

Five tips on communication in the workplace about domestic abuse



1 Be inclusive

There are many myths about what domestic abuse is and who it happens to. Make it clear in your communication that domestic abuse can happen to anyone. 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime.

Other key messages can be that domestic abuse isn't always physical, and that talking about it is an act of courage and strength. People may face many barriers to leaving abusive relationships. We recommend using the term "domestic abuse" rather than "domestic violence" or "gender violence" to reflect the diverse experiences of abuse. Use gender-neutral language where possible. If you use images in your communication, make sure they represent a variety of people. Try to avoid stereotypical imagery such as bruises and fists.



2 Reach your audience

Where do your employees spend most of their time? Are you an office-based or field-based organisation? For the former, avenues of communication could include intranet pages, newsletters, and webinars. For the latter, physical posters and in-person meetings or trainings might be best.

Make sure that support services are clearly signposted and accessible to all. The National Domestic Abuse Helpline is operated by Refuge and is available for both women and men, however, you may also wish to signpost to the Men's Advice Line. Most organisations will employ perpetrators of abuse as well as victim-survivors. We recommend addressing perpetrators in your communications as well, for example by signposting to the Respect phoneline, which helps perpetrators stop their abusive behaviour.



3 Use external campaigns

Running an awareness-raising campaign about domestic abuse doesn't mean you reinventing the wheel. Most organisations in the domestic abuse sector publish free-to-use materials for annual campaigns, such as 16 Days of Activism and Domestic Abuse Awareness Month.

By tagging onto existing campaigns and awareness days, you can access high-quality resources and keep domestic abuse on the agenda throughout the year.



4 Harness the power of events

Domestic abuse can be a very isolating experience for victim-survivors. By hosting events that bring people together to talk about domestic abuse, you can break the silence and create a sense of collective responsibility to tackle the issue head on.

Having senior leaders talk about their commitment to taking effective action on domestic abuse sends a strong message and inspires others. Storytelling and survivor testimonials are also effective ways to engage hearts as well as minds. Organising an event is a great way to announce the launch of your workplace response to domestic abuse. Be prepared to receive disclosures following these events, and make sure you have support ready for them.



5 Keep the conversation alive

By the time you have finished reading this short guide, the police will have received two new reports of domestic abuse. Domestic abuse happens in every country every day, and it is vital to raise awareness consistently as opposed to a one-off event.

Identify as many avenues of communication as you can and have regular conversations across your organisation about what you can do to tackle domestic abuse. Take an active stand both internally and externally, including discussions with partners, customers, and supply chains, encouraging them to support their employees impacted by domestic abuse.