

# Supporting employees experiencing domestic abuse

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## Introduction

Domestic abuse is often a pattern of abusive behaviour/incidents that goes on for a period of time. It's not limited to physical violence, it can include repeated patterns of abusive behaviour to maintain power and control in a relationship, known as coercive control. It can also include economic/financial abuse.

Women are most likely to experience domestic abuse, but men also experience it and domestic abuse also occurs in same-sex relationships.

Anyone who works for the EIS who experiences abuse will be supported as much as we can as their employer, regardless of the type of abuse. The EIS recognises that it is important not to make assumptions about what someone might be experiencing or the gender of the perpetrator.

We will work hard to foster a supportive workplace culture where employees feel able to talk openly about their experiences if they wish to.

This guidance is based on the documentation created by the Equality & Human Rights Commission and the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

## Scope

This guidance covers all employees, students and temporary workers, regardless of their length of service.

## Domestic abuse in the workplace

Research finds that 75% of those enduring domestic abuse are targeted at work. 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:

- Through threatening phone calls and emails
- Travelling to and from work
- The employee's performance, attendance, career prospects and job security
- Colleagues can experience threatening or intimidating behaviour from the perpetrator

However, and 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.

## Duty of care

The EIS has a duty of care for the health, safety and wellbeing of our employees and to create a safe and supportive workplace environment.

If domestic abuse is disclosed, where possible, working environments will provide flexible and adaptable measures that meet the needs of an individual 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 LGBTQ+) 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 may will be different and that any measures will only be used with the authorisation/consent of the individual concerned.

The EIS will take all reasonable steps possible to prevent an employee from being targeted by their abuser at work.

## Framework of support

There is a framework of support the EIS will adopt which consists of four key steps:

- Step 1 Recognising the problem
- Step 2 Responding appropriately to disclosure
- Step 3 Providing support
- Step 4 Referring to the appropriate help

### *Recognising the problem (Step 1)*

Domestic abuse is often a hidden problem and individuals can find it very difficult to disclose. It may manifest itself in the following ways:

- frequent absence from work, lateness or needing to leave work early
- reduced quality and quantity of work or missing deadlines
- spending an increased number of hours at work for no reason
- changes in the way an employee communicates - a large number of personal calls or texts or a strong reaction to personal calls
- physical signs and symptoms such as unexplained or frequent bruises or other injuries
- excessive clothing on a hot day
- changes in the amount of make-up worn
  
- changes in social behaviour, for example, not turning up to work social activities
- obsession with leaving work on time.

Suspicious that an employee is experiencing domestic abuse must be treated in a careful, balanced and sensitive manner where no evidence is available. The line manager should facilitate a conversation to discuss the issue on a general level.

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.

Care will be taken when raising concerns with people working from home, as the abuser might be monitoring the employee's email or other methods of communication.

If an employee is clearly distressed but will not confide in their line manager then they should suggest that the employee contacts the Employee Assistance Programme LifeWorks or the HR department.

### *Respond appropriately to disclosure (Step 2)*

Individuals will be shown empathy and compassion when they disclose they are experiencing domestic abuse. The individual will not be asked for proof.

Assumptions will not be made about what someone is experiencing or what they need. This includes not assuming the gender of someone's partner.

The EIS understands how domestic abuse may affect an individual's work performance and will provide support and understanding during this difficult time.

In terms of practical assistance, the line manager will:

- arrange for the employee's telephone number to be changed if the employee is receiving harassing telephone calls
- agree with the employee how they should respond if the perpetrator attends the workplace
- ensure that the employee does not work alone or in an isolated area
- check that the employee has arrangements for safe travel between home and the workplace
- keep a record of incidents which occur in the workplace, e.g. harassing telephone calls or visits
- consider a temporary change to the employee's working patterns.

In cases where both the survivor and perpetrator of domestic abuse/violence work for the EIS, appropriate action will be taken, including:

- considering utilising different work locations both within the building at which the employees work, or another work location, working hours, work patterns etc
- minimising the potential for the perpetrator to use their position or work resources to find out details about the whereabouts of the survivor
- offering impartial support and where possible ensure both the survivor and perpetrator have different Line Managers who are able to provide appropriate information to each party
- using code-words or signals to communicate with the affected employee and associate those words/signals with an action – for example, a white sheet of paper taped to the corner of their computer screen could indicate that the employee has been receiving threats from the perpetrator and a manager needs to intervene and have the perpetrator removed from the building
- depending on the severity of the case, you may need to contact the police if violent threats are being made.

### *Providing support (Step 3)*

Line managers will meet regularly with their employee so they can raise any concerns and discuss what support they might need, including what the best method of communication will be. The support required may change over time so this will need to be regularly reviewed.

Support may include: temporary change in hours, salary payment to an alternative bank account, authorisation to take an increased amount of leave and the period of homeworking be terminated, in line with the latest coronavirus guidelines.

Where possible, the EIS will respect the wishes of the employee if they want the information to remain confidential. Line 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 LGBTQ+ community, where individuals might not have disclosed their sexual orientation and/or gender identity to their work colleagues. Please also refer to the confidentiality section below.

The EIS understands that employees may need to take leave at short notice, as they often need the flexibility to deal with issues arising from their situation, for example, attending court hearings or medical appointments.

The EIS will support the wellbeing of all employees (line managers, or colleagues) involved in supporting domestic abuse survivors. The employee assistance programme which is provided by LifeWorks have a 24 hour counselling helpline, **0800 169 1920**.

#### *Referring to the appropriate help (Step 4)*

There are different organisations that deal specifically with domestic abuse, who can provide support both to survivors and those individuals who have provided support. These resources are listed in Appendix 1, page 8.

Line managers will signpost individuals to the employee assistance programme, LifeWorks, but it is not their responsibility to adopt the role of counsellor.

## **Confidentiality**

In some cases, an employee may seek to confide in their line manager or a member of the HR team 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.

There are, however, 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 EIS needs to protect the safety of its employees.

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

## **Perpetrators of domestic abuse**

The EIS will not tolerate domestic abuse by its employees, nor use of EIS equipment to carry out such abuse and this will be made clear to the perpetrator. The EIS will take seriously any allegations towards an employee of domestic abuse and investigations may lead to disciplinary action being taken in line with the EIS disciplinary policy.

When speaking with an alleged perpetrator of domestic abuse, a manager should, if considered necessary, take measures to ensure their own safety such as taking a colleague to a discussion.

If both the individual experiencing domestic abuse and the perpetrator work for the EIS, measures will be taken to reduce the impact, for example:

- reassigning duties/roles and
- restricting the perpetrator's access to information about the person they are targeting.

Confidential records will be kept of any disclosure or action taken in relation to an alleged perpetrator of domestic abuse.

## Appendix 1

The [Bright Sky App](#) which provides a service directory for survivors

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

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

**Hestia – National domestic abuse helpline** - 0808 2000 247

**National Rape Crisis Helpline** – 0808 802 9999

**ManKind Initiative:** 01823 334 244

**Samaritans:** 116 123

**Galop, the LGBTQ+ anti-violence charity**, has produced a factsheet on domestic violence and abuse and the LGBTQ+ community.