

Domestic Abuse Guidance and Information

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1. Domestic Abuse Guidance and Information

The guidance outlines some simple steps that can be taken to respond to this sensitive issue. To a large degree this is about basic good people management involving managers listening, empathising, and showing concern for their employees. However, it is important that managers are also aware of the warning signs that may indicate a member of staff is suffering from abuse, as well as the sources of support available to victims including [Brookes Security Service](#), and the [Employee Assistance Programme](#).

2. The challenges posed by Domestic Abuse

Domestic Abuse is an issue that can follow women and men to work and affects thousands of working people every day. Given that up to one in four people will experience domestic abuse at some point in their lifetime, it is very likely that all workplaces will have staff that have experienced or are experiencing domestic abuse.

Domestic Abuse is a grave concern that continues to cost the UK economy £ billions every year in lost economy as a result of decreased productivity, increased absenteeism and increased employee turnover.

The key aim of this guidance is to highlight the benefits of taking effective action in the workplace to ensure that staff experiencing domestic abuse feel safe and supported at work. This guidance also includes some common-sense practical tips for managers to facilitate conversations about domestic abuse so that support for their staff can be put in place.

3. What is Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse is the abuse of power and control over one person by another and can take many different forms, including physical, sexual, emotional, verbal and financial abuse.

Domestic abuse is not limited to physical violence. It can include repeated patterns of abusive behaviour to maintain power and control in a relationship. It includes abuse carried out by a partner, ex-partner, or family member. The government's definition of domestic violence and abuse recognises this and defines domestic abuse 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. It can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional”

Domestic abuse not only impacts on the well-being of the individual, but it affects the financial strength and success of the organisations for which they work. The majority of those experiencing domestic abuse are targeted at work and it is often possible for perpetrators to use workplace resources such as phones, email and other means to threaten, harass or abuse their current or former partner.

As mentioned, one in four women will experience domestic abuse at some point in their lifetime. This means it is likely that all workplaces will have staff that have experienced or are experiencing domestic abuse as well as those who are perpetrators of abuse. Whilst this guidance refers in the main to women it applies equally to men.

However, research in recent years has shown that women are more likely to suffer more serious injury and ongoing assaults than men. However, it should be acknowledged that men can experience domestic abuse from their female partner and that domestic abuse also occurs in same-sex relationships. Therefore, all employees who experience abuse should be supported regardless of gender, gender fluidity and the type of abuse.

4. Good People Management

Oxford Brookes University as a caring employer includes supporting staff through new or difficult periods in their lives including Domestic Abuse which has a devastating impact on individuals and their families.

In terms of this issue and as published by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) for the 12-month period ending March 2020.

- The Crime Survey for England and Wales showed that an estimated 2.3 million adults aged 16 to 74 years experienced domestic abuse in the last year (1.6 million women and 757,000 men), a slight but nonsignificant decrease from the previous year.
- The police recorded 758,941 domestic abuse-related crimes in England and Wales, an increase of 9% from the previous year; this continues an ongoing trend that may reflect improved recording by the police alongside increased reporting by victims.
- Over three-quarters of domestic abuse-related CPS prosecutions were successful in securing a conviction (78%), a similar level to the previous year.

Regrettably, research has also shown that people experiencing domestic abuse can often be subject to disciplinary action and potentially lose their jobs because of their behaviour, being late for example, is misinterpreted as such. However, a steady income is often key to a survivor's economic independence and their opportunities to escape from an abusive relationship.

Employers have a responsibility to provide all staff with a safe and effective work environment. For some employees, the workplace is a safe haven and the only place that offers routes to safety. Therefore, having a structured approach to combat domestic abuse will clearly demonstrate that domestic abuse is not tolerated within or outside our workplace thus demonstrating the university's commitment to provide whatever staff support is possible as and when these circumstances arise.

5. The Duty of Care

As an employer we have a common law duty of care and also health and safety obligations to ensure our staff are able to work in a safe environment where risks to health and well-being are considered and dealt with efficiently.

There are four main areas of health and safety law relevant to violence at work:

- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992
- Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995
- Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations 1996.

An effective approach on domestic abuse will ensure that the university is complying with these statutory obligations. As previously mentioned even with limited resources there are steps that the university can take to address the effects of domestic abuse in the workplace. In many cases it is about being aware and signposting staff to the organisations that provide specialist support. Below is a list of common-sense actions the university can also take to manage domestic abuse for the benefit of all concerned.

6. Recognise if there is a problem

Managers should look for sudden changes in behaviour/personality/anxiety/defensiveness and/or changes in the quality of work performance for unexplained reasons despite a previously strong record. Look also for changes in the way an employee dresses, for example excessive clothing on hot days, changes in the amount of make-up worn etc.

7. Respond & Reassure

Managers should always take a stance of belief when an employee makes a disclosure of domestic abuse, you do not have to ask for proof and should be sensitive to boundaries. Reassure the employee that the organisation has an understanding of how domestic abuse may affect their work performance and the support that can be offered.

If a manager suspects that an employee is experiencing domestic abuse, they should facilitate a conversation to be able to discuss this and identify and implement appropriate support. Shying away from the subject can perpetuate fear of stigma and increase feelings of anxiety. Often employees will not feel confident in speaking up, so a manager making the first move to begin a conversation can be an essential first step.

Managers should ask the employee indirect questions, to help establish a relationship with the employee and develop empathy. Below are some examples of questions that could be used:

- How are you doing at the moment? Are there any issues you would like to discuss with me?
- I have noticed recently that you are not yourself. Is anything the matter?
- Are there any problems or reasons that may be contributing to your frequent sickness absence/under-performance at work?
- Is everything all right at home?
- What support do you think might help? What would you like to happen? How can I help you at this time?

Avoid victim blaming. It is important that managers are able to provide a non-judgemental and supportive environment. Respecting the employee's boundaries and privacy is also essential.

Even if managers disagree with the decisions being made regarding an employee's relationship, it is important to understand that a victim of domestic abuse may make a number of attempts to leave their partner before they are finally able to do so. It may be that the victim decides to return to a previously abusive partner, however, the manager again should not be judgemental should this situation occur.

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

8. Provide Support

Where necessary divert phone calls and email messages and look to change a phone extension if an employee is receiving harassing calls. Agree with the employee what to tell colleagues and how they should respond if their ex/partner telephones or visits the workplace. If necessary, Brookes Security can conduct a risk assessment and make recommendations, please contact Brookes security at the following work page: [Brookes Security](#)

Where possible ensure the member of staff does not work alone or in an isolated area and check that staff have arrangements for getting safely to and from home. Keep a record of any incidents of abuse in the workplace, including persistent telephone calls, emails, or visits to the workplace.

9. Refer to the appropriate help

As well as the National Agencies listed at the end of this document, managers should signpost the support services offered in our local area that are easily accessible and refer employees to appropriate organisations that deal with domestic abuse. For example Local Authorities - Designated Officers from Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service (Part of the Community Safety Service) oxfordshiredomestic@a2dominion.co.uk
Tel: 0800 731 0055

10. To raise awareness

As an organisation we provide policy statements and/or Oxford Brookes commitment which opposes all forms of domestic abuse This includes our commitment to treat domestic abuse seriously, understand the risks and consequences in the workplace, fully support colleagues and take action against perpetrators of domestic abuse.

As an organisation we also recognise that while domestic abuse can affect both sexes, women's and men's experiences of violence are different. It should also be recognised that there can be additional issues for employees because of their gender identity, ethnic background, religion, age, sexuality or disability.

11. Information and examples of the different forms of domestic abuse

As previously outlined, this demonstrates that no single act of abuse or harassment defines domestic abuse. Providing information on and examples of types of physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and financial abuse will help gain an understanding of the wide range of activities domestic abuse includes.

12. Identify Manager's Responsibilities

Line managers are responsible for the following actions, this list is not exhaustive but would include the following:

- Line managers should hold regular one to one meetings with staff to give staff an opportunity to privately raise any issues if they choose to
- If an employee raises domestic abuse issues the line manager should listen and provide the employee with details to access this guidance document, to access the Employee Assistance Programme and offer to refer them to Occ Health
- The dangers of domestic abuse should not be underestimated. If domestic abuse is disclosed, undertaking a risk assessment can ensure that the potential risk to employees and colleagues is lessened. It is important to note each person's needs are different and that any measures should only be used with the authorisation/consent of the individual concerned.
- Enquire with the employee as to whether they need a new work phone number or desk location so that it is harder for the abuse to find or contact them.
- Sign post the member of staff to the local and UK agencies helplines as listed in this guidance

13. An obligation to prioritise confidentiality wherever possible

Managers are responsible for ensuring information is not disclosed and that all employees are aware of their responsibilities in relation to confidentiality. There are exceptions when confidentiality can be broken, for example when there are concerns about children or vulnerable adults.

14. Reasonable Adjustments

Employees who are experiencing domestic abuse may need specific safeguards and adjustments to be made, for example, to provide safeguarding measures as may be necessary in line with the circumstances of the situation and perceived threats that the employee is experiencing.

15. A commitment to distribute the policy to all employees

This guidance is available for all staff via the intranet 24 hours a day 7 days a week

16. Local and National Help Agencies

There are many organisations that can offer further advice and practical guidance on domestic abuse in the workplace. For example:

Local Authorities

Designated Officers from Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service (Part of the Community Safety Service)

oxfordshiredomestic@a2dominion.co.uk

Tel: 0800 731 0055

Wiltshire Country Council

<https://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/community-safety-speak-out-wiltshire>

Tel: 0300 4560 100

Thames Valley Police

<https://www.thamesvalley.police.uk/advice/advice-and-information/daa/domestic-abuse/>

Tel: 101 or 999

Wiltshire Constabulary

<https://www.wiltshire.police.uk/article/1132/Domestic-Abuse>

Tel: 101 or 999

Black Association of Women Step Out (BAWSO)

www.bawso.org.uk

BAWSO is a specialist agency which can provide culturally sensitive and appropriate information and services to black and other minority ethnic groups.

Broken Rainbow

www.broken-rainbow.org.uk

Broken Rainbow provides support for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people experiencing domestic abuse.

Corporate Alliance Against Domestic Violence

www.caadv.org.uk

The Corporate Alliance aims to raise awareness and reduce the social and economic impact of domestic violence in the workplace. Working together with employers, their vision is to create a work environment where employees have the opportunity to seek practical support and advice and, ultimately, take positive action to end domestic violence. Membership is open to any employer, trade union or representative body in the UK.

Dyn Project

www.dynwales.org

The Dyn Project works across Wales to support men who experience domestic abuse.

Man Kind Initiative

www.mankind.org.uk

The Man Kind Initiative is a national charity that provides help and support for male victims of domestic abuse.

Men's Advice Line

www.mensadvice.org.uk

The Men's Advice Line offers practical advice, information and support to male victims of domestic abuse as well as concerned friends and families.

Refuge

www.refuge.org.uk

Refuge is one of the largest single providers of specialist accommodation and services to women and children escaping domestic violence, supporting over 1,000 women and children every day.

Respect

www.respect.uk.net

Respect is the UK association for professionals working with domestic violence perpetrators and associated support services. The organisation's key aim is to increase the safety of those experiencing domestic violence through promoting effective interventions with perpetrators.

Scottish Women's Aid

www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk

Scottish Women's Aid is the leading organisation in Scotland working towards the prevention of domestic abuse. They play a vital role in campaigning and lobbying for effective responses to domestic abuse.

Southall Black Sisters

www.southallblacksisters.org.uk

Southall Black Sisters provide advice and information on domestic abuse, racial harassment, welfare and immigration, primarily for Asian, African and African- Caribbean women.

Welsh Women's Aid

www.welshwomensaid.org.uk

Welsh Women's Aid is a national umbrella organisation representing local women's aid groups situated throughout Wales. Welsh Women's Aid can provide specialist training, support and information to member groups and outside organisations.

Women's Aid

www.womensaid.org.uk

Women's Aid is the national domestic abuse charity that helps up to 250,000 women and children every year. They work to end violence against women and children and support over 500 domestic and sexual violence services across the country.

Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland

www.womensaidni.org

Women's Aid is the leading voluntary organisation in Northern Ireland addressing domestic abuse and providing services for women and children.

National Helplines

England

24-hour National Domestic Violence Freephone Helpline – 0808 2000 247

This is run by Women's Aid and Refuge

Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland 24-hour domestic abuse helpline – 0800 917 1414

Scotland

Scottish Domestic Abuse Helpline – 0800 027 1234

Wales

24-hour All Wales Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Helpline – www.allwaleshelpline.org.uk

Tel: 0808 80 10 800

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Not applicable

Further Information

For further information about this policy/guidance, please contact [Human Resources](#).