

OADBY & WIGSTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY



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1.0 Introduction

Domestic abuse includes, but is not limited to, controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse. It can be physical, emotional and/or psychological abuse, as well as financial, and can take place in person or through digital means. The abuse is usually between adults who are, or have been, in an intimate relationship or family members. Domestic abuse is usually a pattern of behaviour although it can be a one-off event. We recognise that any member of our workforce could be subject to domestic abuse, and in some cases, the victim may not realise that the behaviour displayed towards them is abuse. Research shows that those who are experiencing domestic abuse are targeted at work.

It can occur at any time in a person's life, though may be triggered by specific events or become more extreme or frequent as a result of those events.

The purpose of this policy is to set out that the Authority will treat domestic abuse seriously and how the Authority aims to provide a safe and supportive workplace environment to employees who are experiencing domestic abuse.

It applies to the Authority's employees (permanent and temporary), workers, agency workers and self-employed contractors.

2.0 Impact of Domestic Abuse at Work

The Authority is aware that the challenges that domestic abuse victims face can manifest themselves in problems such as chronic absenteeism or lower productivity.

We recognise that domestic abuse does not occur only within the home and an employee can experience domestic abuse:

- through threatening visits, phone calls and emails from the perpetrator while they are at work or
- when travelling to and from work.

Colleagues can experience threatening or intimidating behaviour from the perpetrator of the abuse.

3.0 Management Support

If an employee confides in a manager that they are being subjected to domestic abuse, that manager must treat all conversations as confidential. However, the manager should not get involved in the situation themselves by, for example, confronting someone accused of being

abusive. The manager's role is primarily to help the employee find expert help and be supportive of the employee.

The manager should encourage the employee to seek expert help. This could include reporting incidences to the police or seeking help from a specialised organisation. The manager should encourage the employee to make contact personally with such organisations instead of making contact themselves. A list of organisations can be found at the end of this policy.

Employees should be reminded of their access to the Employee Assistance Programme, a confidential telephone counselling service offered by the Authority where they can talk to a trained counsellor about their circumstances.

If employees do not feel comfortable raising their circumstances with their manager, they are also able to speak to a designated domestic abuse champion.

The manager, or chosen contact, should also be supportive of the employee and should not ask for proof of abuse.

Support could include, but is not limited to:

- regularly checking in with the employee
- permitting use of Authority equipment to search for online assistance or to speak to an expert who can help
- ensuring websites of organisations who can offer assistance are accessible from work equipment i.e. are not blocked under an internet usage policy
- allowing the employee time off to visit one of the advice organisations, the police or a doctor or to address concerns, such legal, financial or housing
- adjusting targets to reduce any undue pressure on the employee
- diverting phone calls if the perpetrator is attempting to call the employee at work
- ensuring there is no public access to the workplace where possible
- agreeing code words or hand signals to be used during a telephone or video call to signal that the employee is in a threatening situation, and what action needs to be taken when one is used
- a salary advance to a bank account other than that which is normally used.

4.0 If a Manager Suspects an Employee is a Victim of Domestic Abuse

Managers will receive training in how to recognise the signs that an employee may be experiencing domestic abuse, including silent signals that can be used during a video conference with employees working remotely, and also ways to support the employee.

Signs could include:

- Sudden changes in behaviour or quality of work
- Changes in the way an employee dresses e.g. excessive clothing on a hot day or changes in the amount of make-up worn

If a manager suspects that an employee is being subjected to domestic abuse, but has no evidence, then great care must be taken. The manager should give the employee an opportunity to confide but should not question the employee or put any undue pressure on the employee to discuss the situation.


Great care should be taken when the employee in question works at home because the perpetrator of the abuse may be monitoring communication or be in earshot of video or telephone calls.

If an employee is clearly distressed but will not confide in the manager then the manager should suggest that the employee contacts the Employee Assistance Programme, the HR department or some other suitable person.

On some occasions a colleague or friend of an employee might confide in a manager that an employee is being subjected to domestic abuse. It must be realised that this information might be incorrect, hence care should be taken. The manager should give the employee an opportunity to confide but should not question the employee or put any undue pressure on the employee to discuss the situation.

5.0 If Both the Victim and Perpetrator are Employed by the Authority

In cases where both the victim and perpetrator of domestic abuse work for the Authority, we will take appropriate action including:

- considering utilising different work locations both within the building at which the employees work, or another of our work locations, working hours, shift patterns etc.
 - minimising the potential for the perpetrator to use their position or work resources to find out details about the whereabouts of the victim.
 - offering impartial support and where possible ensure both the victim and perpetrator have different supervisors who are able to provide appropriate information to each party.
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6.0 Impact on Performance

If an employee is underperforming it is important to make that employee aware of the concerns about performance.

The Authority will make reasonable efforts to consider all aspects of the employee's situation to support them through a challenging time. The manager should agree reasonable targets with the employee and provide any necessary support. If the poor performance continues and the employee does not appear to be able to improve their performance at work notwithstanding the support given, further discussions will be held with the employee.

Although the use of formal procedures e.g. disciplinary or capability is not prohibited, this should be a last resort.

7.0 Confidentiality

There are some circumstances in which confidentiality cannot be assured. These occur when there are concerns about children or vulnerable adults or where the Authority needs to act to protect the safety of employees. In these circumstances the manager will discuss with the employee the reason for disclosing any information to a third party and will seek the employee's agreement where possible.

All records concerning domestic abuse will be kept strictly confidential and in line with our obligations under the Data Protection Act 2018. Improper disclosure of information i.e. breaches of confidentiality by any member of staff will be taken seriously and maybe subject to disciplinary action.

8.0 Organisations that can Provide Advice and Assistance

General

National Domestic Abuse Helpline – 0808 2000 247 (Freephone and 24 hour) / www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk

Citizens advice bureau – www.adviceguide.org.uk

National centre for domestic violence – 0800 970 2070 / www.ncdv.org.uk

Galop – 0800 999 5428 / www.galop.org.uk

Women's Aid – www.womensaid.org.uk

Refuge – 0800 2000 247 / www.refuge.org.uk

Muslim Women's Helpline – 020 8904 8193 or 020 8908 6715 / www.mwnhelpline.co.uk

IKWRO – Women's rights organisation for Middle Eastern and Afghan women - 020 7920 6460 / www.ikwro.org.uk

ManKind Initiative – 01823 334 244 / www.mankind.org.uk

Respect Men's Advice Line – 0808 801 0327 / www.respect.uk.net

For Perpetrators

Respect – 0808 802 4040 / www.respect.uk.net