



LEEDS
BECKETT
UNIVERSITY

Domestic Abuse Guidelines for Staff

leedsbeckett.ac.uk

Domestic Abuse Guidelines

1. Introduction

Our University aims to provide a healthy working environment and is committed to the health, safety and wellbeing of all employees (including as required under Health and Safety legislation). These guidelines aim to raise awareness of the extent and nature of domestic abuse and the impact it can have in the workplace and provide a framework for handling matters at work.

The Home Office defines domestic abuse as any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or 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. This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse: psychological, physical, sexual, financial, emotional, verbal. This definition includes so-called “honour” based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage.

Incidents of domestic abuse can have a serious impact on those who are affected by them. Studies estimate 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men experience domestic abuse at some point in their lives¹ and 75% of those experiencing domestic abuse are targeted at work by the perpetrator². A significant proportion of employees who experience domestic abuse have to take time off work. Many others report symptoms that have a long-term effect on their work performance, such as stress, anxiety and depression. The majority of victims of domestic abuse are women, however it is important to recognise that men can experience domestic abuse by a partner. Domestic abuse occurs in same-sex relationships and across all races, classes, nationalities, religions, cultures, sexualities, ages and abilities.

Some of our employees will be amongst those affected by domestic abuse for example as survivors of domestic abuse, individuals who are currently living with domestic abuse, someone who has been impacted by death related to domestic abuse or as an individual who perpetrates domestic abuse.

Our University is committed to providing appropriate support to employees affected by domestic abuse. Any employee who is a victim of domestic abuse has the right to raise the issue in the knowledge that they will receive the appropriate support and assistance. These guidelines outline the support for employees experiencing domestic abuse including signposting them to the appropriate support services and to assist managers in dealing with a disclosure from an employee. They also provide guidance where there are concerns that an employee may be the perpetrator of domestic abuse.

2. Identifying domestic abuse

Concerns that an employee may be being subjected to domestic abuse can occur in a number of ways. Individual employees may recognise they are the victim of domestic abuse and may choose to seek support and assistance through speaking to a colleague, their manager or a

¹ British Crime Survey, Walby and Allen, 2004

² Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2013

Trade Union representative. Employees may inform their manager that they know or suspect that a colleague is suffering from domestic abuse.

Managers and employees may identify signs which indicate a colleague may be suffering from domestic abuse. These signs can include, but are not limited to:

- Obvious effects of domestic abuse such as injury;
- A decline in performance at work;
- An increase in sickness absence or presenteeism;
- Conduct that is out of character;
- Stress, depression or anxiety.

Although colleagues and managers may identify signs which indicate domestic abuse, it is for the affected employee to decide that they are a victim and whether to take action. Managers and colleagues can provide support and explore options with an individual but any action taken must come from that individual or be taken with their consent.

3. Support

Managers are advised to take disclosures seriously and to offer information, workplace support, and to signpost to other organisations. Managers should not try to counsel victims. Human Resources are an additional confidential contact for staff and can provide guidance for managers who are approached by staff requesting support.

Employees can access our University's Employee Assistance Programme. The service offers confidential counselling, both via the telephone and face to face and a legal and financial helpline for all employees of Leeds Beckett.

Our University will prioritise the safety of employees if it is made known that they are experiencing domestic abuse. Where necessary and practicable, changes to an employee's role and their work environment may be made for an appropriate period of time. These include:

- Removing the employee from a customer facing role;
- Diverting telephone calls and email messages;
- Changes to working hours;
- Alerting security, with the employee's permission, if the perpetrator is known to visit the campus;
- Changes to security codes on buildings.

Employees experiencing domestic abuse may require more time off from work than usual or an alteration to their working hours. This may allow them to:

- Attend appointments with support agencies or counselling;
- Arrange re-housing and/or alternative childcare arrangements;
- Meet with solicitors; or
- Change their routine to prevent the perpetrator from stalking them.

Managers should be flexible in responding to requests for annual leave, flexi time or adjusted working hours. If an employee wishes to alter their working hours (e.g. reduced hours or job share) or change their working times, or work location, they should discuss this with their manager who in turn may seek advice from Human Resources. It may be appropriate to refer employees to our University's Flexible Working Policy. The Flexi-Time Scheme can be considered for shorter periods of change to working hours.

The manager should take account of issues of domestic abuse when addressing the impact on work, including for example, impact on performance and sickness absence.

Further information on support available is provided in the Manager Guidance on Domestic Abuse and on the Human Resources webpages.

4. Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse

Acts of verbal or physical abuse by employees both inside and outside of work are unacceptable. Under our University's current policies and procedures, acts of harassment or bullying and violent, threatening or abusive behaviour may be considered as gross misconduct and will be dealt with in accordance with our Disciplinary Procedure. The advice of Human Resources should be sought in such cases.

Employees should also be aware that their conduct outside of work could lead to disciplinary action because of its impact on employment relationships and the reputation of our University.

Perpetrators of domestic abuse may wish to seek help and support voluntarily and when appropriate, access to help and support will be provided.

In cases where both the victim and the perpetrator of domestic abuse are employees at our University, appropriate action will be taken. In addition to considering disciplinary action against the employee who is perpetrating the abuse, action may need to be taken to ensure that the victim and perpetrator do not come into contact in the workplace. However, it is recognised that in certain circumstances, those experiencing and perpetrating domestic abuse in a relationship may choose to seek solutions jointly, and in such situations appropriate support will be given.

5. Confidentiality

Employees who disclose experiencing domestic abuse can be assured that the information they provide is confidential. Managers must maintain appropriate confidentiality and comply with data protection requirements, including in relation to the storage and/or the forwarding of any information and documentation relating to domestic abuse. Records concerning domestic abuse should always be clear and accurate and should not be disclosed unless there is a legal requirement to do so.

Where domestic abuse in a same sex relationship is disclosed, due regard will be paid to the disclosure of confidential information particularly where the recipient of the abuse has not disclosed their sexuality.

If the alleged perpetrator is an employee of our University, a manager may have to disclose certain information to another more senior manager.

There are circumstances in which confidentiality cannot be assured. For example, where action needs to be taken to protect the safety of our employees or when there are concerns about children or vulnerable adults. In circumstances where it is necessary to breach confidentiality, a discussion with the employee will take place, where possible, to explain why and to seek the employee's agreement. Improper disclosure of information, i.e. breaches of confidentiality by any University employee will be taken seriously and may be subject to disciplinary action.

6. Related Policies and Documentation

Dignity at Work and Study

Flexible Working Policy and Procedure

Flexi-Time Scheme

Managing Performance Policy and Procedure

Redeployment Policy and Procedure

Safeguarding Policy

Sickness Absence Management Policy and Procedure

Time Off For Public Duties and Special Leave

MANAGER GUIDANCE ON DOMESTIC ABUSE

Identifying Domestic Abuse

Whilst it is for an individual to recognise that they are the victim of domestic abuse, there may be signs to be aware of. These may include, but are not limited to:

- Late or high absenteeism without explanation;
- Uncharacteristic depression, anxiety, distraction or problems with concentration;
- Changes in the quality of work performance for no apparent reason;
- The receipt of repeated upsetting calls/e-mails/social media or the individual being a victim of vandalism or threats;
- Obsession with time;
- Needing regular time off for appointments;
- Clothing that is excessive or inappropriate for the time of year;
- Repeated injuries, or unexplained bruising or explanations that do not fit the injuries displayed;
- Increased hours being worked for no apparent reason;
- Changes during pregnancy - unfortunately statistics show instances of violence towards women increase during pregnancy.

It should be noted that the above is not an exhaustive list, nor is it a checklist. Not all victims behave in the same way and some may not show any signs of domestic abuse.

Suspecting an Employee is Experiencing Domestic Abuse

If you suspect that an employee is experiencing domestic abuse, you should talk to them. 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 you making the first move to initiate a conversation can be key.

It may be helpful to consider the following in preparing to talk to employees you suspect are experiencing domestic abuse. Further advice may also be sought from Human Resources.

You should ask your employee indirect questions to help establish a relationship and develop empathy. Below are some examples of questions that you could use:

- How are you 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 recent absence(s)/performance at work?
- How are things at home?
- What support do you think might help? What would you like to happen?

If an individual does not wish to talk with you and you are concerned about their safety or wellbeing you should contact Human Resources for advice.

Responding to a Disclosure of Domestic Abuse

When dealing with an employee who is experiencing or has experienced domestic abuse you should be prepared to:

- Prioritise confidentiality wherever possible, ensuring all discussions take place in private;
- Listen, reassure and take seriously what is being disclosed without the need to ask for proof, providing a sensitive and non-judgmental approach;

- Be aware that the employee may need some time following the initial conversation before signposting the employee to appropriate resources;
- Fully support employees by responding in a sensitive way ensuring that they are provided with up-to-date information and are aware of all the options open to them. Avoid telling them what you think should happen;
- Recognise that the employee may need some time to decide what to do and that they may try different options during this process;
- Discuss measures to prioritise safety in the workplace, ensuring that the employee's safety and wellbeing is prioritised;
- Be aware of what support is available and explore these options with the employee. This may address leave and time off work, financial issues and their health. This should also include signposting the employee to our Employee Assistance Programme and local and national support services.

It may be frustrating when an employee returns to their abuser or remains in an abusive relationship. There are many reasons as to why, including:

- Fear for their life and/or their children's lives;
- Financial problems;
- Responsibility;
- The fear that friends/family/others will not believe them;
- Belief that the abuse is their fault;
- Low self-esteem;
- Promises of change from the perpetrator;
- Lack of knowledge of support services.

Even if you 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.

Possible Adjustments/Support Mechanisms

The following is a list of possible adjustments/support mechanisms that could be considered to help an employee experiencing domestic abuse whilst they are at work:

- Divert telephone calls and email messages;
- Alert reception and security staff if the perpetrator/alleged perpetrator is known to come to our University premises;
- With consent, advise colleagues of the situation on a 'need to know' basis and agree what the response should be if the perpetrator/alleged perpetrator contacts the workplace;
- Allow your employee flexible working or special leave to facilitate any practical arrangements that are required, such as seeking legal advice, attending counselling, support meetings or to attend court;
- If your employee is absent, a method of communication should be arranged with yourself so that you are aware that the employee is safe, whilst maintaining confidentiality of their whereabouts;
- Identify a work contact for support and an emergency contact should you be unable to contact your employee.

Information on the support available to employees is also available in the guidelines and a full list of support agencies is included on the Domestic Abuse webpage.