



employers'
initiative
on domestic abuse



A guide for
**domestic abuse
champions**

This guide is for Domestic Abuse Champions — and those considering becoming one. Your role is an important part of our organisation's workplace domestic abuse response.

The role of the Domestic Abuse Champion

As a Domestic Abuse Champion, you have an important part to play in our organisation's workplace domestic abuse response. You are being asked to be a confidential first point of contact, to lead the person through what support is offered within the organisation and to signpost to external services.

This information pack provides background information and guidance to help you understand and develop your skills:

- The role of the Domestic Abuse Champion
- Key skills for a Domestic Abuse Champion
- Understanding domestic abuse
- Domestic abuse in the workplace
- Responding to a colleague experiencing domestic abuse: Recognise, Respond, Refer
- Responding to perpetrators.



Domestic Abuse Champions are asked to:

- Become alert to the signs of domestic abuse — see [Recognise the signs](#).
- Be ready for a conversation with a colleague who is experiencing domestic abuse — see [Respond appropriately](#).
- Be able to signpost to further support provided internally and the external services most appropriate for each person— see [Refer to help and support](#).
- You may be asked to respond to perpetrators. See [Responding to Perpetrators](#).
- Be willing to have your details publicised within our organisation, for example on the intranet.
- Help to create a supportive and non-judgemental environment where colleagues experiencing abuse feel encouraged to come forward.

This role does not mean you are on call. You are not expected to become a specialist in handling domestic abuse. Typically, you will respond to someone when they make contact, or arrange to meet them somewhere safe for them to talk to you. You may have follow-up meetings to discuss their needs and options and to signpost them to support.

Develop and maintain an understanding of domestic abuse and our organisation's workplace response by:

- Attending any training we may provide in addition to this guide.
- Developing an understanding of our workplace response and the team implementing it, including the related policy, any related awareness and training campaigns, and the specialist services that are available to employees. See [Understanding domestic abuse](#).
- Keeping up with developments in domestic abuse. The Employers' Initiative on Domestic Abuse (EIDA.org.uk) provides support to help you do this, including events and regular email updates.

It is important to understand the boundaries in terms of what you can and cannot do.

- Share knowledge and experience with other Champions.
- This can be a challenging role and it is helpful to keep in touch with other Domestic Abuse Champions in our organisation. It is recommended that you meet regularly. You can also consider buddying up with another Champion.

Immediate threat to life

If you are in a situation where there is immediate threat to life or harm to children, contact the police on 999 and follow their advice on next steps.

Key skills for Domestic Abuse Champions

People with a range of backgrounds and experience can be Domestic Abuse Champions. However, it is important that you have, and can continue to develop, skills in these areas:

- Active listening
- Being non-judgmental / open-minded
- Implementing confidentiality, safeguarding, and recording policies
- Empowering others
- Being empathetic and able to ask appropriate questions — and avoiding inappropriate questions like 'why didn't you just leave?'
- Providing a safe space
- Understanding and providing options, but not telling someone what to do.

Don't blame yourself if you don't spot the signs; avoid the sense of guilt that you should have done more, you don't have all the answers. For people experiencing domestic abuse, sometimes their safest way is by looking fine and pretending everything is okay. They are highly skilled at masking signs.

EIDA Ambassador Andrew Lane

Understanding domestic abuse

As a Domestic Abuse Champion, it is important to have a broad understanding of what behaviour is defined as domestic abuse. A common misconception persists that domestic abuse solely involves physical violence by an intimate partner, but it can take many more forms than this.

Domestic abuse is defined in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 as abusive behaviour which one person exhibits towards another. It takes place between two people aged 16 years or over who are personally connected. This could, for example, include people who are (or previously have been) married or in a civil partnership or an intimate personal relationship, or who have a child together. It could also include people who are related to each other, like parents and children, siblings, and in-laws.

Children are also recognised as victims of domestic abuse if they witness or experience the effects of domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse can affect anyone, regardless of their gender identity, sex, age, race, disability, sexual orientation, background, or their role or seniority.

Domestic abuse may be a single incident, or a pattern of behaviour. Behaviour is considered abusive if it consists of any of the following:



physical or sexual abuse



violent or threatening behaviour



controlling or coercive behaviour



economic abuse



**psychological, emotional,
or other abuse**

Examples of abusive behaviours

Controlling behaviour can be a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent. This can include isolating them from their normal sources of support (for example, not allowing them to see friends and family), depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance, and escape (for example, not allowing them to drive, or selling their vehicle) and regulating their everyday behaviour (for example, some victim-survivors are locked in their homes when not working).

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 another person. Examples include undermining and abusing someone when in the company of others, or threatening to share personal information with colleagues or family members.

Economic (including financial) abuse means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on a person's ability to acquire, use, or maintain money or other property, or obtain goods or services. For example, some victim-survivors are forced to pay their salary into their abuser's account and then are given no access to money.

Technology-facilitated abuse involves the use of technology to perpetrate domestic abuse and has become increasingly common. Mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets can be misused to stalk, harass, impersonate, and threaten victims. In the workplace, some examples of technology-facilitated abuse include hacking into, monitoring, or controlling email accounts, coercing the victim into sharing their passwords, limiting or controlling access to the internet or other equipment, or using GPS locators on items such as phones and computers to track someone's movements.

Domestic abuse can also include so called 'honour'-based abuse, female genital mutilation (FGM), and forced marriage.

Domestic abuse in the workplace



Prevalence: 1 in 4 women, 1 in 7 men and 1 in 6/7 transgender people experience domestic abuse in their lifetimes. This means it is highly likely that colleagues in our organisation are experiencing domestic abuse today. It also means that we are likely to have people who abuse family members within our organisation.

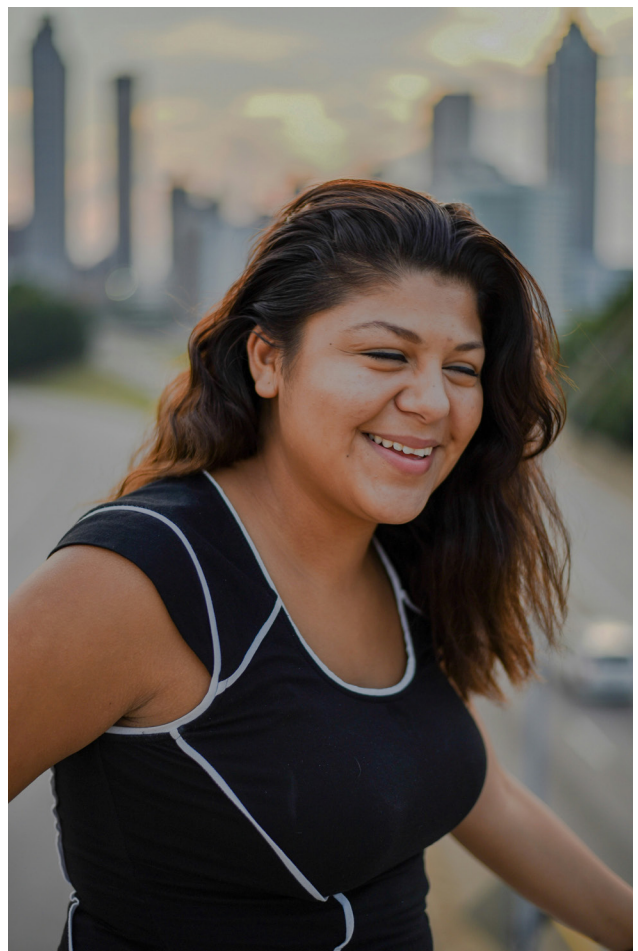


Impact on work: Domestic abuse often follows the person being abused into the workplace. Trades Union Congress (TUC)¹ research found that **over 1 in 10 people** experiencing domestic abuse reported that the abuse continued in the workplace.

This may happen through abusive emails or phone calls. Abusers may come to someone's place of work or stalk them outside their place of work. The person being abused and the abuser may even work for the same organisation. When a person is experiencing domestic abuse the control may not stop when the person goes to work.

Even if the abuser does not pursue their victim at work or enter the workplace, domestic abuse often impacts a person's ability to work and to be productive.

¹ Domestic Violence and Workplace – a TUC Report
<https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/domestic-violence-and-workplace>



Responding to a colleague experiencing domestic abuse — Recognise, Respond, Refer

When responding to a person experiencing domestic abuse, it is helpful to follow the Recognise, Respond, Refer framework.

Recognise the signs

As a Domestic Abuse Champion, it is useful to develop an awareness of the range of behaviours and signs that someone might exhibit when they are experiencing domestic abuse. However, it may be difficult to spot these as they are often hidden.

Victim-survivors do not expect you to know everything but would like you to have some knowledge and to signpost them to help. Listening and showing understanding is very important.

EIDA Ambassador Charlotte Budd

The possible signs of domestic abuse include:



Work productivity impacted:

- Regular interruptions from a current or former partner or family member at work, including phone calls, texts, emails, and turning up at the workplace or at external events uninvited or unexpectedly
- Regular or sudden absenteeism including medical problems or arriving late/leaving work early without explanation.



Behaviour or demeanour:

- An obsession with leaving work on time or anxious if asked to stay late
- Spending an increased number of hours at work for no reason, and a reluctance to go home
- Appearing isolated from family, friends, colleagues, and social networks
- Sudden and sustained changes in behaviour or performance at work (for example, becoming quiet, withdrawn, emotional, or angry).



Physical signs:

- Unusual changes in appearance (for example, heavy clothing in the summer, long sleeves and/or heavy make-up)
- Injuries with inconsistent or no explanation
- Fatigue or sleep disorders.

Of course, many of these signs may not be related to domestic abuse and each situation should be considered on its own merits.

If you're contactable 24 hours a day, you're accountable 24 hours a day.

EIDA Ambassador Sharon Livermore

Why don't people don't share their experience of domestic abuse?

It is often very difficult for someone to tell another person that they are experiencing domestic abuse. There are many reasons why they find it hard to disclose what they are going through. These may include:

- A fear that they will not be believed
- Not recognising that what they are experiencing is domestic abuse
- A fear of the abuser finding out that they have spoken to someone
- Feeling embarrassed
- Concerns about keeping their job
- Fear of being forced to report to the police.

Respond appropriately

Your overall approach as a Domestic Abuse Champion to those that come to you for advice is to listen, show understanding, provide reassurance, and signpost to support (internal and external).

Your approach and behaviour

When someone approaches you as a Domestic Abuse Champion asking for advice, suggest that you go somewhere quiet and comfortable to speak in private. If the person works from home, suggest meeting for a walk or at a safe space.

Try to maintain an open posture — for example, do not fold your arms or cross your legs. Be sensitive to body language that may make the person feel threatened by invasion of personal space — for example, leaning forward or touching. Make it clear that you will be led by them on the pace and extent of the conversation. Be prepared for them to be upset and tearful. Allow plenty of time and space for them to speak.

At the beginning of the meeting, confirm the confidentiality of what is said. Any information will only be disclosed to others if it is absolutely necessary in providing help and support and with the prior agreement of the person who has disclosed. The exception to this is if you believe there is an imminent threat to life, harm of children, or threat against the employer. At that point, you must contact the police and follow their advice.



Use of language and possible questions

Be thoughtful about your choice of language. For example, people experiencing domestic abuse may not identify as or wish to be referred to as a 'victim'. Try to avoid expressing personal opinions, or unsolicited advice, and avoid language that indicates blame or fault, such as questions like **"Why don't you just leave?"** or **"Why haven't you told anyone before?"**

Begin by asking indirect questions, to establish an empathetic relationship.

For example:

- How are you doing at the moment?
- Your wellbeing is important to me and I've noticed that you seem distracted/upset at the moment — are you okay?
- If there's anything you'd like to talk to me about at any time, I'm always here to support you.
- You don't have to tell me anything, but please know that I would like to support you if and when you feel ready.

Acknowledge the courage of the employee and how difficult it must be to talk about this.

Your response

Domestic Abuse Champions are not expected to be experts but it's important to be aware that the traumatic nature of domestic abuse can have deep and wide-ranging effects on a person's mental health. A person may exhibit behaviours that, on the surface, may not initially make sense to you. Here are some ways to ensure a trauma-informed response:

- Believe a colleague when they disclose to you.
- Reassure them that the abuse isn't their fault and they aren't to blame.
- Prioritise their safety.
- Ask them how you can help or what support they need. They know their situation best and how to keep themselves safe.

- It is critical that details of the situation are only shared on a need-to-know basis, and not shared unnecessarily. If there is a threat to life, then you must act (call 999) and it will not be possible to keep all details confidential, so don't promise to keep it a secret.

Explain practical measures available

You can explain the possible practical support that the organisation can offer, where appropriate. Ensure you familiarise yourself with what is available within our organisation. For example:

If the person is telling you in your official capacity and is seeking help, then you do need to record details ... you may be called upon to provide evidence in any investigations by the police or in court procedures related to the domestic abuse.





Adjustments to working conditions:

- Temporary adjustments to their work patterns, hours or duties (for example, to attend court hearings, counselling, or other appointments)
- Adjustments to arrival and departure times
- Time away from work (paid or unpaid)
- Moving to a different work location
- Ensuring that the employee does not work alone, where possible.

Future safe communications:

- Changing the employee's work mobile phone number
- Ensuring that you have the number of a trusted family member or friend you can call if you are unable to contact the employee
- Agreeing a safe, confidential means of communication or a phrase or codeword that the employee can use if it's not safe to talk
- Making specific provision for those working from home by ensuring daily contact with at least one colleague.

Financial measures:

- Providing an advance on the employee's salary to deal with emergency issues, or a loan or one-off payment to assist the employee to become financially and physically independent from the person or people abusing them
- Ensuring financial independence (for example, where is the person's salary being paid?)

Checklist to cover:

Make sure that you agree:

- The steps necessary to ensure they remain safe whether in the workplace or working remotely, in case a perpetrator suspects they may have reported the abuse
- For them to supply an up-to-date emergency contact number for a trusted friend or family member
- For them to keep a record of any incidents of abuse in the workplace, including persistent telephone calls, emails, or visits to the employee
- What to tell colleagues (if anything) about their situation
- How they want colleagues to respond if the abusive person contacts or visits the workplace
- Next steps and what can and cannot be shared.



Decide whether to keep a record

It is important to decide whether you need to keep a record. Firstly, consider the type of conversation you are having: if the person just wants to share with you off the record, and is uncomfortable with notes being taken, then consider not taking formal notes. Check whether our organisation requires you to keep an anonymised record that a domestic abuse-related conversation took place.

If the person is telling you in your official capacity and is seeking help, then you do need to record details. In this case, it is important to make a record of the conversation as you may be called upon to provide evidence in any investigations by the police or in court procedures related to the domestic abuse. Tell the person in advance that the note will be kept in a safe, confidential place.

Follow these guidelines when recording disclosures of domestic abuse:

- All notes must be clear and accurate, and include dates, times, and locations.
- The note should be factual recordings of what has been said. The note should not include speculation or the views of the person making the note.
- A copy of the note should be shared with the employee, if they agree.
- Explain exactly what has been recorded, where it will be held, who will have access to this information, and how long the information will be retained for.

Follow these guidelines for retaining notes:

- Consider carefully how you title/save documents and emails.
- Notes should be retained in a safe location and must comply with relevant data protection regulations, such as GDPR, including any additional protections required for sensitive personal data (for example, password protection).
- Notes should not be included in an employee's personal record (for example, within a Human Resources system) unless linked to their employment (for example, if it forms part of a disciplinary disclosure, or if an abuser is on bail or suspended from work because of domestic abuse).
- Notes should only be retained for as long as is necessary in accordance with GDPR.

It is important to remember that the workplace and its systems may provide a safe and secure place for the employee to keep a record of the abuse they are experiencing at home, which may assist for evidence-gathering purposes for the police or other agencies.

**Refer to appropriate help and support**

If someone reveals to you that they are experiencing domestic abuse, your priority is to ensure the safety and wellbeing of them, their family, and, potentially, other employees. Once this is established, the next step is to refer them to the support available internally and signpost them to where they can receive confidential and specialist services externally.

Internal support

As a Domestic Abuse Champion, familiarise yourself with the support available within our organisation. For example, this might be:

- A named person in Human Resources — who can help further with the practical support available from the organisation
- Our Employee Assistance Programme
- Counselling services.

External domestic abuse helplines and services

There is an extensive range of specialist helplines and support services available for those experiencing domestic abuse. There are local and national services specialising in providing support for people based on their gender identity, heritage, sexual orientation, or disability, and for different types of domestic abuse. Independent Domestic Abuse Advisors (IDVAs) are a useful point of contact for champions. You could contact your local IDVA service for advice if needed, as well as make referrals.

Remember, if you are calling any service on behalf of someone else, you need their consent. They might not be ready to talk to a domestic abuse service, they may have just wanted to tell someone.



For the service that meets your requirements most closely, visit the EIDA Directory of Support Services web page:

- <http://www.eida.org.uk/resources/directory-support-services>

If you need immediate help because a colleague has told you they are being abused, you can contact:

- Hestia Respond to Abuse Advice Line on 020 3879 3695
- Adviceline.EB@hestia.org

This service is provided by specialist charity Hestia and is available to any business or organisation in the UK that would like free support, guidance, or information about domestic abuse and how to support employees.

Find support using the Bright Sky app

Bright Sky is a free app for anyone experiencing domestic abuse or worried about someone else. It helps you spot the signs, suggests how to respond, and provides direct links and phone numbers for support local to you. You can download it onto your mobile phone from the app store or access the website version: <https://www.hestia.org/brightsky>

The workplace may be an employee's only safe space. You should consider allowing external support services to come to the workplace and discuss options with the employee in a confidential setting, particularly if there is a risk that the abuser may be monitoring the employee's movements through their mobile phone or another device.

Bright Sky is a free app for anyone experiencing domestic abuse or worried about someone else. It helps you spot the signs, suggests how to respond and provides direct links and phone numbers for support local to you.

Responding to Perpetrators

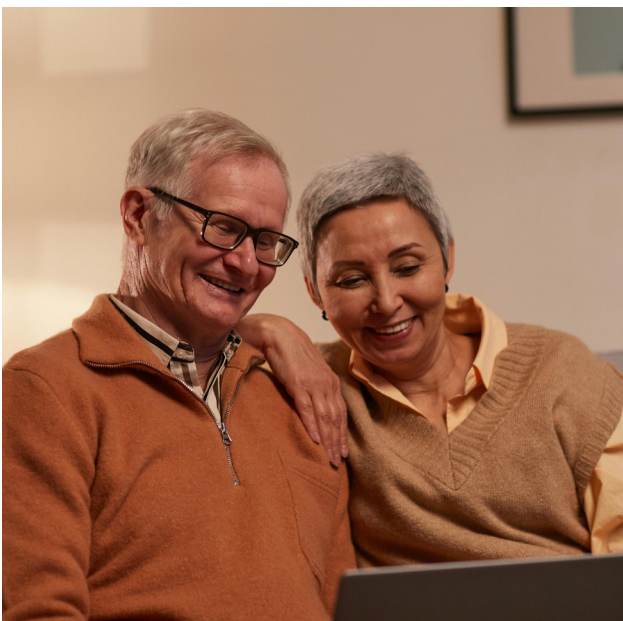
Perpetrators rarely come forward seeking support. However, if they do come forward it is often the result of an incident occurring, such as a partner leaving, the perpetrator being arrested, or family or friends becoming aware of the abuse.

Signs that someone may be a perpetrator

You should also be aware of signs that an employee is using abusive behaviours:

- Negative comments made by the abuser about a partner, ex-partner, or family member.
- Expressing anger and blaming their partner, ex-partner, or family member for issues.
- Constant text messaging or telephoning a partner, ex-partner, or family member, or if working remotely, referencing their partner's behaviour.
- Repeated injuries such as scratches, bite marks, or bruised knuckles.

However, it is not usually possible to assess whether someone is a perpetrator based solely on their outward behaviour: they often behave pleasantly to people other than the person they are abusing.



How to respond to a perpetrator

If you believe there is immediate threat to life, contact the police.

When meeting with a perpetrator:

- Ensure that your own safety is not compromised. Take another staff member with you or meet in a public place.
- Remember that the safety and support for the victim-survivor is the priority in any action taken.
- Be careful of being sympathetic or empathic to their situation or excusing their behaviour, but aim to have a non-judgemental response.
- Be clear that abuse is always unacceptable and that it may constitute criminal behaviour.
- Explain our organisation's workplace domestic abuse perpetrator policy. This may include:
 - This organisation does not tolerate domestic abuse and considers that perpetrators should be held accountable for their actions.
 - The safety of victim-survivors, their families, and other employees is central to any action taken to deal with perpetrators.
 - If an employee commits domestic abuse at work or outside work, there is the potential for disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal. Note there does not need to be a criminal conviction for it to be considered fair to deal with an employee who is a perpetrator of domestic abuse, in the workplace.
 - There may be options to signpost the support provided by our organisation or by external specialists.

Priority actions to take when responding to a perpetrator

In the event of a perpetrator disclosing abuse, your priority is to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the person experiencing the abuse and their family members. Consider what support can be provided to them in the workplace or externally.

Additionally, consider the risk and impact of the perpetrator's behaviour on other employees. Assess this risk and take appropriate action to reduce or eliminate it. Be very careful about disclosing information to the perpetrator – for example, information about where the victim-survivor is, how they can be contacted, or when they are going home.

If the perpetrator is targeting an employee

Steps must be taken to mitigate further risks to the victim and other employees. These may include reassigning duties and restricting the perpetrator's access to information about the person they are targeting. Some actions may require coordination between managers which should be done in consultation with the person being abused.

Help for the perpetrator

Our perpetrator policy may enable you to signpost your employees to specialist services. There are a range of perpetrator programmes available – but be aware that provision across the UK is patchy and there is no guarantee of being able to change someone's behaviour. The success of these programmes is primarily measured by the resulting impact on the safety of the victim-survivor.

The charity Respect works with perpetrators of domestic abuse. Contact their Make a Change team via their website: www.makeachange.uk.net

