

EIDA Conference 2024 session summary

Employers as enablers of a joined-up response to domestic abuse

This is a summary of our 2024 Conference panel session about the role of employers as enablers of a joined-up response to domestic abuse. The session was chaired by Catherine Hearn, HR Director, EMEA, Amazon Web Services. The speakers were: Andrew Wadey, Detective Superintendent - Lead Responsible Officer for Domestic Abuse and Stalking, Metropolitan Police; Jaswant Narwal, Chief Crown Prosecutor, Crown Prosecution Service; Georgina Hamblin, Founding Partner, Hamblin Family Law; Andrew Lane, EIDA Ambassador; and Susie McDonald, CEO, Tender. You can watch the session [here](#).

How do the police respond to domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is a significant driver of policing demand. In London alone, it accounts for 150 000 incidents per year, resulting in around 100 000 criminal investigations by over 1200 MET police officers. Employers are a crucial part of the response to domestic abuse, given that we spend a third of our lives at work. Police officers use a risk assessment tool to assess the risk to the victim-survivor from the behaviour of the abuser. This may lead to arrests, sometimes against the wishes of the victim-survivor, who will often be referred to specialist support. As well as providing a safe space and a range of support, employers may have evidence relevant to a criminal investigation and subsequent prosecution.

What is the role of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) in relation to domestic abuse?

The CPS is independent from the police but works closely with them on domestic abuse cases. There is a high standard for criminal evidence used to pursue a prosecution, and there is almost always a public interest to pursue a case. The CPS prosecutes around 50 000 of the 2.1 million incidents of domestic abuse each year, which are the cases where standards for evidence has been met and victim-survivors are willing and able to support a prosecution. Employers can support an investigation by sharing evidence of first-hand accounts, where a victim-survivor has disclosed their experiences to someone at work. With the consent of the victim-survivor, employers should provide this evidence to the police investigation. If a victim-survivor is unwilling or unable to support a prosecution, the CPS can still carry out an evidence-led prosecution based on the available evidence on behalf of the state.

The issue of court backlogs is currently highly contentious and risks undermining public confidence in the court system. However, most domestic abuse cases are heard in the

Magistrates Courts rather than Crown Courts, and the wait is shorter. It is important that employers are aware of court timelines, and of orders and bail conditions relating to an employee being investigated for domestic abuse offences.

The statutory definition of domestic abuse in England and Wales (which can be found [here](#)) is robust and covers a range of abusive behaviours. Crucially, it covers family relationships as well as romantic partnerships.

✚ **Key EIDA Resource:** [Collection, storage, and use of data](#) about domestic abuse and [how to handle disclosures of domestic abuse](#).

What is a lawyer's perspective on the role of the employer in supporting someone affected by domestic abuse?

Employers can provide a crucial first point of contact and a safe space for someone who discloses abuse, many of whom will not pursue the case in court. A lawyer may collaborate with the police to secure non-molestation orders and other court orders to remove the perpetrator from the victim-survivor and their children. This can be a lengthy process – often around 18 months - and employers can offer support and flexibility to help their employee through that process. Confidentiality is essential to maintain employee privacy. Court legal fees can be expensive, and employers can signpost their people to [Courtney Legal](#) as a resource for employees. It is a monthly £25 subscription and gives them access to digestible information about the court process.

The signs employers typically see among those affected are changes in behaviour or performance, receiving constant texts or calls at work, not attending social events, not coming to the office, or keeping their cameras off during online meetings. Greater awareness is needed particularly around economic abuse, and employers are uniquely placed to spot this and offer help – for example by paying the employee's salary into an individual rather than joint account. Regardless of whether the victim-survivor wants to pursue a legal case, employers should support their safety and wellbeing.

What is the experience of a survivor going through these processes?

EIDA Ambassador, Andrew Lane, explained that it took seven years to go through the full processes of building a case with the police, securing a criminal conviction, and later dealing with post-separation abuse, including through the Family Court. The practical impacts entailed handing over his mobile phone to the police for several weeks, and a very significant amount of time to liaise with agencies and to attend hearings. He had very little control over his time and faced a large financial burden to cover the cost of proceedings. Emotionally, the recovery from trauma was tough. "Few abusers go quietly", and in his case, the post-separation abuse often required police intervention.

The proceedings also place considerable demands on children, while the victim-survivor is trying to provide a sense of normality for them. Domestic abuse sends shockwaves through a childhood - children are often used as levers of abuse given to their proximity to the primary victim-survivor - and the trauma revisits them in new ways as they grow older. Employers can make a big difference by providing flexibility for affected employees with children or for employees who have grown up witnessing domestic abuse.

🚩 **Key EIDA Resource:** [Six things I wish every employer knew](#) about domestic abuse by Andrew Lane

How can employers help prevent domestic abuse?

Education about healthy relationships should happen in schools, but there is also a place for education in the workplace. Employers have a role to play in supporting employees affected by abuse who are in crisis, but also in breaking down stigma and normalising conversations about domestic abuse. This is achieved through fostering a workplace culture where people feel safe to come forward and providing a safe place for people to access support when they need it. This also sends a signal to perpetrators that domestic abuse is not tolerated. Educating the entire workforce about the prevalence of domestic abuse, spotting the signs and how to respond, also helps to reframe the narrative from “why didn’t you just leave?” to “what are the barriers to you leaving?”. It is also vital for victim-survivors to be supported to remain in employment, enabling them to become financially independent from the person abusing them.

🚩 **Key EIDA Resource:** [Through the four phased approach, the EIDA Handbook](#) sets out how to create a supportive workplace culture.

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