# Managers Guide to Supporting Employees Affected by Domestic Abuse

The University is committed to supporting employees who are directly affected by domestic abuse. This guidance is for colleagues and managers who may be trying to offer support in such circumstances.

Disclosures of domestic abuse are never made lightly and will be extremely stressful and emotional for a victim. Domestic abuse victims may have limited opportunities to seek support as they are often isolated and may have small social networks, due to coercive tactics used by abusers and the shame and embarrassment that victims may feel.

Domestic abuse is often a hidden problem and individuals can find it very difficult to disclose but there may be other ways for you to recognise a problem. There may be changes in behaviour or changes in the quality of work for unexplained reasons. An employee may change the way they dress, for example, excessive clothing on hot days or changes in the amount of make-up worn. For additional sign and indicators of domestic abuse please see appendix 2.

There is no one size fits all approach to supporting victims as each victim and their experience and needs will differ.

Some employees might not think they are experiencing domestic abuse and might not want to use these words to describe their experiences. Ask open and empathetic questions such as;

* How are you doing at the moment?
* How are things at home?
* I have noticed recently that you are not yourself. Is anything the matter?

Be mindful when raising concerns with colleagues working from home, as the abuser might be monitoring the employee’s email or other methods of communication. Even asking open questions in an email, or in a call when it’s not known who else is listening, might ring alarm bells with the abuser and cause more abuse.

If an employee approaches you for advice, ensure the conversation takes place in a private space. You should try to support those experiencing domestic abuse in a sympathetic and non-judgemental manner. You have a key role in signposting affected employees to both internal support and sources of external support. You are not expected to solve people’s problems.

Do not pressurise the employee into disclosing personal information if they are not comfortable to do so. They may require some time to decide what to do. Ask the individual what support they need and regularly check in with that question, as the support they need may change over time as their circumstances change.

Ask the individual about the best way to keep in contact with them, for example which communication methods are private and which they have easy access to.

Where possible you should respect the wishes of the employee if they want the information to remain confidential. If you want to share the information with HR, ask the employee if they are happy for you to do this.

Confidentiality is a complex matter and there may be circumstances in which it cannot be assured such as in cases where there are concerns about children or vulnerable adults, or where we need to protect the safety of employees. Agreement with the employee should be sought where possible.

Potential ways of supporting the employee may include:

* Offering flexibility in working hours to enable the employee to sort out financial, housing, legal and childcare issues.
* Divert phone calls and email messages and look to change a phone extension if an employee is receiving harassing calls.
* Agree with the employee what to tell colleagues and how they should respond if their ex/partner telephones, visits the workplace or is present during a virtual meeting.
* Ensure that the employee doesn’t work alone or in an isolated area and check that staff have arrangements for getting safely to and from home.
* Think about specific areas of the workplace where the employee’s physical safety may be at risk e.g the carpark.
* Keep a record of any incidents of abuse in the workplace, including persistent telephone calls, emails or visits to the workplace or any concerns that the employee reports, as well as anything that occurs around the workplace, such as travel to and from work or to meetings not held in the usual place of work. Also record the support offered.
* With the consent of the employee, consider agreeing code words or hand signals in video calls, so if they don’t come into the office, or if they are in a threatening situation while working at home, there are set phrases both parties can say to enable them to flag if they are in danger. Also agree what action a signal requires, for example if to call the police, or if to provide information about available support.

Appendix 1: Where to go for help - signposting

This is not an exhaustive list, for further details on support please visit [www.citizensadvice.org.uk/family/gender-violence/domestic-violence-and-abuse-getting-help/](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/family/gender-violence/domestic-violence-and-abuse-getting-help/)

Local organisations

Northamptonshire Domestic Abuse Service has an online chat service, drop in sessions and helpline. More information can be found at <https://ndas.co/> or the helpline on 0300 0120 154

Eve is a Christian domestic abuse charity based in Northamptonshire who run a Family Refuge <https://eveda.org.uk/>

Sunflower Centre is a partnership-funded service that works closely with Voice to provide specialist support to victims of domestic abuse. For more information visit <http://voicenorthants.org/victims/about-voice-northants/sunflower-centre/>

Organisations for women

Refuge offers a 24 hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline – 0808 2000 247, and information, support and an online chat function via <https://www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk/>

Women’s Aid has an online chat function and support including a survivor’s handbook at [www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk)

Organisations for men

Respect – Men’s advice line has telephone or webchat support via [www.mensadviceline.org.uk](http://www.mensadviceline.org.uk) or 0808 8010327

ManKind Initiative is a charity offering information and support via [www.mankind.org.uk/](http://www.mankind.org.uk/) or 01823 334244

Organisations for women and men

RCJ Advice Family Service can give legal advice to people who are affected by domestic abuse [www.rcjadvice.org.uk/family/](http://www.rcjadvice.org.uk/family/)

Respect Phoneline offers information and advice to partners, friends and family who want to stop someone’s violent behaviour <https://respectphoneline.org.uk/>

Organisations for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people

National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline – Galop provides support for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people experiencing domestic violence.

Organisations for disabled people

Signhealth – Domestic Abuse Service provides a specialist domestic abuse service to help Deaf people <https://signhealth.org.uk/with-deaf-people/domestic-abuse/domestic-abuse-service/>

Respond work with children and adults with learning disabilities who have either experienced abuse or abused other people [www.respond.org.uk/](http://www.respond.org.uk/)

Appendix 2 – Signs and indicators

Work productivity/ Academic engagement:

• Receives high volume of emails, texts, phone calls from current/former partner or family member

• Upset or anxious in response to emails, texts, phone calls

• High absenteeism or persistently late without/with unusual explanation

• Frequently anxious about leaving work/classes on time and going home

• Unusual reluctance to engage with colleagues/workplace/campus culture (or change in usual level)

• When working remotely/online, appearing anxious/not attending or using camera when expected

• Drop in student attendance/grades, staff work performance, meeting work/assignment deadlines, and how they communicate/interact in class/meetings with colleagues or tutors/peers

Psychological signs:

* Fear of current/former partner or family member
* Expresses that a family member (child/parent) is at risk of harm from current/former partner or other family member
* Mentions abusive behaviour fleetingly, casually, or in other terms (“It’s a shame I can't join in, but they get cross if I’m not back in time”)
* Frequently cry and/or act anxious (online or on campus)

Physical signs:

* Fatigue or frequent/sudden/unexpected medical problems/sickness
* Repeated visible injuries (e.g., bruises) and implausible explanations
* Sudden change in dress or pattern of make up (e.g., excessive clothing in summer or seems unhappy/uncomfortable in a complete change in style) and/or unkept appearance
* Notable change in weight