

# Domestic violence and abuse: a trade union issue

A UNISON guide

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## Why is domestic abuse a trade union issue?

UNISON is committed to achieving equality in our workplaces, in our union and across society. Equality is a high priority for UNISON in our negotiating and campaigning work. People have the right to be treated with dignity and respect at work, to do their job to the best of their ability, free from discrimination and harassment. Just as we support members experiencing race, gender and other forms of discrimination, UNISON recognises we need to find ways to help our members who are experiencing domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse may be regarded as a personal issue, concerned with people's private lives and nothing to do with trade unionism. However, it is so widespread that many UNISON members are likely to be affected, and their lives and work are also likely to be overshadowed by it. Some may be members of your branch.

The impact of domestic abuse is wide-ranging and will inevitably affect workers and their colleagues. It is important that it is understood as a serious, recognisable and preventable issue in the workplace.

During the COVID-19 crisis, the UK government acknowledged the particular anxiety caused by lockdown or other restrictions for those who are experiencing or feel at risk of domestic abuse. The workplace is changing with more working from home for example. It is important to consider how support can be maintained as we all work in different ways.

Abuse can be psychological, financial and emotional, and includes controlling or coercive behaviour. It can also include stalking, forced marriage, so called 'honour crimes', and female genital mutilation, as well as on-line or digital abuse.

UNISON recognises that controlling and abusive behaviour can occur in mixed and same sex relationships, within extended families, and can affect men as well as women.

However, the vast majority of the victims/survivors of domestic abuse are women and children and women are also considerably more likely to experience repeated and severe forms of violence and sexual abuse.

More than two women per week are killed by current or ex-partners and figures are sadly rising. Currently, almost one in three women in the UK will experience domestic violence sometime in their lives. All research indicates that in an economic recession domestic violence and abuse increases and that funding for women's support services and refuges is likely to be cut.

Domestic abuse is most commonly perpetrated by men. Consequently, in this document we mainly refer to the perpetrator as 'he' and the victim/survivor as 'she'. However, the information in this guide relates to all victims/survivors of domestic abuse.

The effects of domestic abuse, like those of harassment in the workplace, can be far-reaching. Home and work issues cannot always be neatly separated. Domestic abuse can affect job performance, and therefore job prospects and security. It threatens the health and safety of those who suffer. It can threaten their lives. It is one of the most extreme forms of oppression a woman can experience.

It is important to remember that victims/survivors of domestic violence may be at increased risk of harm in their workplace if they leave an abusive partner, as it may be the only place where they can be located. As such, employers who are aware of domestic violence and fail to protect their employees from violence at work may be held liable under Health and Safety legislation.

Under the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974), the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1992), Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (1995) and the Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations (1996), employers have a legal responsibility to promote the welfare and safety of all staff.

Tragically, people sometimes die as a result of domestic abuse. When this happens, the law (under Section 9 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Adults Act 2004) says that professionals involved in the case must conduct a multi-agency review of what happened (a Domestic Homicide Review). The aim is to identify what needs to be changed to reduce the risk of it happening again in the future, and the reviews may be published. Employer involvement is actively encouraged and is seen as an important part of the duty of care to their employees.

UNISON recognises that domestic abuse is a trade union concern. In 2021 UNISON lobbied MPs during the passage of the Domestic Abuse Bill through parliament about the impact of domestic abuse in the workplace and succeeded in getting an amendment passed which protects victims from perpetrators in the workplace.

The statutory guidance which implements the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 highlights UNISON's Domestic Abuse guide and model policy as good practice for employers.

The government also recognises the role that employers can play in spotting signs of abuse and putting support mechanisms in place for victims/survivors. In 2021, the Business Minister wrote an open letter to employers setting out practical steps they could take to ensure every person in every workplace feels comfortable raising an issue of abuse **Domestic abuse: open letter from the Business Minister to employers - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk))**

The information and advice in this document is intended to help UNISON branches, officers and stewards understand some of the issues and provide the support needed by members experiencing that abuse. We also set out information for victims/survivors of abuse in the **further contacts section.**

## If you are concerned for your own or someone else's immediate safety, ring the police on 999.

If you or a friend needs help **call 0808 2000 247 the freephone 24 hour National Domestic Violence Helpline** (run in partnership between Women's Aid and Refuge) or email: [helpline@womensaid.org.uk](mailto:helpline@womensaid.org.uk).

The helpline is a member of Language Line and can provide access to an interpreter for non-English speaking callers. The helpline can also access the BT Type Talk Service.

You can also contact:

**0808 802 1414 – Northern Ireland Women's Aid 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline**  
(for women and men)

**0800 027 1234 – Scottish Domestic Abuse Helpline**

**0808 801 0800 – All Wales Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Helpline**

National LGBT Domestic Violence Helpline for LGBT+ for people experiencing domestic abuse and friends, family members, and professionals who may be concerned about an LGBT+ person who is facing abuse:

**Call 0300 999 5428, 10.00-17.00 Monday to Friday and Wednesday and Thursdays 10.00-20.00.** Outside these hours, you can email [help@galop.org.uk](mailto:help@galop.org.uk)

**Men's Advice Line** (for men experiencing domestic violence)

**Call 0808 801 0327 or email:**  
[info@mensadviceline.org.uk](mailto:info@mensadviceline.org.uk)

## What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is generally used to refer to abusive or violent behaviour between partners or ex-partners. Children may be involved, too, either suffering or witnessing the abuse, as may other family members, either as victims/survivors or abusers themselves.

Domestic abuse is about a range of controlling behaviours, not just physical violence. The abuse may be emotional, verbal, psychological, sexual or physical, or a combination. Financial abuse is another form of control used to gain power. It may develop slowly and insidiously, so that what at the outset could perhaps be seen as protective can become increasingly controlling.

Domestic abuse affects women of all classes, ages, races and religions as well as lesbian, bisexual and transgender women.

Domestic abuse related crimes are defined as any incidence of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial, or emotional) towards another "personally connected" person, where it has been identified that an offence has taken place.

A 'personal' connection is between two people who (a) are, or have been, married to each other; (b) are, or have been, civil partners of each other; (c) have agreed to marry one another (whether or not the agreement has been terminated); (d) have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether or not the agreement has been terminated); (e) are, or have been, in an intimate personal relationship with each other; (f) have, or there has been a time when they each have had, a parental relationship in relation to the same child; (g) they are relatives.

While domestic abuse is not itself a specific criminal offence, criminal offences may be

committed by perpetrators. Related offences could include but are not limited to controlling or coercive behaviour, harassment, stalking, criminal damage, physical assault, sexual assault, rape and murder

All forms of domestic abuse - psychological, economic, emotional and physical - come from the abuser's desire for power and control.

Different terms may be used - "violence"; "abuse"; "battering"; "violence by known men"; "domestic violence" and "abuse in the home". Some terms may appear to minimise and marginalise the impact and effect of the actions. It is important to remember the vast range of abusive behaviour: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional or psychological abuse and financial abuse.

Examples are:

- **Destructive criticism and verbal abuse:** shouting, mocking, accusing, name calling, verbally threatening, lying to the victim/survivor or to their friends and family, persistently putting her down in front of other people, never listening or responding when she talks, isolating her from friends and family, monitoring her phone calls, emails, texts and letters, checking up on her, following her, not letting her go out alone.
- **Pressure tactics:** sulking, threatening to withhold money or disconnect the telephone or take the car away or commit suicide or take the children away or report the victim/survivor to welfare agencies unless she complies with his demands regarding bringing up the children, lying to her friends and family about her, telling her that she has no choice in any decisions.
- **Disrespect:** persistently putting the victim/survivor down in front of other people, not listening or responding when she talks,
- **Breaking trust:** lying to the victim/survivor, withholding information from her, being jealous, having other relationships, breaking promises and shared agreements.
- **Isolation:** monitoring or blocking the victim/survivor's telephone calls, telling you where she can and cannot go, preventing her from seeing friends and relatives.
- **Harassment:** following the victim/survivor, checking up on her, opening her mail, repeatedly checking to see who has telephoned her, embarrassing her in public.
- **Threats:** making angry gestures, using physical size to intimidate, shouting the victim/survivor down, destroying her possessions, breaking things, punching walls, wielding a knife or a gun, threatening to kill or harm her and the children.
- **Sexual violence:** using force, threats or intimidation to make the victim/survivor perform sexual acts, having sex with her when she doesn't want to have sex, any degrading treatment based on her sexual orientation.
- **Physical violence:** punching, slapping, hitting, biting, pinching, kicking, pulling hair out, pushing, shoving, burning, strangling.
- **Denial:** saying the abuse doesn't happen, saying the victim/survivor caused the abusive behaviour, being publicly gentle and patient, crying and begging for forgiveness, saying it will never happen again
- **Financial abuse:** controlling/monitoring use of money and economic resources, destroying belongings, generating economic costs, refusing to contribute to household and child

costs, interfering with a victim/survivor's ability to work or undertake education and training.

## Coercive Control

On December 29th 2015 the criminal offence of domestic abuse 'coercive and controlling behaviour' came into force.

Coercive control is when an abuser repeatedly behaves in a way which makes the victim/survivor feel controlled, dependent, isolated or scared even though the abuser knows or ought to know that his behaviour would have a serious effect on her.

Common examples of coercive control include:

- isolating a person from their friends and family
- controlling how much money they have and how they spend it
- monitoring their activities and their movements
- repeatedly putting a person down, calling them names or telling them that they are worthless
- threatening to harm or kill a person or their child
- threatening to publish information about them or to report them to the police or the authorities
- damaging their property or household goods
- forcing them to take part in criminal activity or child abuse.

Some of the most dangerous domestic abuse cases happen when violence and coercive control occur together. This is when women

and children are more likely to be murdered and early identification and intervention is vital in order to save lives.

Polly Neate, Chief Executive of Women's Aid at the time said that the coercive control law "marked a big step forward for understanding, preventing, and tackling domestic abuse.... Coercive control – the systematic destruction of a survivor's self-esteem and autonomy – is the heart of domestic abuse."

## Honour-Based Violence

Honour-based violence is a violent crime or incident which may have been committed to protect or defend the honour of the family or community. It is often linked to family members or acquaintances who believe someone has brought shame to their family or community by doing something that is not in keeping with the traditional beliefs of their culture. Crimes of "honour" do not always include violence and might include:

- sexual or psychological abuse
- forced marriage
- being taken and held against the victim/survivor's will
- assault.

## Forced Marriage

A forced marriage is where one or both people do not (or in cases of people with learning or physical disabilities, cannot) consent to the marriage and pressure or abuse is used. A forced marriage is when the potential bride, groom or both are forced into marrying against their will, usually by their families.

The pressure put on people to marry against their will can be physical (including threats, actual physical violence and sexual violence) or emotional and psychological (for example, when someone is made to feel like they're bringing shame on their family). Financial abuse (taking the victim/survivor's wages or not giving her any money) can also be a factor. Men or women may be tricked into going abroad on a "family holiday" and may be subjected to all these abuses and pressures until they "agree" to the marriage. Victims may be imprisoned and threatened with abandonment by their families if they resist the marriage.

## Female Genital Mutilation

Female genital mutilation (FGM), also known as female circumcision or female genital cutting, is defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as "all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons".

FGM is practiced in more than 29 countries across Africa, parts of the Middle East, South East Asia and countries where migrants from FGM affected communities live. Female Genital Mutilation is not a religious requirement or obligation. Globally most Muslims do not practise FGM and it is not condoned by Christian or Jewish teachings, or the Bible or Torah. However it is estimated that 137,000 girls and women are living with the consequences of FGM in the UK alone and 60,000 girls under 15 are at risk of FGM in the UK.

The procedure is traditionally carried out by an older woman with no medical training. The most common age when it is done is between four and ten.

FGM or failing to protect a girl at risk of FGM is a criminal offence in the UK. FGM is considered to be child abuse in the UK.

## Stalking

Stalking is a pattern of repeated and persistent unwanted behaviour that is intrusive and engenders fear. It is when one person becomes fixated or obsessed with another and the attention is unwanted. Threats may not be made but victims may still feel scared.

Data from the Crime Survey of England and Wales shows that in the year ending March 2020, there were over 1.5m offences of stalking; 526,000 men (35%) and 977,000 women.

Research (by Sheridan, L., 2005, paper on key findings from the [www.stalkingsurvey.com](http://www.stalkingsurvey.com)) found that 75% of domestic stalkers will target their victim at work, with 79% of male perpetrators using their work resources to target the victim. The majority of stalkers who attend the workplace will be ex-partners of the victims, who also experienced domestic abuse within the relationship.

Laura Richards, Director of Paladin (the National Stalking Advocacy Service) warns that "Many victims we work with are stalked at their place of work and it has a serious impact on their performance as well as attendance levels due to the psychological impact, stress and anxiety. Many also need time off to attend repeat legal appointments. Some stalkers may escalate to serious harm and murder. I have reviewed many cases that have tragically ended in murder and yet the links have not been made. Employers have a duty of care to ensure the health, safety and welfare at work of all their employees. It is vital that employers protect their staff with the relevant policies and offer them the appropriate support to keep them safe."



## Online and digital abuse

Online domestic abuse can include behaviours such as:

- monitoring of social media profiles or emails
- abuse over social media such as Facebook or Twitter, sharing personal or intimate information without a person's consent including sex videos and photos sometimes called 'revenge porn'
- stealing a person's identity
- setting up profiles in a person's name
- trying to damage a person's reputation by making false comments
- accusing her of things she hasn't done
- using GPS locators or spyware
- long-term, intrusive and persistent pursuit of one person by another, making the victim feel frightened and distressed sometimes called 'cyber stalking'.

Women's Aid research found that for 85% of respondents, the abuse they received online from a partner or ex-partner was part of a pattern of abuse they also experienced offline.

For half of respondents the online abuse they experienced also involved direct threats to them or someone they knew.

Nearly a third of those respondents who had received threats stated that where threats had been made online by a partner or ex-partner they were carried out.

## Why do we call it domestic abuse?

Abuse is abuse so why do we call violence and abuse that happens in the home "domestic"? Doesn't this just trivialise the seriousness of it?

One of the reasons is that calling it "domestic" abuse differentiates it from "stranger" violence and so allows us to explore some of the crucial differences. It is important to acknowledge these differences because they can help us to understand why women may respond to their experiences in a certain way.

Some differences are:

- The victim/survivor and the perpetrator are known to one another which means that feelings of betrayal of trust may be involved. Usually, the people involved live or used to live together.
- Unlike stranger violence, domestic abuse occurs overwhelmingly in private and behind closed doors. This allows perpetrators to argue in court that they are "not a danger to the general public".
- "Outsiders" tend, on the whole, to take domestic abuse less seriously and are more likely to seek to blame the victim/survivor for the occurrence.
- Domestic abuse rarely happens once, and tends to increase in frequency or severity over time. The victim/survivor may find that challenging the abuse on her own leads to an increase in abuse from the perpetrator.
- The perpetrator has on-going access to the victim/survivor which has implications for which options for action are safe.
- Often the victim/survivor has feelings of care towards her assailant and hopes that he

will change. This makes the situations very complex and means that there are rarely simple solutions.

- The abuser knows how to get to her, how to hurt her, often in subtle ways that may not be understood by others.
- Injuries can be easily targeted on places where they are not seen.

Attacks are often presented as momentary loss of control, but are more likely to be part of a continuous pattern of threats, bullying and assaults which are used to maintain power and control.

The term “domestic” implies a marital squabble, a private and personal matter which merits no intervention from outside, rather than a pernicious - and possibly life-threatening - social evil. An abusive man may be excused by society: perhaps he was reacting to his wife’s “nagging”. The woman may be blamed for “bringing it on herself” or being “addicted” to violence. This is a myth: the responsibility for abuse lies with the abuser.

The Cavell Nurses’ Trust’s 2016 research findings show that nursing professionals are three times more likely to face domestic abuse than the public. 4.4% of the nurses the Trust spoke to had been threatened in the last year. This means that someone said they would hurt or kill them, or that they would use a weapon against them or someone close to them, like their child.

Simon Knighton, chair of the Trust said that “every day, in every corner of the UK, nurses are giving their all to care for their patients. Then behind closed doors around one in seven of these nurses is experiencing domestic abuse.”

The effects of domestic abuse may be both far-reaching and long-term, possibly lasting years after the abuse took place.

Anyone experiencing domestic abuse may feel afraid, ashamed and unable to confide in others or to seek help. Brutalised women often lack self-confidence and self-esteem, yet still feel responsible for keeping the family together and for maintaining relationships. Family, friends and outside organisations may reinforce these feelings. The woman may be too frightened of the abuser and his power, real or imagined, to leave.

## Black women and domestic abuse

There is no evidence to suggest that women from some ethnic or cultural communities are any more at risk than others, although the form the abuse takes may vary. However Black women and minority ethnic women have to also face racism and additional stereotyping.

They may be unwilling to seek help from statutory agencies (such as the police, social services, or housing authorities) because they are afraid of a racist response. They may be afraid of rejection from their own community if they ask for help.

Black women and minority ethnic women may find that service providers are basing their responses on particular cultural, ethnic or religious stereotypes. **(see the further contacts section from page 20 for specialist support).**

## Disabled women and domestic abuse

The 2008 report from Women’s Aid, ‘Making the Links: Disabled Women and Domestic Violence’ found that:

- Disabled women are twice as likely to experience gender-based violence than non-disabled women.

- They are also likely to experience abuse over a longer period of time and suffer more severe injuries as a result.
- They are less likely to seek help and often the help is not appropriate. The lack of accessible refuges and temporary accommodation, the scarcity of information on tape or in Braille, and the unavailability of sign language interpreters may compound the problems that disabled women fleeing abuse face.
- Disabled women said that their being disabled made the abuse worse and severely limited their capacity to escape.
- Financial abuse is widely experienced by disabled women.
- Abuse is often more acute where the abusive partner is the principal carer, who may expect tolerance of such abuse as a form of gratitude for being helped.
- Some disabled women may face additional barriers to safety and support such as being socially isolated as a result of their physical dependence on their partner and/or carer.

Examples of the type of abuse experienced by disabled women include:

- The abuser withholding vital care, medication or food.
- The abuser removing or damaging equipment such as sensory or mobility aids in order to limit her independence.
- If the woman has a visual impairment or mobility problems, the abuser may create obstacles around the home so that she is afraid to move around independently.
- The abuser may claim disability benefits on her behalf and limit her access to funds.

- The abuser may use her impairment to criticise or humiliate her. Or he may threaten to tell social services that she is not fit to live alone

## Age and domestic abuse

Older people too can potentially become a victim of domestic abuse wherever they live or visit. The abuser is often well known to the victim/survivor such as their partner or child or relative, a carer or a person they care for. Often the abuser is exploiting a special relationship with an expectation of trust. It can happen in many different ways: physical, psychological, financial sexual abuse and neglect.

Although domestic abuse happens mostly between adults, young people can be affected by the abuse that they see and hear, and they can be hurt or bullied as part of sexual abuse between adults. Young people may also experience abuse from their own partner. Sexual violence and the sexual exploitation of girls have also become a feature of gang culture, and through the use of technology.

## LGBT+ people

LGBT + people are also vulnerable to domestic abuse, from their partners, ex-partners or family members. Surveys show that at least one in four LGBT+ people experience domestic violence.

One of the major barriers to recognising LGBT+ domestic abuse is that the abuse has traditionally been portrayed as a heterosexual issue. Lesbian, bisexual women and trans women can experience the same issues of power and control within their relationships as in any couple, which may manifest itself as physical, sexual, verbal and economic abuse.

There are also issues that are specific to LGBT+ women. The perpetrator – a partner, ex-

partner or family member - may use their sexual orientation or gender identity against them.

This is only an effective tool to exercise power and control because they occur in the broader context of marginalisation and discrimination against LGBT+ people. Examples include:

- threats to out the person to their employer or family – to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity without their consent
- fears that no-one will help because they think the person “deserves” the abuse (perhaps because of a belief that service providers are homo/bi/transphobic or heterosexist)
- the myth that abuse in same sex relationships is “mutual”
- undermining the person’s sense of identity
- controlling the person’s access to social networks, particularly LGBT+ support networks.

All these factors can also act as a barrier to women getting help, with a very high proportion not reporting abuse to the police. LGBT+ women may also fear approaching mainstream domestic abuse services, thinking they will meet prejudice or lack of understanding. Trans women may have particular concerns about how they will be received. Women’s refuges may not feel safe to someone fleeing a violent woman partner as a female perpetrator may be able to access women’s refuges unless the staff are aware and vigilant.

It is vital that all domestic abuse services are informed and able to meet the needs of LGBT+ women. But it is also vital to publicise widely the specialist support available to LGBT +people **(see the Further contacts section from page 20).**

## Why do victims stay?

My Sisters Place [www.mysistersplace.org.uk](http://www.mysistersplace.org.uk) an independent specialist one stop shop based in Middlesborough for women aged 16 or over who have experienced or are experiencing abuse, found that almost 50% of the women they were supporting were employed. Investigation of these cases showed a catalogue of barriers and difficulties in accessing the services they needed, in particular, safe, temporary accommodation and legal aid to secure their property rights and the safety of children.

Leaving is an extreme action requiring strength and resourcefulness that may have been eroded by fear and despair. A woman may fear reprisals. 50% of fleeing women are followed. As shown by research undertaken by My Sister’s Place, difficulties with housing and money, as well as a range of emotional pressures, often force a woman to return to an abuser. Leaving may cease to be an option.

Displays of confusion and emotional paralysis may lead others to judge that the abuse is not happening or is not serious; the woman may want to believe that too. A victim/survivor needs to be supported to make changes at her own pace, with the benefit of reliable information about the choices open to her.

## Perpetrators of domestic abuse

Many perpetrators of domestic abuse don’t come into contact with the criminal justice system. Even if they are convicted and imprisoned, they will soon be back in the community, often back in the same family. They may have ongoing contact with their children, even if the relationship with the child’s mother has ended. When one relationship ends, most perpetrators have other relationships, creating new victims/survivors.

It is important that employers recognise that they have a role in encouraging and supporting employees to address violent and abusive behaviour of all kinds and are clear that abuse is always unacceptable. Employers should be seen to respond appropriately to perpetrators to promote the safety of victims/survivors and children. It is far more likely that a perpetrator will reveal information about their violence and abuse to people they know, such as someone at their work. There may be signs of uncharacteristic or other types of behaviour that may be indicative of a concern. Perpetrators may also use workplace resources such as telephones and emails to threaten, harass, stalk or abuse their current or former partner, through which work colleagues may become aware of the abuse. The abuse may also come to light as a result of allegations made, notification by the police or the employee needing time off to attend court. Some men may voluntarily ask for help to deal with their abusive behaviour.

Acts of domestic violence can be a criminal offence, but the fact that an employee has been charged with a criminal offence may not in itself be sufficient grounds for disciplinary action, including dismissal, unless this is specifically covered by the workplace code of conduct. Employers will need to consider whether there is a connection between the abusive behaviour and their role at work and the extent to which the employee's role involves contact with, or poses a risk to, other employees and the general public.

If the victim/survivor and the perpetrator work in the same organisation, in addition to considering potential disciplinary action against the employee who is perpetrating the abuse, action may need to be taken to ensure that the victim/survivor and perpetrator do not come into contact in the workplace. Action (such as change of duties for one or both employees or withdrawing access to information) may also need to be taken to minimise the potential for the perpetrator to use their position or

work resources to find out details about the whereabouts of the victim/survivor.

One of the most common requests from victims/survivors is for someone to work with their partner, to help him change and to keep them safe from his violence. Employers can help perpetrators to end their abusive behaviour by providing information about the services and support available to them, and encouraging the perpetrator to seek support and help from an appropriate source, such as the Respect Phonenumber.

Respect is the UK membership association for Domestic Violence Prevention Programmes and Integrated Support Services. Domestic violence prevention programmes are community based groupwork programmes which work directly with perpetrators with the aim of changing their behaviour and stopping further abuse and violence. Research is ongoing about the effectiveness of perpetrator programmes.

The Respect Phonenumber is a confidential helpline for domestic abuse perpetrators (male, female, in mixed or same sex relationships). They offer information and advice to support perpetrators to stop their violence and change their abusive behaviours.

**If you are worried about your behaviour towards your partner, or if you have been abusive or violent, you can get information from the Respect Phonenumber.**

**Call 0808 802 4040 (free from landlines and most mobile phones). Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm**

You can leave a message when the lines are closed or busy and they will get back to you within 2 working days.

Email: [info@respectphonenumber.org.uk](mailto:info@respectphonenumber.org.uk)  
[www.respectphonenumber.org.uk](http://www.respectphonenumber.org.uk)

## What can UNISON do?

UNISON has established policy that recognises that domestic abuse is a gendered issue and is committed to working with the women members' self organised groups, branches and regions in developing and negotiating workplace policies on domestic abuse.

UNISON recognises that men and boys can also be the victims of violence and that there has been a rise in domestic abuse in same sex relationships. UNISON is opposed to all violence, whatever the gender or age of the perpetrator or victim.

UNISON supports and lobbies for the UK to enact the UN statutory definition of violence against women: **“Any act of gender based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty whether occurring in public or in private life”.**

UNISON lobbied successfully for the the law (Domestic Abuse Act 2021) to recognise that domestic abuse can have an impact in the workplace, on victims and their colleagues and that employers and trade unions can help see the signs of abuse and help prevent it. UNISON continues to campaign for paid leave for workers experiencing domestic abuse.

UNISON is clear that when employers have a policy on domestic abuse, this can make a real difference to victims/survivors of abuse having the confidence to seek support and we are proud of our role in helping persuade the government to provide advice to employers on domestic abuse including recommending UNISON's own model policy. UNISON reps locally are working hard to get employers to agree the model policy and an increasing number of employers are recognising that it makes good business sense as well as being

socially responsible to agree to implement a policy.

As the ways we work are changing and more workers are working flexibly from home, UNISON's model policy recommends that employer's policies on domestic abuse take account of the particular circumstances of employees who are working from home, including providing job flexibility.

Despite more public awareness of misogyny, sexual harassment and domestic abuse and a political commitment to take steps to prevent it, there is evidence that violence against women and girls continues to increase. 40,572 women were victims of sexual assault in the year ending September 2021, up 13% from the previous year, the highest number of sexual offences ever recorded within a 12-month period.

Not-reporting acts of abuse and violence in an issue. Sadly, it is still the case that victim who report incidents are not believed and this prevents many women from reporting violence and abuse.

Violence and abuse against women is rife in some parts of society and even trade unions are not immune.

If any incident or allegation is raised in any workplace, including UNISON, there must be a fair and impartial investigation that protects the rights of all parties. UNISON branches manage this on a daily basis. For example, in a situation where a member has put in an allegation against another member, each member has a representative who is there to protect their individual interests and to support them, but any investigation resulting from their allegations is independent, fair and impartial.

Likewise, if legal advice were sought from UNISON from both a complainant and the person complained of, the same test would be applied to both parties: there would be

separate legal evaluation of the complaint and the defence, and separate representation for both parties, where this was judged appropriate within UNISON's legal guidelines.

It is essential that anyone reporting abuse is confident that reporting such an incident would be taken seriously, and that all women who complain of male violence have the right to be listened to, their allegations taken seriously and properly investigated with appropriate action being taken if proven.

For women in an abusive relationship, the workplace can be an important protective factor. It offers time away from the abuser, space for women to be themselves and valued for their skills and abilities, a source of income that provides some autonomy and independence and communication with work colleagues that reduces isolation. Employers should also be able to provide support to make a disclosure and seek help but, as a TUC survey showed, too often women suffer in silence – too afraid, or too ashamed to tell their employer.

Women are more likely to turn to a trusted union rep, and with violence at home undoubtedly impacting on job performance, it is important that victims/survivors have a union on their side

Members who are abused should be in no doubt that UNISON is there to support them personally at all levels - locally and nationally - through campaigning and lobbying on the issues to changing the way abused women are treated. The union is committed to raising awareness of the effects of domestic abuse amongst members and their employers, and of finding ways to help victims/survivors of domestic abuse.

## What branches can do

Branches can raise the issues of domestic abuse and its effects with employers, among the membership and with activists. They can highlight the value of a domestic abuse policy.

Local branch welfare officers may be the first point of contact for members who are experiencing domestic abuse and associated personal, emotional or financial difficulties. These officers are also the local representative of There for You (UNISON welfare). There for You provides a confidential service for members over the phone or in person and may also be able to offer financial support and give debt advice.

**You can contact There for You on  
020 7121 5620 or  
email [thereforyou@unison.co.uk](mailto:thereforyou@unison.co.uk) or speak  
to your branch welfare officer.**

A support system for members experiencing domestic abuse could also be established at branch level. The branch women's group might undertake its co-ordination, perhaps with the LGBT members', disabled members' and Black members' groups, or it might be easier to initiate at regional level. Given the sensitivity and high level of emotion associated with domestic abuse incidents, support should focus on practical measures.

The branch should make sure that any support available is well publicised so that any woman knows who to approach directly, without having to ask stewards or branch officers who may not be directly involved. The support needed is likely to be both personal and practical.



There are a number of practical measures that branches should consider:

- ensuring all members are aware of There for You (UNISON welfare) services and how to access them
- ensuring all branch reps know what advice and support is available to victims/survivors
- making information on existing services available, with a stock of appropriate leaflets
- obtaining emergency welfare funds to assist a woman's flight
- establishing links with local agencies, such as Women's Aid and refuges, legal aid solicitors, the housing advice centre, a local rape crisis centre (contacts should be available in the telephone directory, through your local authority or public library, or **see the Further contacts section from page 20**)
- supporting a local refuge and lobbying for its support by local authorities and others
- affiliating to appropriate national campaigns and their local groups.

Branch and workplace reps can also work with employers on implementing a domestic abuse policy. **A model workplace agreement on domestic violence and abuse is available on page 25.** It is key that all branch reps know what advice and support is available to recipients of domestic abuse.

## Why should employers have a policy?

Domestic abuse results in

- decreased productivity
- increased absenteeism
- increased errors
- increased employee turnover

and in many cases the violence and abuse can spill out of the home and into the workplace. If the workplace is home, this can intensify any violence and abuse.

Domestic violence also affects other staff who may

- have to fill in for absent or non-productive colleagues
- feel resentful of victims/survivors needing time off or receiving extra attention
- try to protect victims/survivors from unwanted phone calls and visits
- be completely unaware of how to intervene, often feeling helpless and distracted from their work
- fear for their own safety
- hear and/or take part in harmful gossip and rumours.

## Negotiation with employers

Branches should put the following issues on the negotiating agenda with employers:

- reassurance that any woman seeking help will be assisted in the strictest confidence



- reassurance for a woman experiencing domestic abuse that her job is secure, with help to minimise the disruption in her life
- job flexibility, with understanding about the possible need to work irregular hours and for special paid leave
- no penalisation through sickness absence monitoring policies
- if redeployment is requested, everything should be done to achieve it at no cost to the woman, and her new working location should not be revealed
- provision of independent and confidential counselling at no cost to the woman and in working hours
- adequate facility time for members of the branch involved in supporting a woman fleeing abuse
- appropriate training and awareness raising for managers and HR officers so that they are able to support staff experiencing abuse and deal with any associated intimidation of colleagues if the abuser visits the woman's workplace
- ensure that health and safety risk assessments are carried out to protect employees
- encourage employers to develop guidelines and good practice on domestic abuse, not just for their staff through a workplace policy but also the community, working in conjunction both with UNISON and appropriate outside agencies, such as Women's Aid
- ensuring effective publicity about all these service conditions to all staff.

### **Risk assessments**

If domestic violence is disclosed, the employer should consider undertaking a work place risk assessment to ensure that the potential risk to the employee and work colleagues is minimised. If there is a reason to consider that the employee's (ex)-partner presents a risk to other employees then the employer can also consider taking legal action to protect the workplace.

The employee should be encouraged to contact a specialist domestic violence service (see the Further contacts section from page 20) who can assess the risk that a victim is exposed to by using a risk assessment tool such as the DASH (domestic abuse, stalking and honour based violence) risk assessment ([www.dashriskchecklist.co.uk](http://www.dashriskchecklist.co.uk)).

Some organisations (for example, local authorities) may have a staff member who is a specialist in domestic violence and has training in the use of the DASH. If this is the case then they can undertake such an assessment. The professional will ask the employee questions related to the risk factors and will then work with the victim and the employer to manage that risk.

In cases where an employee is considered to be a high or very high risk victim then it is likely that they will be referred to a Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC). MARACs are monthly multi-agency meetings that aim to increase the protection of high risk victims of domestic violence through a broad range of supportive interventions.

### **Special paid leave**

Many workplace domestic abuse policies make important links with other existing policies that allow, for example, individuals to change working patterns and take special leave. For a victim/survivor to find a new home, get a place at a refuge, secure new school places for her children, receive legal advice, open a new bank

account, seek medical help and counselling, it will take a considerable amount of time as well as money. Paid leave is essential to help facilitate these practical arrangements.

Unions in Australia have successfully campaigned on domestic violence as a workplace issue and have negotiated 20 days of paid leave in cases of domestic violence across the whole of the public sector.

The UNISON branch of Luton Borough Council successfully negotiated within their domestic abuse policy support for victims/survivors that included “special paid leave up to a maximum of 20 days for relevant appointments, including with support agencies, solicitors, to rearrange housing or childcare, and for court appointments.”

Newcastle City Council have also agreed to a “provision to grant up to two weeks special leave with pay for a variety of purposes, including for an unforeseen personal or domestic crisis. Managers should look sympathetically at requests for reasonable time-off with pay for employees who have disclosed that they are experiencing domestic violence.”

The ability to take time off work without facing disciplinary action or losing out on pay is crucial for survivors of domestic abuse who are trying to flee an abusive relationship.

### The benefits for our members of employer policies:

- It raises awareness of the issue in the workplace.
- It makes clear the employer position on domestic violence and abuse.
- It has the potential to make disclosing less terrifying.
- It encourages a sympathetic response.
- The employer is less likely to initiate disciplinary/capability/attendance procedures on victims/survivors.
- Risk assessments will be undertaken – protecting recipients and their colleagues in the workplace.
- We are more likely to appreciate and support the voluntary sector services available.

## Checklist of what should be included in a workplace domestic violence and abuse policy

- Principles and commitment
- Legal obligations
- Definitions of domestic abuse, including a statement that it can occur in mixed and same sex relationships, and in the extended family
- Take account of the particular circumstances of employees who are working from home
- Clear indicators to identify domestic abuse
- Support services available and how to access them
- Specific roles and responsibilities for managers
- HR involvement and training
- Working together with trade unions
- Specific roles and responsibilities of employees
- Confidentiality and record keeping
- When both parties are employees – managing ongoing safety issues – safety planning
- Perpetrators of domestic violence
- Training/awareness raising for all staff
- Special paid leave
- Temporary or permanent changes to working times and patterns
- Changes in specific duties
- Redeployment or relocation
- Measures to ensure a safe working environment
- Training courses for victims/survivors with time off to attend
- Links with other existing policies (e.g. flexible working policy, harassment and bullying policy, sickness absence monitoring)
- Monitoring and review.

## Further contacts

### National Domestic Violence helpline

Open 24 hours

Call freephone 0808 2000 247

### Men's Advice Line

For men experiencing domestic abuse

Call freephone 0808 801 0327

[www.mensadviceline.org.uk](http://www.mensadviceline.org.uk)

### Women's Aid

[www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk) is the national domestic violence charity that helps up to 250,000 women and children every year.

They work to end violence against women and children, and support over 350 domestic and sexual violence services across the country.

### Welsh Women's Aid/Cymorth i Ferched Cymru

[www.welshwomensaid.org.uk](http://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk)

### Scottish Women's Aid

[www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk](http://www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk)

### Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland

[www.womensaidni.org](http://www.womensaidni.org)

24 hour domestic and sexual violence helpline

Call freephone 0808 802 1414 - open to all women and men affected by domestic violence

Email: [24hoursupport@dvhelpline.org](mailto:24hoursupport@dvhelpline.org)

Text support to 07797 805 839

### Refuge

<http://refuge.org.uk> has grown to become the country's largest single provider of specialist domestic violence services. On any given day they support over 2,000 women and children.

### Respect

[www.respect.uk.net](http://www.respect.uk.net) is the national association for professionals working with people to end their abusive behaviour.

### White Ribbon Campaign

This campaign is the largest effort in the world of men working to end men's violence against women. It is an educational organisation, encouraging reflection and discussion that leads to personal and collective action among men.

[www.whiteribboncampaign.co.uk](http://www.whiteribboncampaign.co.uk)

## Support for LGBT+ people

### **National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline 0800 999 5428**

A helpline for LGBT+ people who have or are experiencing domestic abuse. We are also here for people supporting a survivor of domestic abuse; friends, families and those working with a survivor.

Email [help@galop.org.uk](mailto:help@galop.org.uk)

The helpline is open: Monday to Friday 10am – 5pm, Wednesday and Thursday 10am – 8pm

<https://galop.org.uk/>

## Support for Black women and children and those from minority ethnic communities

### **Foreign and Commonwealth Office Forced Marriage Unit**

If you feel concerned about a potential forced marriage you should contact them on 020 7008 0151 or email: [fmufco.gov.uk](mailto:fmufco.gov.uk)

The Unit can also speak about forced marriage at conferences or run training workshops for large groups.

Email for outreach work:

[fmuoutreach@fco.gov.uk](mailto:fmuoutreach@fco.gov.uk)

[www.gov.uk/forced-marriage](http://www.gov.uk/forced-marriage)

### **Southall Black Sisters**

Southall Black Sisters is a not-for-profit organisation set up to meet the needs of Black (Asian and African-Caribbean) and minority ethnic women. For more than three decades they have been at the forefront of challenging domestic and gender violence locally and nationally.

Call: 0208 571 0800

General enquiries: 0208 571 9595

[www.southallblacksisters.org.uk](http://www.southallblacksisters.org.uk)

### **Karma Nirvana**

This charity supports victims and survivors of Forced Marriage and Honour Based Abuse and run a helpline. Their aim is to raise public awareness on the issues and in breaking the silence. They provide education through accredited training, including seminars, conferences and workshops.

Honour Network Helpline: 0800 5999 247

[www.karmanirvana.org.uk](http://www.karmanirvana.org.uk)

### **FORWARD**

Forward is an African Diaspora women's campaign and support charity existing to advance sexual and reproductive health and rights as central to the wellbeing of African women and girls. They work with individuals, communities and organisations to transform harmful practices and improve the quality of life of vulnerable girls and women.

[www.forwarduk.org.uk](http://www.forwarduk.org.uk)

### **Daughters of Eve**

This non profit organisation works to advance and protect the physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health rights of young people from female genital mutilation practising communities.

[www.dofeve.org](http://www.dofeve.org)

### **Muslim Community Helpline**

The Muslim Community Helpline aims to provide a listening and emotional support service for members of the community in the United Kingdom.

Call: 0208 904 8193 or 020 8908 6715, Monday to Friday, 10am to 1pm

[www.muslimcommunityhelpline.org.uk](http://www.muslimcommunityhelpline.org.uk)

### **Nour**

Nour is a charity which aims to engage the public, and especially the minority Muslim communities, to become aware and take action

against domestic violence. They are able to offer access to Islamic advisors, professional advisors and legal advisors.

<http://nour-dv.org.uk>

### **The Kiran Project**

The Kiran Project was set up in 1990 to meet the needs of women from the Indian sub-continent experiencing domestic violence.

[www.kiranproject.org.uk](http://www.kiranproject.org.uk)

### **The Chinese Information and Advice Centre (CIAC)**

CIAC provides free information, advice and support to disadvantaged Chinese people living in the UK. This includes supporting women and children who are victims, or at risk of domestic violence.

[www.ciac.co.uk](http://www.ciac.co.uk)

### **Jewish Women's Aid**

Jewish Women's Aid is the only specialist organisation in the UK supporting Jewish women affected by domestic violence.

Helpline: 0808 801 0500, 9.30am to 9.30pm - Monday to Thursday

Head Office: 020 8445 8060

[www.jwa.org.uk](http://www.jwa.org.uk)

### **BAWSO**

BAWSO is an all Wales organisation delivering specialist services to people from Black and Ethnic Minority backgrounds who are affected by domestic abuse and other forms of abuse, including Female Genital Mutilation, Forced Marriage, Human Trafficking & Prostitution.

24 hour helpline: 0800 731 8147

Tel: 029 20644 633

Email: [Info@bawso.org.uk](mailto:Info@bawso.org.uk)

[www.bawso.org.uk](http://www.bawso.org.uk)

### **JAN Trust**

JAN Trust works with vulnerable women JAN Trust was formed to support and provide services to grass root and hard to reach communities because it was noticed that their needs were not being met in order for them to feel and be part of society. It is dedicated to the cause of combating poverty, discrimination, abuse and social exclusion among Black, Asian, minority ethnic, refugee and asylum women.

Tel: 0208 889 9433

Email: [info@jantrust.org](mailto:info@jantrust.org)

[www.jantrust.org](http://www.jantrust.org)

## Legal support

### **Rights of Women**

**Rights of Women** is a women's voluntary organisation committed to informing, educating and empowering women concerning their legal rights.

**Family law advice line** for advice on issues including domestic violence and abuse.

**Call 020 7251 6577 (telephone) or 020 7490**

**2562 (textphone)** on Mondays 7pm to 9pm, Tuesdays 7pm to 9pm, Wednesday 7pm to 9pm, Thursday 7pm to 9pm and Fridays 12noon to 2pm

[www.rightsofwomen.org.uk](http://www.rightsofwomen.org.uk)

### **The National Centre for Domestic Violence (NCDV)**

The Centre provides a free, fast emergency injunction service to survivors of domestic violence regardless of their financial circumstances, race, gender or sexual orientation. They work in close partnership with the police, local firms of solicitors and other support agencies (Refuge, Women's Aid etc) to help survivors obtain speedy protection.

**Freephone: 0800 970 2070**

**Minicom service: 18001 08009 702070**

[www.ncdv.org.uk](http://www.ncdv.org.uk)

## Other support

### **The National Stalking Helpline**

This helpline provides guidance and information to anybody who is currently or has previously been affected by harassment or stalking.

Call 0808 802 0300

Email [advice@stalkinghelpline.org](mailto:advice@stalkinghelpline.org)

[www.stalkinghelpline.org](http://www.stalkinghelpline.org)

### **Paladin – National Stalking Advocacy Service**

Paladin assists high risk victims of stalking throughout England and Wales.

<http://paladinservice.co.uk/>

### **Action Against Stalking**

This website provides helpful information for anyone who is being stalked.

[www.actionagainststalking.org/](http://www.actionagainststalking.org/)

### **Respond**

Respond works with children and adults with learning disabilities who have experienced abuse or trauma, as well as those who have abused others, through psychotherapy, advocacy, campaigning and other support. Respond also aims to prevent abuse by providing training, consultancy and research.

[www.respond.org.uk](http://www.respond.org.uk)

### **The National Child Protection Helpline**

Report your concern or get advice and support on NSPCC's free 24/7 adult helpline by phone, text or online.

Call 0808 800 5000

Email: [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk)

Text: 88858

### **Childline**

Support for children and young people.

Call 0800 1111

[www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

### **Get Connected**

Free confidential help for young people aged under 25.

Call 0808 808 4994

[www.getconnected.org.uk](http://www.getconnected.org.uk)

### **National Association for People Abused in Childhood (NAPAC)**

NAPAC is a registered charity, based in the UK, providing support and information for people abused in childhood.

Support line: 0800 085 3330 or 0808 801 0331. 10am till 9pm Monday to Thursday and 10am till 6pm on Friday.

[www.napac.org.uk](http://www.napac.org.uk)

### **Advocacy After Fatal Domestic Violence (for bereaved friends and family)**

Helping families after fatal domestic abuse through listening and via practical help by informing, guiding, advocating and enabling.

[www.aafda.org.uk](http://www.aafda.org.uk)

### **The Sara Charlton Charitable Foundation**

A grant-making charity dedicated to helping victims of domestic abuse, including honour-based violence, in the United Kingdom.

[www.sarachariton.org.uk](http://www.sarachariton.org.uk)

### **Rape Crisis**

Rape Crisis England & Wales is a feminist organisation that exists to promote the needs of women and girls who have experienced sexual violence, to improve services to them and to work towards the elimination of sexual violence.

Freephone helpline 0808 802 9999

[www.rapecrisis.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisis.org.uk)

### **Rape Crisis Scotland**

Free helpline 08088 01 03 02

[www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk)

### **Rape Crisis Network Ireland**

[www.rcni.ie](http://www.rcni.ie)

### **Samaritans**

Call 08457 90 90 90 (UK)

Email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

### **Victim support**

Call 0845 3030 900

[www.victimsupport.org.uk](http://www.victimsupport.org.uk)

### **Crimestoppers**

Call 0800 555 111

[www.crimestoppers-uk.org](http://www.crimestoppers-uk.org)



## **Model workplace agreement on domestic violence and abuse**

This agreement is made between  
[THE EMPLOYER] and UNISON, a registered trade union.

This agreement comes into force on:      This agreement will be reviewed on:

Date  
\_\_\_\_\_

Date  
\_\_\_\_\_

Signed on behalf of [THE EMPLOYER]  
\_\_\_\_\_

Signed on behalf of UNISON  
\_\_\_\_\_

Date  
\_\_\_\_\_

Date  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Principles and commitment

It is (employer's name) policy that every employee who is experiencing or has experienced domestic abuse has the right to raise the issue with their employer in the knowledge that we will treat the matter effectively, sympathetically and confidentially. This policy also covers the approach we will take where there are concerns that an employee may be the perpetrator of domestic abuse.

We are committed to developing a workplace culture that recognises that some employees will be experiencing domestic abuse and that the workplace should be a place of safety and one that recognises that perpetrators of domestic abuse are responsible for their behaviour and for addressing this.

Through this domestic abuse policy and working to reduce the risks related to domestic abuse, we aim to create a safer workplace and send out a strong message that domestic abuse is unacceptable.

(Employer's name) recognises that domestic abuse is an equalities issue and undertakes to not discriminate against anyone who has been subjected to domestic abuse both in terms of current employment or future development.

This policy is part of (employer's name)'s commitment to family friendly working, and seeks to benefit the welfare of individual members of staff; retain valued employees; improve morale and performance and enhance the reputation of (employer's name) as an employer of choice.

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

(1996), (employer's name) recognises its legal responsibilities in promoting the welfare and safety of all staff. Therefore this policy applies to staff across all sites as well as agency and contract staff (and elected members).

## Definition of domestic abuse

Domestic violence and abuse is best described as the use of physical and/or emotional abuse or violence, including undermining of self confidence, sexual violence or the threat of violence, by any person, who is or has been in a close relationship with the victims/survivors, including abuse of parents or adult children. This policy is therefore applicable whatever the nature of the intimate relationship.

The government definition is:

"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.

Controlling behaviour is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance

and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour..

Coercive behaviour is: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.”

This definition includes so called ‘honour’ based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage.

Domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women are most commonly perpetrated by men against women. However (*employer’s name*) recognises that controlling and abusive behaviour can also occur in same sex relationships and can be perpetrated by women against men.

All forms of domestic abuse come from the abuser’s desire for power and control over other family members or intimate partners.

- Domestic abuse occurs in all social classes, cultures, and age groups whatever the sexual orientation, gender identity, mental or physical ability.
- Once it has started it often becomes more frequent and more violent.
- It can severely affect children emotionally and physically.
- Victims/survivors are sometimes beaten or harassed by members of their immediate or extended family.
- Domestic abuse is gendered – the majority of perpetrators are men and between 80-95% of those who experience it are women, although it does also occur against men in mixed or same sex relationships.
- Domestic abuse is not a “one off” occurrence but is frequent and persistent, aimed at

instilling fear into, and compliance from, the victims/survivors. On average a victim/survivor of domestic abuse is assaulted 35 times before they report the matter to the police.

## Identification of the problem at work

While it is for the individual themselves to recognise they are a victim/survivor of domestic abuse, there are signs which may indicate an employee may be a victim/survivor. These may include the following:

- the member of staff may confide in their colleagues/manager
- staff may inform their manager that a colleague is suffering from domestic abuse
- there may be obvious effects of physical abuse (it is important not to make assumptions)
- it may come to light as a result of enquiries into a drop in performance or a significant change in behaviour
- it may reveal itself as the background to poor attendance or presenteeism – where victims/survivors prefer to be in the workplace rather than at home
- for staff who work at home, wholly or part of the time, on-line behaviour may change, for example turning off a camera or being unwilling to speak on the phone.

It is essential to understand that any of the above may arise from a range of circumstances of which domestic abuse may be one. Line managers should address the issue positively and sympathetically ensuring that the employee is aware that support and assistance can be provided.

*(Employer's name)* respects employees' right to privacy. Whilst *(employer's name)* strongly encourages victims/survivors of domestic abuse to disclose domestic abuse for the safety of themselves and all those in the workplace, it does not force them to share this information if they do not want to.

## Disclosure of abuse

Staff experiencing domestic abuse may choose to disclose, report to or seek support from a union representative, a line manager, or colleague. Line managers and union representatives will not counsel victims/survivors, but offer information, workplace support, and signpost other organisations.

*(Employer's name)* will respond sympathetically, confidentially and effectively to any member of staff who discloses that they are suffering from domestic abuse.

A member of human resources trained in domestic abuse issues, will be nominated as an additional confidential contact for staff. This person will also provide guidance for line managers and union representatives who are approached by staff who are being abused.

## Role of colleagues

*(Employer's name)* encourages all employees to report if they suspect a colleague is experiencing or perpetrating abuse. Employees should speak to their line manager about their concerns in confidence. In dealing with a disclosure from a colleague, employers should ensure that the person with concerns is made aware of the existence of this policy.

## Confidentiality and right to privacy

Employees who disclose experiencing abuse can be assured that the information they provide is confidential and will not be shared with other members of staff without their permission.

Where domestic abuse in a same sex relationship is disclosed, due regard will be paid to the double disclosure of confidential information if the individual recipient of abuse is not out at work.

There are, however, some circumstances in which confidentiality cannot be assured. These occur when there are concerns about children or vulnerable adults or where the employer needs to act to protect the safety of employees.

In circumstances where *(employer's name)* has to breach confidentiality, it will seek specialist advice before doing so. If it decides to proceed in breaching confidentiality after having taken advice, it will discuss with the employee why it is doing so and it will seek the employee's agreement where possible.

As far as possible, information will only be shared on a need-to-know basis.

All records concerning domestic abuse will be kept strictly confidential. No local records will be kept of absences related to domestic abuse and there will be no adverse impact on the employment records of victims/survivors of domestic abuse.

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

## Support for individuals

*(Employer's name)* recognises that developing a life free from abuse is a process not an event and *(employer's name)* will provide ongoing support for employees who disclose abuse.

*(Employer's name)* and UNISON representatives will work together co-operatively to help staff experiencing domestic abuse.

*(Employer's name)* will respond sympathetically, confidentially and effectively to any member of staff who discloses that they are experiencing domestic abuse.

Where domestic abuse has been reported, line managers will treat unplanned absences and temporary poor timekeeping sympathetically.

Line managers may offer employees experiencing domestic abuse a broad range of support. This may include, but is not limited to:

- special paid leave for relevant appointments, including with support agencies, solicitors, to rearrange housing or childcare, and for court appointments
- temporary or permanent changes to working times and patterns
- changes to specific duties, for example to avoid potential contact with an abuser in a customer facing role
- redeployment or relocation
- measures to ensure a safe working environment, for example changing a telephone number to avoid harassing phone calls
- using other existing policies, including flexible working

- access to counselling/support services in paid time
- an advance of pay
- access to courses developed to support female survivors of domestic abuse, for example The Freedom Programme ([www.freedomprogramme.co.uk](http://www.freedomprogramme.co.uk)) or assertiveness training.

Line managers will respect the right of staff to make their own decision on the course of action at every stage and should avoid being judgemental. It must be recognised that the employee may need some time to decide what to do and may try many different options during this process.

- Other existing provisions (including occupational health, independent counselling services) will also be signposted to staff as a means of help.

## Safety planning

*(Employer's name)* will prioritise the safety of employees if they make it known that they are experiencing domestic abuse. Line managers may have to consider incidents such as violent partners or ex-partners visiting the workplace, abusive phonecalls, intimidation or harassment of an employee by the alleged perpetrator, and these will need to be addressed in any safety planning.

When an employee discloses domestic abuse, *(employer's name)* will encourage its employee to contact a specialist support agency (or suitably trained specialist member of staff) who can undertake a DASH (Domestic abuse, stalking and harassment, and honour based violence risk assessment- [www.dashriskchecklist.co.uk](http://www.dashriskchecklist.co.uk)) and make appropriate referrals where necessary.

*(Employer's name)* will work with the employee and a specialist agency (with the employee's consent) to identify what actions can be taken to increase their personal safety as well as address any risks there may be to colleagues, taking into account the duty of care for all employees.

## Organisational planning

All employees will be made aware of this policy through a range of methods including induction, training, appraisal, leaflets and posters.

*(Employer's name)* will remind staff of the importance of not divulging personal details of other employees, such as addresses, telephone numbers or shift patterns.

## Training

*(Employer's name)* is committed to ensuring all line managers are aware of domestic abuse and its implications in the workplace. Information, briefings or awareness raising sessions will ensure that all managers are able to:

- identify if an employee is experiencing difficulties because of domestic abuse
- respond to disclosure in a sensitive and non-judgemental manner
- provide initial support – be clear about available workplace support including in-house specialist staff where applicable
- discuss how the organisation can contribute to safety planning
- signpost to other organisations and sources of support
- understand that they are not counsellors.

## Perpetrators of domestic abuse

Domestic abuse perpetrated by employees will not be condoned under any circumstances nor will it be treated as a purely private matter. *(Employer's name)* recognises that it has a role in encouraging and supporting employees to address violent and abusive behaviour of all kinds.

If an employee approaches *(employer's name)* about their abusive behaviour, *(employer's name)* will provide information about the services and support available to them, and will encourage the perpetrator to seek support and help from an appropriate source.

*(Employer's name)* will treat any allegation, disclosure or conviction of a domestic abuse related offence on a case-by-case basis with the aim of reducing risk and supporting change.

There are four potential strands in the consideration of an allegation:

- a police investigation of a possible criminal offence
- disciplinary action by the employer
- providing specialist, safety-focused counselling
- identifying risk.

An individual cautioned or convicted of a criminal offence may be subject to the organisation's Code of Conduct policy and procedure. *(Employer's name)* also reserves the right to consider the use of this policy should an employee's activities outside of work (whether or not it leads to a criminal conviction) have an impact on their ability to perform the role for which they are employed and/or be considered to bring the organisation into disrepute. In some circumstances it may be deemed inappropriate for the individual to continue in his/her current

role(s). In these circumstances the possibility of redeployment into an alternative role may be considered.

*(Employer's name)* views the use of violence and abusive behaviour by an employee, wherever this occurs, as a breach of the organisation's Code of Conduct for disciplinary purposes.

*(Employer's name)*'s Code of Conduct is intended to inform all staff, irrespective of grade, of the standards of conduct expected of them. It identifies a set of principles governing behaviour by which staff members are expected to abide. Staff members are expected at all times to present high standards of personal integrity and conduct that will not reflect adversely on the organisation and its reputation.

*(Employer's name)* is committed to ensuring that:

- allegations will be dealt with fairly and in a way that provides support for the person who is the subject of the allegation or disclosure
- all employees will receive guidance and support
- confidentiality will be maintained and information restricted only to those who have a need-to-know
- investigations will be thorough and independent
- all cases will be dealt with quickly avoiding unnecessary delays
- all efforts will be made to resolve the matter within 4-6 weeks, although some cases will take longer because of their nature or complexity.

NOTE: This procedure is intended to be safety focussed and supportive rather than punitive.

The alleged perpetrator will be:

- treated fairly and honestly
- helped to understand the concerns expressed and processes involved
- kept informed of the progress and outcome of any investigation and the implications for any disciplinary process
- advised to contact their union or professional organisation.

Any employee who is responsible for giving advice or support to those experiencing domestic abuse needs to be particularly aware of the potential consequences if they are found to be perpetrators.

If a colleague is found to be assisting an abuser in perpetrating the abuse, for example, by giving them access to facilities such as telephones, email or fax machines then they will be seen as having committed a disciplinary offence.

If it becomes evident that an employee has made a malicious allegation that another employee is perpetrating abuse then this will be treated as a serious disciplinary offence and action will be taken.

### If the victim/survivor and the perpetrator work in the same organisation

In cases where both the victim/survivor and the perpetrator of domestic abuse work in the organisation, *(employer's name)* will take appropriate action.

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/survivor and perpetrator do not come into contact in the workplace.

Action may also need to be taken to minimise the potential for the perpetrator to use their position or work resources to find out details about the whereabouts of the victim/survivor. This may include a change of duties for one or both employees or withdrawing the perpetrator's access to certain computer programmes or offices.

However, it is also 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 should be given.

## Review

This policy will be reviewed jointly every three years unless there are changes in legislation, best practice or other organisation policies impact on its effectiveness.

## Further guidance

*{Provide here local contact details for:*

- Domestic Violence Co-ordinator
- Police
- Social Services
- Housing advice
- Drug and alcohol advice
- GPs and health visitors
- Perpetrators' programme providers]

Anyone using this policy to respond to a victim/survivor or perpetrator of domestic abuse should refer to further current information provided by Refuge [www.refuge.org.uk](http://www.refuge.org.uk). Refuge offers a range of services which give women and children access to professional support whatever their situation.



## **If you are concerned for your own or someone else's immediate safety, ring the police on 999**

**If you or a friend needs help call 0808 2000 247 the freephone 24 hour National Domestic Violence Helpline** (run in partnership between Women's Aid and Refuge) or email: [helpline@womensaid.org.uk](mailto:helpline@womensaid.org.uk). The helpline is a member of Language Line and can provide access to an interpreter for non-English speaking callers. The helpline can also access the BT Type Talk Service.

### **You can also contact:**

**0808 802 1414 – Northern Ireland Women's Aid 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline (for women and men)**

**0800 027 1234 – Scottish Domestic Abuse Helpline**

**0808 801 0 800 – All Wales Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Helpline**

**Women's Aid, Republic of Ireland – Call the national freephone helpline 1800 341 900**

[www.womensaid.ie](http://www.womensaid.ie)

**Galop** provide a national lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender domestic abuse helpline giving emotional and practical support for LGBT+ people experiencing domestic abuse.

**Phone the helpline 0800 9995428** open: Monday to Friday 10am – 5pm Wednesday and Thursday 10am – 8:00pm

**Webchat** available: Wednesday and Thursday 5pm – 8pm

**Chatbot** The chatbot is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for those who do not need immediate help. [www.galop.org.uk](http://www.galop.org.uk)

**Men's Advice Line for men experiencing domestic violence.**

**Call 0808 801 0327** Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm **or email: [info@mensadviceline.org.uk](mailto:info@mensadviceline.org.uk)**

**If you are worried about your behaviour towards your partner, or if you have been abusive or violent, you can get information from the Respect Phonenumber. Call 0808 802 4040 (free from landlines and most mobile phones). Monday – Friday 9am-5pm**

You can leave a message when the lines are closed or busy and they will get back to you within two working days. **Email: [info@respectphonenumber.org.uk](mailto:info@respectphonenumber.org.uk)**

[www.respectphonenumber.org.uk](http://www.respectphonenumber.org.uk)





