



# GUIDANCE ON IDENTIFYING, SEEKING SUPPORT FOR AND DEALING WITH DOMESTIC ABUSE

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## Who is this guidance for?

All employees and workers of Central Bedfordshire Council, except those based in schools.

## Why is this guidance important?

The cost of domestic abuse to business is estimated at £1.9 billion a year due to decreased productivity, time off work, lost wages and sick pay. For those affected by abuse, it has an adverse impact on emotional and physical health.

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.

Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) has a duty to support those affected by domestic abuse and we must ensure our staff are supported. We all have a responsibility to speak out against domestic abuse and only then can we tackle it effectively. Domestic abuse is a crime wherever it occurs and it is against the law.

## What else should I read?

You may also wish to read our policies on [Corporate Health & Safety](#), [Code of Conduct](#), [Disciplinary Policy and Procedure](#) and our [Leave & Flexi time pages](#) of the intranet.

You can also further your understanding of domestic abuse by completing the Domestic Abuse e-learning which can be booked via [Success Factors - Learning](#).

## 1. What is Domestic Abuse?

The Government's current definition of domestic abuse is: "Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or who have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexual orientation.

This can include, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse:

- Psychological
- Physical
- Sexual
- Financial
- Emotional
- Verbal
- Economic

Controlling behaviour is a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, controlling and confiscating their resources for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

The definition also includes so called 'Honour Based Violence', Female Genital Mutilation, Coercive Control and Forced Marriage.

**Ultimately, domestic abuse is the abuse of power and control over one person by another.**

## 2. Who is affected?

Men, women and children all experience domestic abuse, and can also all be perpetrators of abuse. However, evidence shows that women are disproportionately affected by domestic abuse and the majority of perpetrators are men.

Abuse can begin at any time in a relationship or within a family, and it takes place at all levels of society, regardless of social class, race, age, religion, sexual orientation or disability. Individuals may experience abuse or be affected by it long after they have left their abuser.

Children and young people who live in a household where domestic abuse is occurring will be victims of that abuse. They will see and hear the abuse, some will physically try to intervene, some can be used as part of the controlling behaviours of a perpetrator, or pick up on the anxiety and tensions between those in an abusive relationship. This can lead to a range of negative effects a child or young person can experience from behavior problems, difficulty sleeping, nightmares, physical ill-health, trust issues, fear and lower attainment levels at school.

Older people can be affected by financial abuse, abuse from withholding medication and can have endured years of emotional and verbal abuse.

It is important to remember that a partner, ex-partner, child (aged 16+) or a family member can be a perpetrator of domestic abuse.

Victims and survivors often say they did not know what they were experiencing was abuse, they were fearful to speak out,

and that they feared what the perpetrator would do to them and their family.

### 3. As a Manager how can I spot the signs of someone who is being abused and what do I do?

#### 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 is not always the case. Domestic abuse can be emotional, financial, sexual or psychological. The indicators below may point towards a problem with domestic abuse, but they could also be the result of a different issue such as ill health.

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

The more supportive atmosphere you can create within your workplace and team, the more likely employees are going to feel comfortable disclosing a problem with domestic abuse.

#### Work Productivity:

- Change in the person's working patterns: for example, frequent absence, lateness or needing to leave work early
- Reduced quality and quantity of work: 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/texts/emails

- Spending an increased number of hours at work for no reason
- Frequent visits to work by the employee's partner / ex-partner or family member which may indicate coercive control

#### Changes in Behaviour or Demeanour

- Conduct out of character with previous behavior
- 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

#### Physical Indications:

- Visible bruising, amount of makeup used to cover up
- 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

#### Other indicators:

- Partner / ex-partner / family member 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/friends<sup>1</sup>

#### Be aware that abuse is different to each individual as should be your response to them

As a Manager, remember that each individual suffering from abuse will need support in their own way and according to their needs. You are not expected to become an expert, but

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<sup>1</sup> Public Health England guidance:  
[https://www.bitc.org.uk/sites/default/files/bitc\\_phe\\_domestic\\_abuse\\_toolkit.pdf](https://www.bitc.org.uk/sites/default/files/bitc_phe_domestic_abuse_toolkit.pdf)

you should know how to respond and signpost a member of staff to help them. For example:

- Older women and men are less likely to report their experiences of domestic abuse.
- Those with disabilities are more likely to experience domestic abuse and sexual violence than non-disabled people.
- Ethnic minority women and men face additional barriers to accessing support. Their experiences may be compounded by discrimination. They may be unwilling to seek help from statutory agencies because they fear a racist response.
- Women and men from different cultural backgrounds might experience abuse in different forms, such as so called 'honour' based violence.
- Lesbian, gay and bisexual women and men can be vulnerable to abusers who threaten to 'out' them to colleagues, employers and family members.
- Transgender women and men have fewer services available to them and can face similar emotional abuse.
- Pregnancy can be a trigger for domestic abuse, and existing abuse may get worse during pregnancy or after giving birth.
- Men experiencing domestic abuse and sexual violence find it more difficult to disclose abuse and often find more barriers to accessing support.

### As a Manager, what do I do?

If a manager suspects that an employee is experiencing domestic abuse, they should arrange to meet with the employee to discuss this further, ensuring that any discussions take place in private and that they respect confidentiality as far as possible. You should listen to the

employee and ask what support they feel they may require. The appropriate support and safeguarding measures should then be agreed with the employee and implemented to help keep them safe (i.e. lone working policy, accompanying someone to and from their car). Please see Appendix 2 for some examples of measures that can be taken to support an employee.

Do not be judgmental to the employee during your conversation. If an employee discloses abuse do not ask for proof. More detailed guidance in relation to how to start a conversation and respond to a disclosure can be found at Appendix 1.

The Domestic Abuse Service has specialist officers who can offer advice, guidance and referral pathways for an employee to access and for a Manager to speak to. To contact a member of the team email [bdap@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:bdap@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

CBC also provides a free and confidential Employee Assistance Programme which is available for all employees and their immediate family members. For more detailed information in relation to this please visit our Health Assured intranet page [here](#).

Should a manager have concerns over an employee's health they may wish to refer them to Occupational Health. You can submit an occupational health referral or make an enquiry by contacting [HRAdvice@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:HRAdvice@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

## 4. I work for CBC and I think I am in an unhealthy relationship / am being abused

Everyone has arguments, and everyone disagrees with their partners, family members and others close to them from time to time. And we all do things at times that we regret, and which cause unhappiness to those we care about. But if this begins to form a consistent pattern, then it can be an indication of domestic abuse.

Although every situation is unique, there are common factors that link the experience of an abusive relationship. Acknowledging these factors is an important step in preventing and stopping the abuse.

This list can help you to recognise if you, or someone you know, are in an abusive relationship. This can be sustained abuse in one factor, or a range of factors. Common factors include but are not limited to:<sup>2</sup>

### **Destructive criticism and verbal abuse:**

- Shouting; mocking; accusing; name calling; verbally threatening.

### **Pressure tactics:**

- Sulking; threatening to withhold money; disconnecting the phone and internet; taking away or destroying your mobile, tablet or laptop; taking the car away; taking the children away; threatening to report you to the police, social services or the mental health team unless you

comply with their demands; threatening or attempting self-harm and suicide; withholding or pressuring you to use drugs or other substances; lying to your friends and family about you; telling you that you have no choice in any decisions.

### **Disrespect:**

- Persistently putting you down in front of other people; not listening or responding when you talk; interrupting your telephone calls; taking money from your purse/wallet without asking; refusing to help with childcare or housework.

### **Breaking trust:**

- Lying to you; withholding information from you; being jealous; having other relationships; breaking promises and shared agreements.

### **Isolation:**

- Monitoring or blocking your phone calls, e-mails and social media accounts; telling you where you can and cannot go; preventing you from seeing friends and relatives; shutting you in the house.

### **Harassment:**

- Following you; checking up on you; not allowing you any privacy (for example, opening your mail, going through your laptop, tablet or mobile), repeatedly checking to see who has phoned you; embarrassing you in public; accompanying you everywhere you go.

### **Threats:**

- Making angry gestures; using physical size to intimidate; shouting you down; destroying your possessions; breaking things; punching walls; wielding a knife or a gun; threatening to kill or harm you,

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<sup>2</sup> Women's Aid:  
<https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/what-is-domestic-abuse/recognising-domestic-abuse/>

threatening to kill or harm your children; threatening to kill or harm family pets; threats of suicide.

### Sexual violence:

- Using force, threats or intimidation to make you perform sexual acts; having sex with you when you don't want it; forcing you to look at pornographic material; constant pressure and harassment into having sex; forcing you to have sex with other people; any degrading treatment related to your sexuality or to whether you are gay, lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual.

### Physical violence:

- Punching; slapping; hitting; biting; pinching; kicking; pulling hair out; pushing; shoving; burning; strangling, pinning you down, holding you by the neck, restraining you.

### Denial:

- Saying the abuse doesn't happen; saying you caused the abuse; saying you wind them up; saying they can't control their anger; being publicly gentle and patient; crying and begging for forgiveness; saying it will never happen again.

### What can I do if I identify as someone who is in an abusive relationship?

**It takes courage to speak out and it takes courage to get help. We ask you to have that courage.**

If you feel comfortable speaking to a Manager at work, have a conversation to discuss the issue and let them know what support you would like and how we can help you feel safe. If you feel uncomfortable approaching your line manager in the first instance you may wish to approach your line manager's

manager, a trade union representative if you are a member of a union, HR or contact our [Employee Assistance Programme](#). You should be aware that by disclosing to someone other than your line manager, your line manager will not know about your circumstances and therefore will not be aware of how to support you in terms of the safeguarding measures set out in this policy. Further examples of measures that can be taken to support you at work can be found at Appendix 2.

CBC has a Domestic Abuse Service, with specialist officers who can offer advice, guidance and referral pathways for you to access. You can contact the team via email [bdap@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:bdap@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

CBC provides a free and confidential Employee Assistance Programme which is available for you and your immediate family members. For more detailed information in relation to this please visit our Health Assured intranet page [here](#).

There is a Bedfordshire Domestic Abuse Partnership website where you will find details of the organisations who can help you and your family. You can find the details here <https://bedsdv.org.uk/>

CBC offers a [Flexible Working Policy](#) which may assist you if you need to change how you work. We would encourage you to talk to your Manager about what you feel would help you in this situation.

**It is important to remember you are not on your own, the abuse is not your fault and you will be supported when you come forward to speak to someone.**

## 5. Perpetrators of abuse

CBC has 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 any employees who use abusive behaviours. This includes perpetrators of abuse who, through their actions, are damaging their own lives as well as the lives of others.

CBC will not tolerate any form of abuse and we encourage anyone affected by the issue, whether as an abuser or being abused, to seek support. Abusers may need help to change their behaviour, and we support and encourage employees to address violent and abusive behaviours of all kinds.

The Domestic Abuse Service provides a Perpetrator Programme for those who are abusing others and are looking to change their behaviours and attitudes. You can find details of the service here <https://www.thechange-project.org/domestic-abuse/>. There is also a national perpetrator helpline run by Respect, which can be accessed via **0808 802 4040**.

Expectations in relation to employee conduct and standards of behavior are set out in CBC's [Code of conduct](#) and our [Disciplinary Policy and Procedure](#). Perpetrators should be aware that if they are accused of serious misconduct and/or criminal offences committed during or outside of working hours which bring them or the council into disrepute this may be the subject of disciplinary action which could lead to dismissal.

## 6. The Legal context for Managers

### Health and safety legislation

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.

There are four main areas of health and safety legislation in the workplace relevant to domestic abuse:

- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1992
- Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995
- Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations 1996

Effective workplace guidance on domestic abuse helps to ensure that employers are complying with these laws.

This extends to wherever the workplace may be, including people who work from home.

### Agile Working

CBC operates Agile Working as part of its Accommodation Strategy and [Agile Working Policy](#).

Employers have a duty of care for all their employee's and the requirements of health and safety legislation also applies to employees who work in an agile way including working from non-office based locations and from home. Managers need to remain alert to the possibility of staff using home working as a way to hide that they are being abused.



If a member of staff is affected by abuse, working from home can be a supportive option for some, but a risk factor for others. This should be taken into consideration by a Manager for their staff when assessing if working agilely is suitable for the employee and the work they undertake.

If there is a marked change in behaviour and a member of staff is requesting to or is working from home far more than is usually the case, a Manager should consider Section 3 of this guidance.

### Domestic abuse and the criminal law

In 2018 the government launched a major consultation on domestic abuse, which is intended to lead to a Domestic Violence and Abuse Act. This would consolidate other relevant legislation and introduce new measures to help people affected by domestic abuse.

In the meantime, the Sentencing Council guidelines<sup>3</sup> on domestic abuse were revised in February 2018. The Sentencing Council for England and Wales promotes greater consistency in sentencing, whilst maintaining the independence of the judiciary. The Council produces guidelines on sentencing for the judiciary and criminal justice professionals and aims to increase public understanding of sentencing.

The new guidelines bring a distinct change in emphasis in relation to seriousness. The previous guidelines stated that offences committed in a domestic context should be seen as no less serious than those in a non-domestic context,

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.sentencingcouncil.org.uk/news/item/sentencing-council-publishes-new-guideline-on-domestic-abuse/>

whereas the new guidelines emphasise that the fact an offence took place in a domestic context makes it more serious. This is because domestic abuse is rarely a one-off incident; it is likely to become increasingly frequent and more serious the longer it continues and may result in death. It can also lead to lasting trauma for survivors and their children.

For the first time, the guidelines also include a reference to abuse perpetrated through use of technology, such as email/text, social networking sites or tracking devices fitted to a car, since these are increasingly common methods by which domestic abuse can occur.

The guidelines recognise that these offences can affect people of all backgrounds. They are clear that abuse can occur between family members as well as between intimate partners.

### Public Sector Equality Duty

CBC has a statutory duty as a service provider and an employer to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics; age disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission has highlighted that tackling Domestic Abuse is a priority.

- Since 2015, there has been a considerable increase in the number of domestic abuse incidents reported to the police but under-reporting and mis-recording remain key issues.

- Although there is a lack of data on the experiences of disabled, LGBT and ethnic minority survivors, National Crime Survey evidence suggests that those most at risk are women, disabled people and LGBT people.

## 7. Further advice and information

Please speak to your line manager, the Domestic Abuse Service or an HR Adviser for further advice on this guidance.

Further information on the Duty to make reasonable adjustments can be found in Chapter 6 of the [Employment Statutory Code of Practice](#).

## Appendix 1: Opening the conversation

The aim of starting a conversation if you are concerned an employee is suffering from abuse, 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.

If a manager suspects that an employee is experiencing domestic abuse, they should facilitate a conversation to discuss the issue on a general level and identify and implement appropriate support.

Begin by asking indirect questions, to establish an empathetic relationship with the employee. Be patient, offering support to encourage disclosure.

Below are some 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?
- Is everything all right at home?
- You don't have to tell me anything, but please know that I would like to ensure you are directed to where support can be provided if and when you feel ready
- What support do you think might help? What would you like to happen? How?

The role of a manager is not to deal with the abuse itself but to make it clear where support can be obtained

## **Disclosure**

If an employee discloses that they are experiencing domestic abuse, it can be challenging for the manager/colleague too.

An employee may step forward to raise concerns about a colleague who they suspect is experiencing domestic abuse.

Reassure them that the information they have shared will be treated in the strictest confidence.

Consider what steps might be necessary to ensure they remain safe in the workplace, in case a perpetrator suspects they may have reported the abuse.

Suggest that you go somewhere quiet and comfortable, away from the office/desk if possible.

Acknowledge the courage of the employee and how difficult it must be to talk.

Confirm the confidentiality of the disclosure. As a guide for managers, any information should only be disclosed to anyone else (with the exception of their manager) if it is absolutely necessary in providing awareness and support and with the prior agreement of the person who has disclosed,

Exceptions to that are if the manager believes there is an imminent threat to life, harm of children or vulnerable adults, or threat against the employer. At that point, an employer should contact the police and follow their advice on next steps.

Have an open posture. Reach towards them but be sensitive that they may feel threatened by invasion of personal space.

Be prepared for them to be upset and tearful. Do not be judgemental.

Avoid language that indicates blame or fault (“Why don’t you leave?” / “How can you let this happen?” / “Why haven’t you told anyone before?”).

Allow plenty of time and space for them to speak.

Managers may also contact the EAP Service confidentially at any time in order to receive support themselves or seek management advice.

It is important to remember that the impact of domestic abuse can be long term. Employers should be aware that court processes can take several years, and that abuse may continue long after the relationship has ended.

## **Appendix 2 – Examples of practical workplace support for people who are experiencing domestic abuse**

Agree with your Manager what to tell colleagues and how they should respond if the abusive partner/ ex-partner / family member telephones or visits the workplace.

Consider if an individual can change work patterns or workload and allow flexible or more flexible working or [special leave](#) if applicable to facilitate any practical arrangements.

Consider how flexi leave, annual leave, unpaid leave or agile working arrangements can facilitate any practical arrangements. Examples include:

- Attending court
- Meeting or calling a solicitor
- Viewing properties
- Meeting teachers at school
- Talking to their bank or getting advice from domestic abuse organisations.

Consider [flexible working](#) arrangements to enable individuals (or their children) to attend health appointments resulting from the abuse, such as seeing a counsellor. This may be needed for some time after the abuse has stopped.

If the abuser has an employees' work email and telephone details, consider diverting their phone calls and emails to help shield them from their abuser.

Notify reception and security staff if the abuser is known to come to the workplace and provide a copy of any existing orders against the abuser and a photograph of the abuser to reception and security staff.

Check that employee's have arrangements for getting safely to and from home and consider accompanying them to and from their car if suitable.

Check with the employee that the personal information held on Success Factors, such as temporary or new addresses, bank or health care details are up to date including the

employee's next of kin information and/or an up to date emergency contact number for a trusted friend or family member.

Where practical, consider offering a temporary or permanent change of workplace, working times/ patterns through the completion and consideration of a [flexible working request](#)

Where practical, consider changes in specific duties where they could be at risk of abuse, such as not expecting the employee to answer telephones or sit on reception.

If appropriate move the employee out of public view, ensuring that they are not visible from reception points or ground floor windows.

Complete and regularly review a risk assessment with the employee to ensure any arrangements in place remain appropriate to both the employer and employee or require changing.

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.