

Domestic Abuse – Guidance for Managers and Staff

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Domestic abuse and violence takes place in all groups and sections of society regardless of age, culture, disability, gender identity, race, religion, sexuality and social class. There are an estimated 2.3 million victims¹ of domestic abuse each year in England and Wales, aged 16 to 74, of whom, two thirds are women and one third men.
- 1.2 The University takes its duty of care towards all our staff seriously and recognises that they may be affected by domestic abuse, which could have an impact on their safety, wellbeing and ability to work.
- 1.3 Our aim with this guidance is to ensure that any member of staff who may be experiencing, or is witness to domestic abuse knows they will be supported within the workplace and that it is a safe place in which they can disclose (if they wish), that they are suffering from/have witnessed domestic abuse and can seek support. Additionally this guidance is intended to provide line managers with a greater understanding of what may constitute domestic abuse and/or violence and the practical steps they need to consider when offering support to a member of staff who is experiencing domestic violence, ensuring that they are supported within the workplace.
- 1.4 This guidance applies to all staff at the University regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation.

2 What is Domestic Abuse?

- 2.1 Domestic abuse and/or domestic violence is considered to be any incident (including a pattern of incidents) of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over and who are personally connected².

¹ [Domestic abuse prevalence and trends, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk/people-in-the-uk/population-and-demography/ethnicity-and-nationality/ethnicity-and-nationality-in-england-and-wales)

² [Domestic Abuse Act 2021 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/26/section/1)

2.2 'Abusive behaviour' can take many forms and is defined in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 as any of the following:

- Physical or sexual abuse
- Violent or threatening behaviour
- Controlling or coercive behaviour
- Economic abuse
- Psychological, emotional or other abuse

2.3 Examples of domestic abuse and violence may include but are not limited to:

- **Physical assault, or threats of physical assault or violence** such as; punching, slapping, kicking, biting, choking, the use of weapons, damaging personal property, forbidding someone from being able to eat or sleep, trapping someone in their home or keeping them from leaving, preventing someone from obtaining medical assistance, withholding medical prescriptions or hormone treatment.
- **Emotional or psychological abuse** such as; intimidation, using insults and verbal abuse, trying to isolate someone from friends and family/not allowing them to visit or see them, gaslighting, humiliation, acting jealous or possessive, demanding to know their whereabouts all the time, attempting to control their appearance, purposely referring to an individual by the wrong pronoun or calling them 'it', withholding affection as punishment.
- **Sexual assault or threats of sexual assault and/or coercion** such as; rape, being forcing or manipulated into having sex or perform sexual acts, being coerced or forced into sex work/prostitution, being forced to dress in a sexual way, insulting them in a sexual manner, ignoring their feelings regarding sex, purposefully trying to pass on a sexually transmitted infection to them, being tricked into unsafe sex, reacting negatively with sadness, resentment or anger if they say no or don't immediately agree to something.
- **Financial/Economic abuse** such as; giving an allowance and closely monitoring how you spend it, preventing you from viewing or having access to bank accounts, insisting that your salary is paid into their bank account and preventing you from accessing it, forbidding you to work or limiting the hours that you can work, stealing money from you or your friends and family, living with you but refusing to contribute to the household, maxing out credit cards in your name without your permission, or not paying the bill which could impact on your credit score.

2.4 'Personally connected' is defined in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 as parties who:

- are married to each other
- are civil partners of each other
- have agreed to marry one another (whether or not the agreement has been terminated)
- have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether or not the agreement has been terminated)
- are or have been in an intimate personal relationship with each other
- have, or there has been a time when they each have had, a parental relationship in relation to the same child
- are relatives

2.5 Abuse can also occur in other forms such as so-called 'honour' based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage, teenager to parent abuse and elder abuse when committed within the family or by an immediate partner.

3. Recognising domestic abuse - workplace indicators

3.1 Domestic abuse and violence remains largely a hidden issue and is a highly sensitive topic for both a member of staff to feel comfortable to discuss, and for line managers to feel adequately equipped to respond and support their member of staff.

3.2 For those who experience abuse, the workplace can be a safe haven and offers respite away from the abuser. Colleagues and line managers can often be the only other people outside the home that a member of staff suffering from domestic abuse speaks to on a daily or frequent basis and are therefore in a unique position to help spot the signs of abuse.

3.3. Some potential indicators of abuse include:

- **Work Productivity:** A drop in performance standards, changes or reduced quality and/or quantity of work, missing deadlines for no apparent reason or which seem out of character for the individual, uncharacteristically late, frequent absences or regularly needing to leave work or meetings early without explanation, spending an increasing number of hours at work for no reason or being anxious to return to the workplace during the COVID-19 pandemic. Changes to the way they communicate, such as receiving a large number of personal calls or text messages or a strong reaction to personal calls. If

working from home they may be difficult to get hold of or their partner is regularly in the room during meetings, frequent visits to the workplace by their partner, which may indicate coercive control.

- **Changes in behaviour or demeanour:** Their conduct is out of character with their previous behaviour, changes in their behaviour may include; becoming very quiet, anxious, frightened, tearful, aggressive, distracted or depressed, isolating themselves from work colleagues, secretive about their home life or why they have not got their camera turned on if working from home, worried about leaving their children at home, having an obsession with time-keeping, avoiding lunch breaks or socialising with colleagues outside of work, a lack of money.
- **Physical indicators:** Repeated/frequent injuries or unexplained bruising or explanations that perhaps do not fit with the injuries, ill-suited or excessive clothing which do not suit the climate and may be used to hide injuries, a change in the pattern or amount of makeup used, substance use/misuse, fatigue/sleep disorders.
- **Other indicators:** Partner or ex-partner stalking the member of staff in or around their place of work or on social media, partner or ex-partner exerting control or demands over the member of staff's work schedule, isolation from friends/family/colleague, being the victim of vandalism/threats.

3.4 Additionally, domestic abuse can often escalate during sport tournaments. While football, for example, doesn't cause domestic abuse, it can aggravate pre-existing behaviours. Research from Lancaster University (2013)³ shows there is a link between team wins and defeats, and perpetrator behaviour. Line managers should be mindful of this, especially if it appears that sporting events are coinciding with the example indicators above in point 3.3.

3.5 The effects of domestic abuse and violence will vary and the examples provided are only potential indicators and should not be used alone to identify whether or not a member of staff is suffering from domestic abuse or violence.

4. Impact in the workplace

4.1 Domestic violence and abuse can greatly impact upon a member of staff's work-life, many of whom may have suffered from physical injuries, sleep deprivation, low morale, low self-esteem and heightened levels of anxiety, which can all contribute towards lateness, absenteeism and poor performance.

³ [Lancaster University study](#)

- 4.2 Members of staff experiencing domestic abuse or violence may be especially vulnerable whilst they are at work, in particular where they attempt to leave and an abusive partner and the workplace becomes the only place where they can be located.
- 4.3 They may receive harassing or repeated phone calls, texts or emails, unwelcome notes left on their car or unplanned and unannounced visits at work. They may also be stalked, physically assaulted whilst at, or travelling to and from work.
- 4.4 Additionally, colleagues of the member of staff may also be targeted by the perpetrator and followed to or from work, or subject to questioning about the individual's personal contact details and/or location.
- 4.5 Perpetrators may be using workplace resources such as time, phones, emails, instant messaging or other means to threaten, harass, intimidate or abuse their current or former partner.

5. Domestic abuse and working from home

- 5.1 Due to the pandemic there has been a greater shift towards homeworking or 'hybrid' working than ever before, which may undermine the visibility of abuse that may have otherwise been spotted within the workplace.
- 5.2 Home is not necessarily a safe space for all of our members of staff and for some the pandemic and lockdown(s) has meant that they have been isolated with their abuser, and in some cases their safe space at work or escape had been removed.
- 5.3 In such situations the abuser may present themselves as friendly and accommodating to those outside of the home. You may notice that they are frequently in the background when the member of staff is on work calls/video meetings, making it more difficult for the member of staff to reach out for help.
- 5.4 Some examples of behaviour that line managers and/or colleagues may pick up on include but are not limited to: members of staff not dialling into phone or video calls/meetings when expected to, or dialling in late, their abuser creating a disruptive workspace, not using visual aids when in video meetings, seeming quiet or withdrawn.
- 5.5 For those who now regularly work from home as part of their working pattern it is essential that line managers ensure they maintain regular contact with them, which may include; regular 1:1's, check-ins, virtual team meetings, and ensuring that no member of the team goes a full working day without being part of at least one phone/video call or electronic conversation.

6. Roles and Responsibilities

- 6.1 Members of staff are under no obligation to tell anyone at work about their domestic situation, however if they do then line managers have a crucial role to play in enabling staff experiencing domestic abuse and/or violence to seek help and to provide them with support.
- 6.2 As noted in point 3.2, line managers are in a unique position to notice potential signs of domestic abuse, and can, with support from your [People and OD Partner](#), encourage the member of staff to discuss any issues they are experiencing and what support or adjustments can be put in place to help them.
- 6.3 Part of the fear of disclosing domestic abuse is the fear of not being believed or taken seriously by others (they may have been told by their abuser that they will not be believed). Line managers should respond sympathetically and confidentially to any disclosure of domestic abuse and/or violence, and they should believe the disclosure unless there is clear evidence to the contrary.
- 6.4. Line managers must respect the right of the member of staff who has confided in them to make their own decision on the course of action at every stage. They should provide information to the individual, not advice.
- 6.5. Additional considerations for line managers when they are made aware of a disclosure:
- Be mindful that the member of staff may wish to speak to a line manager, or People and OD Partner of the same gender, or from the same equality group,
 - Hold any discussions in a safe, private and confidential space,
 - Be supportive, available and approachable,
 - Take the time to listen, let the member of staff talk and take them seriously, use empathy and ensure a non-judgemental approach,
 - Use care and sensitivity when asking questions, reinforcing that as far as possible confidentiality will be respected (except in relation to child protection or safeguarding issues),
 - Keep any personal opinions to yourself and do not be judgemental,

- Discuss with the member of staff what they want to do (if anything), respect their decision and bear in mind that they may have limited access to resources,
- There may be occasions where it is necessary to agree with the member of staff what (if anything) colleagues should be told where there is a risk of incidents in the workplace. In such situations when there is an agreement to share the disclosure with colleagues, line managers must communicate to those colleagues the importance of confidentiality and the potential consequences of failing to do so i.e. disciplinary action.
- Ensuring the safety of all team members is protected (taking appropriate guidance from your People and OD Partner who can liaise with central Safety Services for further advice and guidance where necessary) – particular care should be taken in the event that the member of staff is a [Lone Worker](#),
- Ask the member of staff if they want to report the abuse to the police and/or seek medical assistance – this is their choice and should not be forced. If the member of staff is injured then they should be encouraged to seek medical treatment and have any injuries assessed and documented with their consent,
- Ask the member of staff if they would consent to your notifying the relevant People and OD Partner. If they do not consent to this, you can still speak to your Partner in confidence for general support whilst keeping the member of staff's details anonymous,
- Be prepared to offer the same level of support on all occasions no matter how many times the same colleague comes forward, as some individuals may find it very difficult to leave their abuser or abusive relationship,
- Provide the member of staff with the details of the University's [Employee Assistance Programme](#) and [Report and Support](#) platform. Additionally, sign-post to other relevant external support agencies:

[Domestic abuse: how to get help - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/topics/domestic-violence)

[Domestic abuse: specialist sources of support - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/topics/domestic-violence)

[Domestic Abuse Directory - Womens Aid](#)

[Refuge Against Domestic Violence - Help for women & children.](#)

[Home | Refuge National Domestic Abuse Helpline \(nationaldahelpline.org.uk\)](https://nationaldahelpline.org.uk)

[End The Fear - Greater Manchester](#)

6.6. If the member of staff is suffering from financial/economic abuse then they should be encouraged to speak to their bank, building society or lender, as there are ways that they can help.

- [Financial Abuse Code of Practice | UK Finance](#)

6.7. Additionally there are a number of financial resources signposted on the Universities [Financial wellbeing](#) page. Staff can also seek money and debt support via the University's [Employee Assistance Programme](#).

6.8. As their line manager you should not:

- Expect too much from the member of staff, they may not want you to do anything other than listen,
- Pressurise the member of staff to leave their abuser – this is not helpful as there is often an escalation in violent behaviour after an attempt to leave. Planning to leave an abuser takes careful planning and support and should be done at the member of staff's pace,
- Mislead the member of staff into thinking you can do more than you can realistically do as their line manager,
- Set pre-conditions for supporting them or rush them to make a decision to force them to take action,
- Act as a go-between,
- Disclose to anyone that the member of staff has made you aware that they are suffering from domestic abuse and/or violence unless you have their express consent to do so, or the nature of their disclosure highlights child protection or safeguarding concerns.

6.9. Examples of support that line managers may be able to provide include but are not limited to:

- Granting leave (including at short notice) for relevant appointments such as; support agencies, solicitors, to arrange childcare or housing, to attend court appointments etc.
- Temporary or permanent changes to working hours/patterns,
- Acknowledging that there may be an impact on performance output and that temporary adjustments may be required to support this,
- Making changes to specific duties, for example to avoid potential contact with an abuser in a public facing role, or if they are another University of Manchester member of staff,
- Redeployment or relocation if requested and deemed appropriate and reasonable,

- Discussing with the member of staff whether there are any relevant training courses they would like to attend and helping them get a place where possible e.g. University of Manchester courses (if appropriate),
- Advising the member of staff on relevant policies (such as Special Leave) and applying appropriate discretion on the use of these policies,
- Taking supportive action to enable the member of staff to remain at work, working with the individual at all times,
- Undertaking a [risk assessment](#) in relation to the member of staff and any potential risks posed to colleagues. To support the completion of a risk assessment, line managers can seek guidance from the [Advice and Response](#) team about the option of using a DASH checklist as a supportive tool.

7. **Safety considerations at work**

- 7.1. Where a member of staff has made it known that they are experiencing domestic violence and/or abuse, as their employer we will take all reasonable steps to actively try and minimise the risk to their safety whilst at work.
- 7.2. Line managers have a duty to maintain a secure environment for their employees and in some cases this may be easier if colleagues are aware of any potential risks. In such scenarios line managers should agree with the member of staff what information their colleagues should be told, especially if there is a potential risk of incidents in the workplace e.g. the abuser also works at the University, or the member of staff works in an area easily accessible by the general public.
- 7.3. In these circumstances, colleagues who are made aware of this information must keep it confidential and understand the risks if the information is disclosed to others. A failure to do so may result in disciplinary action being taken.
- 7.4. Reasonable measures that line managers can consider to ensure the safety and security of the member of staff may include:
- Altering the layout of a room, or moving desks so that the member of staff cannot be seen through reception/entrances or through a window,

- Changing specific duties, for example to avoid potential contact with an abuser in a public facing role, or if they are another University of Manchester member of staff,
- Changing or diverting the member of staff's internal phone number, using the necessary functionality on Outlook to block messages from specific email addresses,
- Agreeing with the member of staff what to tell colleagues (if anything) and how they should respond to contact from the abuser who is looking to make contact with the member of staff concerned. This may include providing colleagues, building security and reception staff with a photograph and other relevant details e.g. car make and registration,
- Reminding colleagues of the importance of not divulging personal information to other colleagues, third parties, members of the public or any unknown persons requesting the information, such as; addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, social media account details, work patterns,
- Ensure that any systems used for recording staff whereabouts e.g. swipe cards, are adequate. If the nature of their work requires them to be off-site or working alone, then consider how to minimise the risks e.g. keep in regular contact, can they buddy up with a colleague so they don't have to work alone, inform building security if they are lone workers,
- Special arrangements for when the member of staff finishes work for the day e.g. leave via a different exit or at different times, walked to their car/public transport,
- Ensure that any incidents which occur on University premises are documented, including any witnesses. This information may be used as evidence in any court or civil proceedings,
- Consider a change in working hours or location, or other temporary measures as an option to keep the member of staff safe whilst at work,
- Establishing with the member of staff how to contact them outside of work if contacting them direct at home may not be appropriate.

7.5. Where both parties work for the University, or one of the individuals is a University of Manchester student, line managers should speak to their People and OD Partner about what appropriate course of action should be taken to reduce the risk of incidents taking place at work/study.

7.6 If/when we are made aware of any incident(s) of domestic abuse and/or violence which has taken place in the course of employment, irrespective of where it took place, the University will

seek to investigation this accordingly in line with the relevant University polices and/or statutes and take appropriate steps against any perpetrator, including disciplinary action.

8. Support for line managers

8.1. If you are at all unsure about how to approach domestic abuse or violence related issues then please speak to your [People and OD Partner](#) for further confidential advice.

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