affected. They may be followed to or from work, or subject to questioning about the victim's contact details or locations. They may have to cover for other workers while they are off, try to fend off the abuse and fear for their own safety. Furthermore, colleagues may be unaware of the abuse or not know how to help.

Introducing an effective workplace policy and practice will be a **good investment to retain skilled and experienced staff**, thereby increasing their commitment to you as an employer.

## A duty of care

All employers have a duty of care and health and safety laws ensure workers have the right to work in a safe environment where risks to health and well-being are considered and dealt with efficiently.

There are **four main areas** of health and safety law relevant to violence at work:

- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992
- Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995
- Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations 1996.

An effective workplace policy on domestic abuse can ensure that employers are complying with these laws.

# PRACTICAL TIPS FOR BUSINESSES

Even with limited resources there are steps that **small business owners** can take to address the effects of domestic abuse in the workplace. In many cases it is about being aware and signposting to the organisations that provide specialist support.

**Below is a list of ten low-cost, common-sense actions businesses can take to manage domestic abuse in the workplace, with benefits for both employees and businesses.**

## Recognise the problem

- 1 Look for sudden changes in behaviour and/or changes in the quality of work performance for unexplained reasons despite a previously strong record.
- 2 Look for changes in the way an employee dresses, for example excessive clothing on hot days, changes in the amount of make-up worn.

## Respond

- 3 Believe an employee if they disclose experiencing domestic abuse – do not ask for proof.
- 4 Reassure the employee that the organisation has an understanding of how domestic abuse may affect their work performance and the support that can be offered.

## Provide support

- 5 Divert phone calls and email messages and look to change a phone extension if an employee is receiving harassing calls.
- 6 Agree with the employee what to tell colleagues and how they should respond if their ex/partner telephones or visits the workplace.
- 7 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.
- 8 Keep a record of any incidents of abuse in the workplace, including persistent telephone calls, emails or visits to the workplace.
- 9 Put up domestic abuse helpline posters on the back of toilet doors (Refuge/Respect 2010).

## Refer to the appropriate help

- 10 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.

# DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE DOMESTIC ABUSE WORKPLACE POLICY

As well as implementing the practical steps above, organisations may decide to put into practice an effective domestic abuse workplace policy.

## A CASE STUDY

### The Co-operative Group

The Co-operative Group comprises a family of businesses including food, travel, financial services, healthcare and legal services and has 123,000 employees across the UK.

In 2008 the Co-op Group implemented a domestic abuse workplace policy to create a working environment which promotes the view that domestic abuse is unacceptable. The policy sets out how support will be made available to staff who experience violence as well as perpetrators who are committed to seeking professional help.

When the policy was launched, posters were distributed around head office, every store and branch. This communication provided useful telephone numbers and further copies are available on the group's intranet site. This policy is undergoing development and is being monitored by the employee assistance programme (AXA ICAS), which provides external support for colleagues of the Co-operative Group.

Since the policy has been introduced it has been used by a number of employees. Feedback has shown that the commitment has been well received and employees are pleased that the organisation is making a stand on such an important issue. What's more, the policy has provided good PR for the organisation.

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.

### 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**

This can be set within the wider violence against women context.

It is important to recognise that while domestic abuse can affect both sexes, women's and men's experiences of violence are different. It should also be recognised that there can be additional issues for employees because of their gender identity, ethnic background, religion, age, sexuality or disability.

- **Information and examples of the different forms of domestic abuse**

This will demonstrate that no single act of abuse or harassment defines domestic abuse. Providing information on and examples of types of physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and financial abuse will help gain an understanding of the wide range of activities domestic abuse includes.



- **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 (Jaffe et al 1986). 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. Although this should not to be used as a checklist, it can allow 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. Examples in help in asking difficult questions are included on page 10.

- **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 perpetrators**

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 can lead to disciplinary action being taken. Employees ought to be aware that domestic abuse is a serious matter that can lead to a criminal conviction. 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. There are exceptions when confidentiality can be broken, for example when there are concerns about children or vulnerable adults.

## **To ensure provision, 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. 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 can allow, for example, individuals to change working patterns; special leave may help to facilitate any practical arrangements.

- **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.

- **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 policy holders and the intranet, all staff can be made aware and have information on 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.

- **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.

# ASKING DIFFICULT 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. Below 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/ under-performance at work?
- Is everything all right 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.

Even if managers disagree with the decisions being made regarding an employee's relationship, it is important to 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.

The role of a manager is not to deal with the abuse itself but to make it clear through a workplace policy that employees will be supported and to outline what help is available.

**The national domestic abuse helplines can provide further information and advice on discussing domestic abuse with employees.**

# GETTING FURTHER INFORMATION

There are many organisations that can offer further advice and practical guidance on domestic abuse in the workplace. For example:

## **Black Association of Women Step Out (BAWSO)**

[www.bawso.org.uk](http://www.bawso.org.uk)

BAWSO are a specialist agency which can provide culturally sensitive and appropriate information and services to black and other minority ethnic groups.

## **Broken Rainbow**

[www.broken-rainbow.org.uk](http://www.broken-rainbow.org.uk)

Broken Rainbow provides support for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people experiencing domestic abuse.

## **Corporate Alliance Against Domestic Violence**

[www.caadv.org.uk](http://www.caadv.org.uk)

The Corporate Alliance aims to raise awareness and reduce the social and economic impact of domestic violence in the workplace. Working together with employers, their vision is to create a work environment where employees have the opportunity to seek practical support and advice and, ultimately, take positive action to end domestic violence. Membership is open to any employer, trade union or representative body in the UK.

## **Dyn Project**

[www.dynwales.org](http://www.dynwales.org)

The Dyn Project works across Wales to support men who experience domestic abuse.

## **Man Kind Initiative**

[www.mankind.org.uk](http://www.mankind.org.uk)

The Man Kind Initiative is a national charity that provides help and support for male victims of domestic abuse.

## **Men's Advice Line**

[www.mensadviceline.org.uk](http://www.mensadviceline.org.uk)

The Men's Advice Line offers practical advice, information and support to male victims of domestic abuse as well as concerned friends and families.

## **Refuge**

[www.refuge.org.uk](http://www.refuge.org.uk)

Refuge is one of the largest single providers of specialist accommodation and services to women and children escaping domestic violence, supporting over 1,000 women and children every day.

## **Respect**

[www.respect.uk.net](http://www.respect.uk.net)

Respect is the UK association for professionals working with domestic violence perpetrators and associated support services. The organisation's key aim is to increase the safety of those experiencing domestic violence through promoting effective interventions with perpetrators.

## **Scottish Women's Aid**

[www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk](http://www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk)

Scottish Women's Aid is the leading organisation in Scotland working towards the prevention of domestic abuse. They play a vital role in campaigning and lobbying for effective responses to domestic abuse.

## **Southall Black Sisters**

[www.southallblacksisters.org.uk](http://www.southallblacksisters.org.uk)

Southall Black Sisters provide advice and information on domestic abuse, racial harassment, welfare and immigration, primarily for Asian, African and African-Caribbean women.

## **Welsh Women's Aid**

[www.welshwomensaid.org.uk](http://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk)

Welsh Women's Aid is a national umbrella organisation representing local women's aid groups situated throughout Wales. Welsh Women's Aid can provide specialist training, support and information to member groups and outside organisations.

### **Women's Aid**

[www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk)

Women's Aid is the national domestic abuse charity that helps up to 250,000 women and children every year.

They work to end violence against women and children and support over 500 domestic and sexual violence services across the country.

### **Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland**

[www.womensaidni.org](http://www.womensaidni.org)

Welsh Women's Aid is the leading voluntary organisation in Northern Ireland addressing domestic abuse and providing services for women and children.

## **National helplines**

### **England**

24-hour National Domestic Violence Freephone Helpline – 0808 2000 247

This is run by Women's Aid and Refuge

### **Northern Ireland**

Northern Ireland 24-hour domestic abuse helpline – 0800 917 1414

### **Scotland**

Scottish Domestic Abuse Helpline – 0800 027 1234

### **Wales**

24-hour All Wales Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Helpline – [www.allwaleshelpline.org.uk](http://www.allwaleshelpline.org.uk)

Tel: 0808 80 10 800

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