

Policy: Domestic Abuse

Equality Statement

The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) is committed to the principles of equality and diversity. No member of the public, member of staff, secondee, volunteer or job applicant shall be discriminated against on the grounds of age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; or sexual orientation.

Policy Statement

Domestic abuse is a term used to describe a range of violent, abusive, coercive or threatening behaviours between adults who are, or who have been, intimate partners or family members. The OPCC condemns domestic abuse and recognises it is unacceptable and, in many cases, a crime. We are committed to the welfare of our employees and we will support and assist any employee who is experiencing problems related to domestic abuse. We will treat all incidents of domestic abuse reported to us as a high priority and we will seek to create a supportive work environment where employees feel comfortable requesting support for domestic abuse related concerns. We will also raise awareness of domestic abuse and will aim to develop a workplace culture where domestic abuse is recognised as unacceptable.

We acknowledge that remote working creates difficulties both in terms of employees being able to disclose their domestic abuse and for managers being able to identify and pick up on the signs of domestic abuse. We are committed to creating a safe workplace culture for employees to be able to disclose their domestic abuse and to support them as best as we can without harming their safety and will continue to raise awareness and develop management capability to ensure we can continue to support employees under current working arrangements.

Aims

This policy aims to:-

- Demonstrate the OPCC's commitment to, and support for employees experiencing domestic abuse;
- Equip managers with the knowledge to recognise, address and help prevent domestic abuse;
- Ensure that all reports of domestic abuse are treated seriously and as a matter of high priority;
- Have systems in place that deal with incidents of domestic abuse effectively, consistently ensuring that employees experiencing domestic abuse are offered the right type of support and guidance
- Enable employees to feel supported and confident to approach their managers for help;
- Raise awareness of domestic abuse and the likely effects on employees;

Scope

This policy covers all OPCC employees (to also include temporary staff, secondees and people working on contracts).

This policy will apply wherever an employee experiences abuse within a domestic situation. The abuse can be physical, but it can also psychological, sexual, emotional, social, financial and intimidation and neglect.

This policy does not affect the rights of any individual to take independent action following abuse or an assault, for example by contacting the Police or their Union.

Definition of Abuse

Domestic abuse is a term used to describe a range of violent, abusive, coercive or threatening behaviours between adults who are, or who have been, intimate partners or family members. Abuse can be physical, but it can also psychological, sexual, emotional, social, financial and intimidation and neglect. Its effects range from bruising to permanent injury, and can even result in death. Less visible effects include diminishing self-esteem, fear, guilt, insomnia, depression, agoraphobia and difficulty in trusting people. This definition also includes so called 'honour' based violence, forced marriage, female genital mutilation and dowry abuse.

Domestic abuse is a systematic pattern of abuse and is rarely a one-off event. It includes a range of abusive behaviours that generally escalate over time.

Confidentiality and Right to Privacy

We recognise that confidentiality is essential for an employee who is experiencing or the perpetrator of domestic abuse. In most circumstances, information employees provide is confidential and will not be shared without permission. However, there are some circumstances where confidentiality cannot be assured, specifically when there are safeguarding concerns about children or vulnerable adults or if the situation could result in injury or death.

All records concerning domestic abuse will be kept strictly confidential and no local records will be kept of absences related to domestic abuse.

Checks will be made with the employee regarding the safest way to communicate with them.

Improper disclosure of information i.e. breaches of confidentiality by members of staff will be taken seriously and may be subject to disciplinary action.

Raising the Issue

You can discuss the matter with anyone you choose. We can offer support to employees experiencing domestic abuse. The issue can be raised directly with your line manager. Raising the issue with your Line Manager will make them aware that it could be impacting upon your work performance and on your health, safety and wellbeing and it will enable them to provide practical support. Alternatively, you could speak to Human Resources.

The following agencies can also help you to raise the issue:
24-hour National Domestic Violence Freephone Helpline — 0808 2000 247
Men's advice line – 0800 8010327

Support available for individuals affected

Special and Emergency Leave

An employee experiencing domestic abuse would be able to request special leave. Employees may also request paid time off during the day to attend appointments such as meeting solicitors, arranging re-housing or meeting with support agencies. Managers should treat these requests sympathetically. Leave will not have any adverse effect on the colleague's employment record.

Flexible Working Arrangements

If an employee feels that it would be helpful to temporarily alter their working hours a request should be made using the Flexible Working Arrangements Policy. This request should be responded to promptly and treated sympathetically.

Health and wellbeing

Employees experiencing domestic abuse may be more vulnerable to stress at work. Reference should therefore be made to the OPCC policies and procedures for supporting employees with stress, including potential referral to the Occupational Health Service. If an employee needs to be absent from work due to the effects of domestic abuse, the length of the absence will be determined by the individual's situation and in line with the Sickness Absence Policy and Procedure

Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)

Whatever mental health, physical, financial or personal issue you are facing, access expert help and support for life's ups and downs, 24/7, 365 days a year with Vivup. They offer a wide range of care and support specialists waiting to hear from you. You can use this service as many or as few times as you like, there's no limit on the support you can receive. Vivup can be contacted on 0800 048 5956. More information can be found in the following link [Employee Assistance Programme \(tercltd.co.uk\)](https://www.tercltd.co.uk/Employee-Assistance-Programme)

Managing Workplace Safety

We will aim to protect the safety and security of all employees at work, including those affected by domestic abuse. When an employee discloses domestic abuse, the OPCC will work with the employee to risk assess and identify any actions that can be taken to minimise risks and increase the individual's personal safety. Examples of considerations include:

- Identifying an emergency contact person should the manager be unable to contact the employee;
- Change the employee's work arrangements, e.g. change of phone number, changes to their schedule;
- Discussing with employees what is appropriate to share with colleagues to prevent any tensions or misunderstanding;
- Agreeing the workplace response should the perpetrator or victim contact the workplace

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- Confidentially alerting security regarding building access;
- Reviewing communications and IT safety.

Formal Action: Perpetrator of Abuse

Many of the behaviours used in domestic abuse are criminal offences and could lead to a criminal conviction. The OPCC will refer all such cases to the disciplinary procedure. The OPCC will treat any allegation, disclosure or conviction of domestic abuse related offence on a case-to-case basis with the aim of reducing risk and supporting change. This could also result in your vetting status being refused and therefore dismissed from the OPCC.

Guidelines for Managers

Due to the sensitivity of the issue, in some cases employees are reluctant to approach their manager with their problems or disclose to colleagues or HR about the abuse they are experiencing. There are, however, some common signs which may indicate that an employee could be experiencing domestic abuse. The list below is just indicative, but it is also important to understand that any of these signs may arise from a number of circumstances. Therefore, automatic assumptions should not be made from the existence or absence of these signs. Signs include:

- Visible bruising and repeated injuries with unlikely explanations;
- Change in the amount of make-up used;
- A change in the way a person dresses, for instance clothes that do not suit the climate which may be to hide injuries;
- Fatigue and sleep disorders;
- Change in the use of the phone, such as a large number of personal calls or texts, avoiding calls or a strong reaction to calls;
- Change in the use of online communications, such as Microsoft Teams and email. For example, ignoring Teams calls and avoiding meetings, not responding, or reacting strongly, to emails or messages.
- A change in a person's behaviour — becoming tearful, anxious, isolated, quiet, depressed, aggressive etc.; for employees working from home they may be clearly distracted or anxious on Teams calls.
- Becoming secretive about home life;
- Poor attendance absences or/and unexplained hospital visits;
- A change in working patterns, such as frequent lateness, leaving early or spending an increased amount of hours working for no reason; if the perpetrator is in close proximity, they may restrict access to technology meaning work patterns will be affected.
- A marked drop in performance;
- Partner or ex-partner stalking an employee in or around the workplace or their remote working station.

Additional considerations for homeworkers

Employees who work from home may find it difficult to disclose their domestic abuse. The perpetrator of the abuse may be within close proximity to their workstation, even listening in to conversations etc. As a manager, you must be extra vigilant when it comes to looking for signs of abuse.

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As you cannot trust your conversations will be confidential, openly discussing domestic abuse may put the safety of the employee at risk, potentially leaving them vulnerable to more abuse.

There are some steps that can be taken to help support employees who work remotely when it comes to disclosing and discussing domestic abuse:

Agree a code word or phrase within your team to signal that they are experiencing domestic abuse. This can encourage employees to disclose and seek support.

If you are aware, or become aware, of an employee who experiences domestic abuse, mutually agree on how best to communicate with them about the abuse without harming their safety. For example, use code words or hand gestures. Please also be aware that in some cases, the employee may not feel comfortable with this.

Be aware that visual signs, such as bruising and changes in how a person dresses, may be more difficult to pick up on with employees who work remotely. Therefore, it is imperative that you are aware, and look for, other signs

Identifying that an employee is having a difficult time at an early stage means that they will be offered support early on and they are more likely to be able to deal with their situation effectively.

If a manager is concerned about an employee experiencing domestic abuse, they have a duty of care and the responsibility to raise it with the individual sensitively and in private. Managers need to develop a sensitive, positive and non-judgemental approach when dealing with employees who are experiencing domestic abuse. They need to:

- Remember that their role is to support empathetically in the work environment and signpost to specialist services — they are not expected to adopt the role of a support worker.
- Be alert to the possibility of employees experiencing domestic abuse and be aware that employees may find it difficult to approach their manager and may want support from a colleague or trade union representative;
- Be aware that employees who work from home may find it increasingly difficult to disclose their domestic abuse.
- Approach employees in an understanding manner, explaining that they are not alone and that support is available;
- Listen to the employee and take them seriously;
- Believe their experience and not seek proof of abuse. In many cases the abuse experienced is psychological or/and emotional. Seeking proof of abuse may make it less likely that the employee seeks help in the future;
- Allow employees to make their own decisions and not pressurise them to seek help or contact support agencies. Unless the manager feels that the situation could result in serious injury or death no action should be taken without their full involvement and permission. It is for the employee to decide that they are experiencing domestic abuse and whether to take action;
- Reassure the employee that the discussion will be kept in confidence, except in the case of an adult or child protection concern;
- Be patient, non-judgemental and understand that the employee may need time before taking action. Breaking free from an abusive relationship can be hard and can take a long time. Be prepared to offer the same standard of support however many times the colleague wants to talk about it;
- Not make assumptions about the severity of the abuse, or the employee's willingness to "break free" if an employee returns to or stays in an abusive relationship

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- Remember that employees facing domestic abuse may be scared to leave home. Statistics show that risks of more serious assaults and murder increase when a victim decides to leave home;
- Treat unplanned absences and temporary poor timekeeping sympathetically. More generally, be sensitive to an employee experiencing domestic abuse and the impact this may have on their performance when addressing attendance and/or performance issues;
- Work collaboratively with the employee to consider, discuss and establish measures to provide a safe workplace in so far as practically possible;
- Ensure employees experiencing, or at risk of experiencing domestic abuse, are aware of the range of support and flexible work options available in the workplace;
- Seek advice from their HR Business Partner in relation to the provision of support and remember that they do not have to name the employee (if the employee wants to retain confidentiality).

APPENDIX A - NATIONAL AND LOCAL ADVICE AND SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS

Emergency Help

Phone 999 and ask for Police

National Domestic Violence Helpline

A 24 hour helpline run in partnership between Refuge and Women's Aid
0808 2000 247

Refuge

Finds refuge space and/or offers advice and support www.refuge.org.uk

Women's Aid Federation of England

Provides advice and support and finds refuge spaces across the UK
www.womensaid.org.uk

Samaritans

Provides 24 confidential emotional support
08457 90 90 90

Reach

A charity offering help and support for domestic violence victims
<http://www.reachdomesticabusesupport.org/>
For immediate help 0800 088 4194

Safe lives

A charity working with families to help end domestic abuse <http://safelives.org.uk/>

Panahghar

An Urdu word for "safe house", Panhghar is a charity based in Coventry that aims to help Asian women and their families in the region who have experienced domestic abuse
<http://www.safehouse.org.uk/index.htm>

Haven Wolverhampton

A charity providing support for women and children suffering domestic violence
24 hour helpline: 08000 194 400
<http://www.havenrefuge.org.uk/>

Respect

A membership organisation that works with people committing domestic violence, men who suffered domestic violence and young people <http://respect.uk.net/>

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1.0	February 2024	Jennie Alder	Policy Officer	General Review		Biennial