



Domestic Abuse Policy

Produced by Human Resources

Tel: 01925 442941
www.warrington.gov.uk

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Appendix 1 – Myth Busting

1. SCOPE

The policy applies to all employees of Warrington Borough Council.

2. AIMS

To support employees who are experiencing domestic abuse as a survivor or victim and to promote accountability for those employees who are perpetrators of domestic abuse, supporting them to make positive domestic or behavioural changes.

3. DEFINITION – DOMESTIC ABUSE

Domestic abuse can include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Coercive control (a pattern of intimidation, degradation, isolation and control with the use or threat of physical or sexual violence)
- Psychological and/or emotional abuse
- Physical or sexual abuse
- Financial or economic abuse
- Harassment and stalking
- Online or digital abuse

Domestic abuse can be experienced by both men and women in a range of personal and family relationships.

Domestic Abuse occurs in all social classes, cultures and age groups, whatever the sexual orientation, mental or physical ability. See Appendix 1 for some myth busters.

4. POLICY STATEMENT

We recognise that domestic abuse is a form of discrimination and harassment which may adversely affect our employees and their families and believe that everyone has a right to live free from fear and abuse.

We regard any form of domestic abuse as unacceptable and recognise it is a serious safeguarding issue for both adults and children.

Domestic abuse perpetrated by employees will not be condoned under any circumstances and any individual charged or convicted of a domestic abuse related offence may be subject to the Council's Disciplinary Procedures.

5. PRINCIPLES

We have a duty of care to the physical and mental health and wellbeing of our employees in the workplace.

Where appropriate, reasonable additional measures will be taken by managers to protect the safety of those experiencing domestic abuse.

Given the hidden nature of domestic abuse, we will seek to create an environment in which victims feel safe to speak out and access support. Safety will always be the first priority of any intervention.

Confidentiality is also of crucial importance. We will only involve other agencies or share information with the consent of the person concerned, unless there are exceptional circumstances, e.g. when disclosure is required by law or where the sharing of information is vital for the protection of children or adults at risk (including the victim who discloses abuse).

6. MANAGERS RESPONSIBILITIES

All of our managers and employees have a role to play in the successful operation of this policy.

However, it is very important to note that it is for an individual themselves to recognise they are a victim of domestic abuse.

We will respect an employees' right to privacy and we strongly encourage victims of domestic abuse to disclose the abuse for the safety of themselves and all those in the workplace. We will however not force an employee to share any information if they do not want to.

Health and Safety laws are designed to ensure that workers have the right to work in a safe environment where risks to health and wellbeing are considered and dealt with effectively.

We therefore have a duty to maintain a secure environment for all staff and we may have to consider additional factors where an employee is a victim of domestic abuse.

Where risks to employees at the workplace are identified, managers should consider the following preventative and supportive measures:

- Support the employee to establish a personal safety plan
- Improve security measures on entry to buildings, for example, changing key pad numbers or ensuring no access is available to unauthorised visitors.

- Remind employees, including those on reception and switchboard not to divulge personal information about employees, such as addresses, telephone numbers or shift patterns.
- Where possible, offer temporary or permanent changes in work place; work times and patterns that will minimise an employee's risk both at work and during their journeys to and from work. This could include relocating the individual within the office to ensure that the employee is not visible from reception points or ground floor windows.
- If feasible, offer a change in specific duties, such as not requiring the employee to answer phones or work in reception area, or in exceptional circumstances, redeployment to another post if an alternative option is not available.
- Agree how to make colleagues aware of how to respond if the perpetrator rings or calls at the workplace. Provide colleagues with a description of the perpetrator and other relevant details such as car registration numbers. These steps will help to heighten awareness of security in the workplace.
- If there is the need for such discussions with colleagues, in agreement with the employee, the manager should remind staff that the information about the domestic abuse situation is confidential. Any unauthorised breach of confidentiality could lead to disciplinary action being taken against them.
- Ensure systems for recording employee's whereabouts during the day are adequate, and where work requires visits outside the office, consider how risks can be minimised. This could include a change in working duties, ensuring the employee is accompanied by a colleague, and that a mobile phone is carried by the employee.
- Record any incidents of violence in the workplace, including persistent phone calls, e-mails or visits to the employee by their partner/ex-partner. A record should also be kept of any witnesses to these incidents as these records could be used in any criminal proceedings or civil action against the alleged perpetrator.

If it is known that an alleged perpetrator is impinging on the health and safety of a member of staff i.e. indirectly or directly harassing the person whilst they are at work, the appropriate action will be taken in order to protect our employees.

When considering preventative and supportive measures, the manager may be required to take account of whether these are operationally appropriate, however, ensuring the safety of employees should be of primary concern throughout this process.

7. SIGNS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

7.1 Being Aware and Proactive

It is not always easy to detect when an employee is experiencing domestic abuse. Abuse is often associated with physical violence but it may also be emotional or psychological.

The following work indicators may point towards a problem with domestic abuse, but they could be the result of different issues such as ill health.

An aware and proactive manager should look out for these more generally as an indicator that something might be wrong, without assuming it will be related to domestic abuse.

The more supportive you can be, the more likely your member of staff is going to feel comfortable disclosing a problem with domestic abuse.

7.2 Work Productivity

- Is there a change in the person's working patterns for example; frequent absence, lateness or needing to leave work early
- Reduced quality and quantity of working, missing deadlines, a drop in usual performance standards
- Change in the use of the phone/email for example, a large number of personal calls/texts, avoiding calls or a strong reaction to calls/text/emails
- Spending an increased number of hours at work for no reason
- Frequent visits to work by the employee's partner which may indicate coercive control

7.3 Change in behaviour or demeanor

- Conduct out of character with previous behaviour
- Changes in behaviour: for example, becoming very quiet, anxious, frightened, tearful, aggressive, distracted or depressed
- Being isolated from colleagues
- Obsession with leaving work on time
- Secretive regarding home life
- Worried about leaving children at home

7.4 Physical Indicators

- Visible bruising or single or repeated injury with unlikely explanations
- Change in the pattern or amount of makeup used
- Change in the manner of dress: for example, clothes that do not suit the climate which may be used to hide injuries
- Substance use/misuse
- Fatigue/sleep disorders

7.5 Other indicators

- Partner or ex-partner stalking employee in or around the workplace or on social media
- Partner or ex-partner exerting unusual amount of control or demands over work schedule
- Isolation from family and friends

7.6 Opening the Conversation

The aim of starting a conversation in this area is to be supportive to employees rather than to encourage disclosure. Many people dealing with domestic abuse will never feel comfortable disclosing it to their employer as they may not even be ready to admit it to themselves.

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

It is important that managers are able to provide a non-judgmental and supportive environment. Respecting the employee's boundaries and privacy is essential. It is also important to work on the basis of believing the employee so that they feel supported.

7.7 Examples of questions and prompts that could be used:

- How are you doing at the moment?
- Your wellbeing is important to me and I've noticed that you seem distracted/upset at the moment – are you ok?
- If there is anything you'd like to talk to me about at any time, I'm always here to support you.
- Is everything ok at home?
- You don't have to tell me anything but please know that I would like to support you if and when you feel ready.
- What support do you think might help?
- What would you like to happen? How?

8. SUPPORT FOR INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE THE VICTIM OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

We recognise that developing a life free from abuse is a process not an event.

We will respond sympathetically, confidentially and effectively to any member of staff who discloses that they are experiencing domestic abuse.

We will prioritise the safety of our employees if we are made aware that they are experiencing domestic abuse and will signpost employees to specialist support who can provide the appropriate help and support.

We will treat unplanned absences and temporary poor timekeeping sympathetically.

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

- Time off for relevant appointments, including with support agencies, solicitors, to rearrange housing or childcare. Special Leave requested in connection with seeking support for Domestic Abuse will always be granted. See the Authorised Leave Policy.
- Temporary or permanent changes to working times and patterns, if feasible.
- Changes to specific duties where this is possible, for example to avoid potential contact with an abuser in a customer facing role.
- Temporary or permanent redeployment or relocation, if feasible.
- 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 courses developed to support survivors of domestic abuse, for example assertiveness training.

We will respect the right of staff to make their own decision on the course of action at every stage.

8.1 Practical support:

- Agree with the employee what to tell colleagues and how they should respond if the abusive partner/ex-partner telephones or visits the workplace
- In agreement with the employee, provide a copy of any existing orders against the abuser and a photograph of the abuser to reception and security staff
- Check that staff have arrangements for getting safely to and from home
- Ask individuals to supply you with an up to date emergency contact number for a trusted friend or family member
- Ensure that the employee does not work alone or in an isolated area
- Keep a record of any incidents of abuse in the workplace, including persistent telephone calls, emails or visits to the employee

9. EMPLOYEES WHO ARE THE PERPETRATORS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

Employees are expected at all times to conduct themselves in a way that will not adversely reflect on the Council and its reputation. Domestic abuse perpetrated by employees will not be condoned under any circumstances nor will it be treated as a purely private matter. Perpetrating domestic abuse is in breach of the law and potentially the Council's Code of Conduct and where evidenced will be treated as a disciplinary matter.

We recognise that employees who proactively identify themselves as abusers need help to change their behaviour and it is our aim to help and support employees to address violent and abusive behaviours of all kinds.

If an allegation of domestic abuse is made against an employee, we will deal with this on a case by case basis and will make a decision on best course of action.

In line with the Council's Code of Conduct, any police investigations, criminal charges or convictions may have an impact on a person's employment and therefore it is an expectation that this is disclosed at the earliest opportunity. For employees who work with children and vulnerable adults, it is a contractual obligation and therefore essential that this is disclosed immediately.

9.1 Identifying and engaging with perpetrators

We have a duty of care to support employees dealing with domestic abuse and a key aspect of doing so is to be proactive about dealing with employees who use abusive behaviours.

This information may come in a variety of ways, including:

9.2 Self-disclosure

This may be prompted by a crisis, such as a particularly serious assault, arrest or ultimatum from the abused partner.

9.3 Indirect disclosure

This could be:

- A direct allegation shared with the employer by the person experiencing abuse
- An allegation by a family member, friend or colleague
- Notification by the police or through a DBS check
- The employee needs time off to attend court

Managers should also be aware of indicators that an employee may be using abusive behaviours.

These can include:

- Negative comments made by the abuser about a partner (and women/men in general)
- Jealousy or possessiveness
- Expressing anger and blaming their partner for issues
- Constant text messaging or telephoning a partner

- Repeated injuries (scratches, bite marks, bruised knuckles, injuries to wrists and forearms, which could be the consequence of their partner defending themselves)

There may be any number of reasons for this behaviour. But managers who suspect that domestic abuse may be an issue should have the confidence to discuss this with the employee.

When doing so, they should ensure that their own safety is not compromised. For example, they may take another staff member with them, or meet in a public place.

Employers have a duty of care towards ALL their employees. Engaging with perpetrators in a constructive way doesn't mean excusing the abuse and can help to increase safety and even save lives.

In exploratory discussions with an employee who has used abusive behaviours about potential support at work, managers should observe the following principles:

- Ensure their own safety is paramount
- Be clear that abuse is always unacceptable and that it may constitute criminal behaviour. Be clear that abusive behaviour is a choice
- Be respectful
- Be positive about the possibility of choosing to stop. It is possible for perpetrators to change if they recognise that they have a problem and take steps to change their behaviour
- Be aware that on some level the perpetrator may be unhappy about their behaviour
- Be aware that domestic abuse is about a range of controlling behaviours not just physical violence
- Help the perpetrator to be aware of the potential cost of continued abuse. This could include: arrest; prison; loss of their relationship, long term physical and emotional damage to their partner and children; loss of contact with children; losing their job; loss of their home; financial losses; damage or loss of relationships with family and friends

9.4 Discussions

Employers should recognise that abusers may need help to change their behaviour and should support and encourage employees to address violent and abusive behaviours of all kinds.

The information that the manager and organisation gathers will be the basis for its decision about how best to engage with a perpetrator of domestic abuse.

The information will help determine what kind of specialist help is required, either for them directly or to manage the risk to other employees, and whether any further action is required.

Managers should keep a confidential record of a disclosure and any action/decisions that they have taken.

Good records may subsequently help in any legal proceedings or disciplinary hearing involving the perpetrator. It is important to remember that it may not be possible to assess whether someone is a perpetrator based solely on their outward behaviour.

Many perpetrators often conceal their abuse by behaving pleasantly to most people.

10. RESOURCES FOR EMPLOYEES EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC ABUSE

Refuge Warrington Independent Domestic Violence Abuse (IDVA) service

01925 243359 - www.refuge.org.uk

Expert guidance for young people, women and men at risk of injury/harm from all forms of domestic abuse, plus emotional/practical support, safety planning, advice on court/legal options.

Cheshire Police

101 (non-emergency)

Warrington Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre

01925 221546

Warrington Women's Aid Refuge

01925 417138 - www.womensaid.org.uk

Safe, temporary accommodation for women and their children experiencing domestic abuse. Support and advice to men experiencing domestic abuse.

Housing Plus

01925 246868

Independent housing advice and services including a sanctuary scheme.

Cheshire Cares

01606 366336

Victim support.

National 24-hour Domestic Violence Helpline

Free phone 0808 2000 247

Men's Advice Line

0808 801 0327

Support for male victims of domestic abuse.

Mankind

01823 334244 - www.mankind.org.uk

Support for male victims of domestic abuse

Karma Nirvana Honour Network Helpline

0800 5999 247 - www.karmanirvana.org.uk

Support for victims and survivors of forced marriage and honour based abuse.

Respect

0808 802 4040 - www.respect.uk.net

Support for men and women facing up to abusive behaviour towards a partner.

DV Assist

0800 195 8699

Assistance to obtain Non-Molestation Orders and other orders.

Warrington Domestic Abuse Partnership

01925 443124

Bright Sky app

www.hestia.org/brightsky

APPENDIX 1

Myth busting

Myth	Fact
Alcohol and drugs are to blame	Many people are abusive when they are sober. Most people who drink alcohol are not domestic abusers. Blaming drink or drugs is an excuse, a way of denying responsibility.
It only happens to families from lower socio-economic backgrounds	People experiencing domestic abuse come from all walks of life, and can be any race, sexuality or religion.
People who are being abused would leave if it was that bad	It can be extremely difficult to leave an abusive partner. People experiencing domestic abuse may fear what a partner will do if they leave, particularly if the partner has threatened to kill her/him or the children. They may believe that staying is better for the children. Those who suffer abuse are often at the greatest risk of harm at the point of separation or after leaving a violent partner. The person experiencing abuse may feel ashamed of what has happened and believe it is their fault. They may hope that the partner will change, remembering good times at the start of the relationship and hoping they will return. They may not have access to money, or anywhere to go. They may not know where to turn for help, particularly if English is not their first language.
Abusers grow up in violent homes	Growing up in a violent home is a risk factor, and some children who experience abuse do go on to be abusive in their relationships. But many do not. Instead they may be repelled by violence because they have seen the damage it causes. Abusers may learn to be violent from the society within which they grow up but people who blame violence solely on their childhood experiences are avoiding taking responsibility for their actions. Violence is a choice an abuser makes; they alone are responsible.
Some people like violence	Most people who are abused live in fear of their abuser. This is a way of blaming the survivor for what is happening.

Some people ask for it. They get what they deserve	Violence and intimidation are not acceptable ways to solve conflict in a relationship. People using abusive behaviours will often attack their partner for no apparent reason. Again, this is a way of making excuses for the abuser's behaviour. It allows an abusive person to avoid taking responsibility for their actions.
People using abusive behaviours have a mental illness	The vast majority of people who abuse are not mentally ill. Research shows that the proportion of abusers with mental health problems is no higher than in society as a whole.
Stress is to blame for domestic abuse	Some people who abuse their partners do suffer from stress. Again, this is a factor – not the underlying cause of the abuse. Many people who are stressed are never abusive.
They lose their temper sometimes, that's all	It often is said that people who use abusive behaviours "lose their temper" or are "out of control". The truth is that they are very much in control. Abusers are usually selective about when they hit their partner, for example in private or when the children are asleep. They choose not to mark their face or other parts of the body which show. They never "lose their temper" with other people. This suggests they are very aware of what they are doing and are "in control". Many abuse their partners emotionally and psychologically, without ever using physical violence. This shows the extent of their control.
Domestic abuse is a private matter, you shouldn't get involved	For far too long domestic abuse has been allowed to happen behind closed doors. People think what goes on in the home is private, and not their problem. Domestic abuse is a crime wherever it occurs. It is against the law. We are all affected by domestic abuse; we all have a responsibility to speak out against it. Only then can we tackle it effectively.
Men can't experience domestic abuse	Although women are disproportionately affected by domestic abuse, it is certainly a very real issue for male survivors too, in heterosexual, gay and other kinds of relationships.
Perpetrators of domestic abuse cannot change	Perpetrators can change. Treatment and support is available.

