

How to support colleagues experiencing domestic violence



St Monica Trust

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A guide for managers, team leaders and supervisors



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What is domestic violence?



Domestic violence and abuse has been defined as:

Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality.

The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:

- * Psychological
- * Physical
- * Sexual
- * Economic
- * Emotional

Support available



These external sources of help and support are available for colleagues and managers:



The Freephone 24 Hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline

Freephone: 0808 2000 247



Bright Sky is a free app providing support and information for anyone who may be in an abusive relationship, or those who are concerned about someone they know.



Women's Aid has advice on their website about leaving a relationship safely. This may be helpful if you feel you need to be prepared and includes things like packing an emergency bag, keeping some money at all times and teaching your children to call 999.

Free & confidential Employee Assistance Programme follow [this link](#) for details.

Support available



Respect

Respect provides practical information and advice on domestic violence for perpetrators, the abused, health and social care professionals, and family and friends.



ManKind provides advice and support for men experiencing domestic abuse.



Next Link provide safe houses, crisis support, outreach services etc.

- The Trust's Well-being website www.wearesmt.co.uk
- The government's personalised mental health support Able Futures.
- [HRBP's and Reward and Engagement contacts](#), [Pastoral Support](#)

What to look out for



Refuge describes some ‘work productivity’ signs, which might tell you if someone is experiencing domestic violence at home:

- Persistently late without explanation; needing to leave work early.
- Partner exerts unusual amount of control/demands over work schedule – employee may be dropped off and picked up from work and is unable to attend business trips or functions.
- High absenteeism rate without explanation.
- Needing regular time off for “appointments”.
- Changes in quality of work performance for unexplained reasons: may suddenly start missing deadlines and show additional performance problems despite a previously strong record.
- Receipt of repeated upsetting calls/e-mails.
- Reluctance to turn off mobile phone at work.
- Increased hours being worked for no apparent reason i.e. very early arrival at work and/or working late.
- Other signs include psychological (emotional, anxious), physical and social withdrawal.

How a domestic abuse victim may be feeling



Victims of domestic abuse or domestic violence may feel lonely and isolated. It is not uncommon for them to have feelings of guilt and self-blame and be lacking in self-esteem. They may be dependent on their abuser both financially and emotionally, and feel conflicted in their feelings; loving their partner but hating the abuse. If they have children, they may be fearful of how leaving would affect them, but yet unable to plan for the future. They may experience difficulties at work or in other relationships.



Refuge's 4 Rs



RECOGNISE • RESPOND • REFER • RECORD

1. **R**ecognise the problem (look for signs and ask)
2. **R**espond appropriately
3. **R**efer on to appropriate help
4. **R**ecord the details

If you suspect that a colleague is experiencing domestic abuse, you should facilitate a conversation to discuss the issue on a general level and identify appropriate support.

If you have concerns

- Begin by asking indirect questions, to establish an empathetic relationship with the colleague.
- Be patient, offering support to encourage disclosure.
- Avoid blaming the person experiencing domestic abuse. It is important that you help provide a non-judgemental and supportive environment.
- Respecting the colleague's boundaries and privacy is essential. It is also important to work on the basis of believing the colleague so that they feel supported.

When you have concerns



The role of a manager is not to deal with the abuse itself but to make it clear through this guidance that colleagues will be supported and to outline what help is available.

Below are some examples of questions and prompts that could be used:



- 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 ok?
- If there's anything you'd like to talk to me about at any time I'm always here to support you.
- Is everything all right at home?
- You don't have to tell me anything, but please know that I would like to support you if and when you feel ready.
- What support do you think might help? What would you like to happen? How?

When a colleague discloses



- Suggest that you go somewhere quiet and comfortable, away from busy working areas.
- Acknowledge the courage of the colleague and how difficult it must be to talk.
- Confirm the complete confidentiality of the disclosure. Information should only be disclosed to anyone else if it is absolutely necessary in providing help and support and with the prior agreement of the person who has disclosed. Exceptions to that are if you believe there is an imminent threat to life, harm of children, or threat against St Monica Trust. At that point, you should contact the police and follow their advice on next steps.

When a colleague discloses



- Have an open posture. Reach towards them but be sensitive that they may feel threatened by invasion of personal space.
- Be prepared for them to be upset and tearful.
- Do not be judgemental.
- Avoid language that indicates blame or fault:
 - “Why don’t you leave?”*
 - “How can you let this happen?”*
 - “Why haven’t you told anyone before?”*
- Allow plenty of time and space for them to speak.

Following disclosure, contact HR for a debrief while respecting the individual’s confidentiality.

<https://wearesmt.co.uk/useful-resources/peopledirectorate/>

Practical steps



- Agree with the colleague what to tell others at work and how they should respond if the abusive partner/ex-partner telephones or visits the workplace.
- Allow an individual to change work patterns or workload and allow flexible or more flexible working or special leave to facilitate any practical arrangements.
- Agree special leave for individuals to facilitate any practical arrangements. Examples include: attending court; attending mediation; meeting or calling a solicitor; viewing properties; meeting teachers at school; talking to their bank or getting advice from domestic violence organisations.
- Agree flexible working hours to enable individuals (or their children) to attend health appointments resulting from the abuse, such as seeing a counsellor. This may be needed for some time after the abuse has stopped.
- If the abuser has a colleague's work email and telephone details, consider diverting their phone calls and emails to help shield them from their abuser.
- Notify reception and porters/concierges if the abuser is known to come to the workplace.

Practical steps



- Provide a copy of any existing orders against the abuser and a photograph of the abuser to reception and porters/concierges.
- Check that colleagues have arrangements for getting safely to and from home.
- Review content of personal information, such as temporary or new addresses, bank or health care details.
- Ask individuals to make sure that Employee Self Service is up to date with an emergency contact number for a trusted friend or family member.
- Review the employee's next of kin information (with their consent).
- Where practical, consider offering a temporary or permanent change of workplace, working times/patterns.
- Where practical, offer changes in specific duties, such as not expecting the employee to answer telephones or sit on reception.
- Move the employee out of public view, ensuring that they are not visible from reception points or ground floor windows.
- Ensure that the employee does not work alone or in an isolated area.

Cover your tracks online



This helpful information from [Women's Aid](#) explains how to prevent an abuser from discovering your internet activities.

IMPORTANT: The safest way to find information on the internet, would be at a library, a friend's house, or at work.



[Private browsing](#) can hide your immediate past online activity, it doesn't offer complete anonymity

Delete your browsing history.

Clearing your browsing history doesn't actually delete it.

[This article](#) shows you how to delete your history completely.



Email: Take particular care with your email password as your email can provide access to all other account passwords and private information like banking details and calendars. Your email password should be different to any other password and [use a strong password](#). It could be helpful to [use a password manager](#) and [two-step verification](#).



Digital evidence. If an abuser sends you threatening or harassing email messages, print/save them as evidence of this abuse. You could also screenshot emails if it is safe to do so. [Read more about digital evidence here](#)

Cover your tracks online



Social media. Some safety measures you can take include [turning off location sharing](#), [turn on Ghost Mode](#), [turn off location tracking](#), according to what channel you are using. You can also block accounts, mute messages, change settings etc. to help keep yourself safe.



Hide your location. The guide also shows you how to hide your location if you use a fitness tracker/ smart watch and how to remove the history of visited destinations from built-in satnav.



Online banking. If you have concerns, get in touch with your bank directly as they will have specific measures to help you, for instance flagging up fraud warnings. This is particularly important if your abuser has access to a joint account. For more information on contacting your bank and regaining control of your finances, check out [Surviving Economic Abuse's resources](#).



Online access to medical records It's important that your GP documents any reference to domestic abuse for evidence purposes, but they can do this and remove online visibility. Ask your GP to use the "104" code on your records. This code says "Enhanced review indicated before granting access to own health record"