



employers'
initiative
on domestic abuse

Domestic abuse:
**A guide for
managers**

This guide is to **support managers** as part of our organisation's workplace domestic abuse response. It provides background information and guidance to help you respond effectively.

You are not expected to be an expert in domestic abuse

It's important to say from the outset that as a manager, you are not expected to be an expert in domestic abuse. What matters most is that you have an understanding of domestic abuse, are aware of the resources and support within our workplace, and know where to direct a member of your team for assistance. Your awareness will contribute to the development of a workplace environment that encourages people to come forward.

The role of managers in our workplace domestic abuse response

As a manager, your role extends beyond professional performance to ensuring the overall wellbeing of your team. Therefore, you play a crucial role in our workplace domestic abuse response. You can:

Enable people experiencing domestic abuse to continue working

For people experiencing domestic abuse, work can often be their only safe space. It is critical that they are able to continue working and this often requires the support of their manager.



Help create a safe environment

You can help to create a supportive and non-judgemental environment where colleagues experiencing abuse feel encouraged to come forward. It may take several times of asking before someone is comfortable telling someone what is happening to them.

Create opportunities for people experiencing abuse to seek help

You can be alert to any changes in behaviour and signs of domestic abuse. You can use regular interactions with your team to raise any concerns. For example:

- During day-to-day communications, take opportunities to ask if a team member is okay and whether they need to talk.
- During return-to-work interviews after sick leave or holidays, you can ask how things are, including at home.
- For those working at home, ask about the safety of their home environment. Or encourage them to meet with you face to face in a safe place for a work-related reason and take the opportunity to ask how things are.

Be aware of our domestic abuse policy

It is helpful to understand our organisation's domestic abuse policy, related awareness and training campaigns, and the specialist services that are available to employees. But it's also fine to say that you need to look up the details when needed.

Be ready to support a team member experiencing domestic abuse

When responding to a team member experiencing domestic abuse, it is helpful to follow the Recognise, Respond, Refer framework explained fully in this guide.

Key facts about domestic abuse

Domestic abuse affects people of all backgrounds, regardless of age, gender identity, race, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, or their role or seniority. It includes coercive and controlling behaviour, and economic and verbal abuse, as well as physical violence.



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 impacts all aspects of someone's life, including at work, affecting overall well-being and potentially having a negative impact on their ability to concentrate, their performance, and their attendance at work.



Barriers to Disclosure: Fear of the abuser, fear of not being believed, shame, and concerns about job security often prevent people from seeking help. Some people may not recognise that they are being abused where the abusive behaviour has become normalised.

Responding to a team member experiencing domestic abuse — using the Recognise, Respond, Refer framework

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

It is important to bear in mind that it takes an immense effort for someone to tell another person that they are experiencing domestic abuse. Your team member will have many concerns and these might include whether they will keep their job or a fear of being forced to report to the police. On average, a person experiences abuse 50 times before seeking help.¹ How you react when they choose to tell you can determine everything that happens afterwards.

¹ SafeLives: How long do people live with domestic abuse, and when do they get help to stop it? www.safelives.org.uk/policy-evidence/about-domestic-abuse/how-long-do-people-live-domestic-abuse-and-when-do-they-get

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.





Recognise the signs

As a manager, the first time you may become aware that one of your team members is experiencing domestic abuse may be during performance management discussions. However, it may be difficult to spot the signs as they are often hidden.

“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

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 them 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
- Requesting 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

Respond appropriately

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

“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

Use of language and possible questions

Take care with 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 providing 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. 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 your team member and how difficult it must be to talk about this.

Your response

Managers 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. Don’t be overly concerned by inconsistencies in their story or their inability to remember details. 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 the practical support 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. If you are not clear on what is available, you can tell your team member this and say you need time to find out more.

For example:

Adjustments to work:

- 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:

- What steps might be 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 your team member just wants to share with you off the record, and is uncomfortable with notes being taken, then consider not taking formal notes. Our organisation may require you to keep an anonymised record that a domestic abuse-related conversation took place.

If your team member is telling you in your official capacity as their manager 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.

If your team member is telling you in your official capacity as their manager and is seeking help, then you do need to record details.

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. You can also provide temporary secure storage for key documents, such as passports, bank account details, and property deeds.

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, of 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.

Managers should also be aware of the support available within the organisation. For example, this might be:

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

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.

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 specialised in providing support for people based on their gender identity, heritage, sexual orientation or disability and for different types of domestic abuse.

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

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

eida.org.uk/resources/directory-support-services

The workplace may often be an employee's only safe space. Managers 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.



