



Employee Domestic Abuse Support Guidance



Employee Domestic Abuse Support Guidance – V2

Wokingham Borough Council recognises and acknowledges that sadly an employee may be affected by domestic abuse, and should this situation occur the Council are committed to fully supporting the employee through this difficult time.

This document should be read in conjunction with the Employee Domestic Abuse Support Policy available on the HR Hub.

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Purpose of this Guidance

This guidance is designed for all colleagues, so you know where to turn and what to do. This document is intended to help line managers and colleagues to respond to suspicions or disclosures that someone may be affected by domestic abuse as a victim-survivor and how to deal with colleagues who are perpetrators of domestic abuse.

This document should be read in conjunction with our Domestic Abuse Policy which includes further advice and guidance.

Advice for managers - supporting someone experiencing domestic abuse

Research has indicated that in any one year, more than one in five of employed women take time off work and at least 2% lose their jobs as a direct result of domestic abuse. Studies show that over half of domestic abuse victim-survivors call in sick at least three days a month and turn up late more than five times a month.

75% of those experiencing domestic abuse are targeted at work, and it is often possible for perpetrators to use workplace resources such as phones, emails and other means to threaten, harass or abuse their current, former partner or a family member.

Managers can play an important role when a team member is experiencing domestic abuse. As a manager you can support your team member; you can consider practical measures that will allow them to stay in work and to stay safe; and you can signpost them towards specialist sources of help. However, it is not your role to advise your team member what to do about their relationship or to act as a counsellor.

You can find more information about what you can do further on in the guidance. You may also wish to discuss the options available to you with HR. If you wish to discuss the application of this guidance, please contact HRenquiries@wokingham.gov.uk

Your safety and that of your colleagues is paramount. If you believe someone is in immediate danger, you should contact the police by dialling 999.

Recognising the signs of Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse can cause employees to be distracted at work, arrive late, leave early or miss work. Some common signs which might indicate that an employee is affected by domestic abuse can be found in Annex B. Please note this list is not exhaustive. These are examples of things you should be mindful of when considering whether domestic abuse may be affecting the member of staff. You should avoid making any assumptions about a person's situation based on the existence, or absence, of any of these signs and should be mindful that there may be other causes for the behaviour.

Talking to your team member

If you suspect someone is experiencing domestic abuse, you should try to have a conversation with them. Shying away



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from the subject can perpetuate a fear of stigma and increase feelings of anxiety. Often, people who are affected will not feel that they can speak up and disclose the situation themselves, so sensitively taking the first step to start the conversation can be key.

You should begin by making sure you are in a comfortable and safe space where you are not going to be interrupted. Asking indirect questions can help establish a relationship and develop empathy. Some examples of question you might ask are:

- How are you doing at the moment? Are there any issues you would like to discuss with me?
- I have noticed recently that you aren't entirely yourself. Is anything the matter?
- Are there any problems or reasons that may be contributing to your frequent sickness absences/dip in your performance at work?
- What support do you think might help? What would you like to happen next?

If you need to, you can try something slightly more direct such as "Is everything ok at home?" But remember, they may not be ready to tell you what is happening so do not push the issue. Take their lead and let them know you are ready to have a confidential chat when they are ready to do so.

You can also suggest that if they don't want to talk to you, there are other options such as the Employee Assistance Programme helpline. Contact details for this and other relevant external organisations can be found in **Annex E**.

Do not make assumptions or be judgmental. Studies show it can take several years to break free of an abusive relationship and you should not assume, because they stay or return, the abuse is not severe or that they don't want it to stop.

As a manager, you should never encourage your team member to leave their abuser. Studies show when a victim-survivors of domestic abuse is attempting to leave a violent relationship, this is a time when the potential for an attack resulting in severe injury or death is at its highest. Instead, you should encourage them to reach out for the professional help they need to make sure they have the right support in place. Details of relevant external organisations can be found in **Annex E**.

You should also be aware that there may be additional issues and barriers facing a team member seeking help. For example, many LGBT+ people are fearful of coming out. This can be used as a method of control, by threatening to "out" them to family, faith communities, colleagues or employers. More information about specific issues facing LGBT+ and people with disabilities that experience domestic abuse can be found in **Annex D**. This annex also provides more information on 'honour' based abuse and forced marriage.

Key actions for managers

If someone chooses to disclose domestic abuse to you, there is a range of practical measures you can put in place to support your team member at work. Some are quick and easy. Others may take a bit longer. These can be found in **Annex C**.

Remember, it is essential you do what you can to put your colleague in control of the situation. Let them know the practical measures that can be taken and let them tell you what they think will help them the most.



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What should you do as the colleague of a victim-survivor of domestic abuse?

You almost certainly know someone who has been, is currently or will be affected by domestic abuse. Managers and colleagues are in a good position to spot the warning signs. Things to look out for can be found in **Annex B**.

If a colleague or friend tells you that they are affected by domestic abuse, you should not force them to disclose this to someone else. Offer a listening ear but recognise that you cannot adopt the role of counsellor, nor compel them to accept help.

You can encourage them to talk to their manager and you can tell them about relevant external organisations. A list of contact details can be found in **Annex E**. You can also reassure them that contacting the Employee Assistance Programme is confidential.

You may wish to contact the Employee Assistance Programme which can support you too. There is also a free mobile app called Bright Sky you can download. This provides nationwide domestic abuse information for victim-survivors and those who may be worried about someone they know.

It is important you keep any information your colleague shares with you confidential. The perpetrator may know someone in the office or within your circle of friends. Your colleague can be at serious risk if anything they say gets back to the perpetrator. However, if you believe they or someone in their family, such as a child, is in immediate danger, you should contact the police by dialling 999. If a child or vulnerable adult is at risk, you will also need to make the appropriate referrals in order to help keep them safe.

Advice for managers - supporting colleagues of victim-survivors of domestic abuse

As well as supporting your team member experiencing domestic abuse, you should also consider your other team members. They may be the first people to pick up signs of abuse or to be told what is going on at their colleagues' home. They may not be sure where to get support for themselves or their colleague. You should encourage them to read this guidance.

You should remind them that any information disclosed to them by the victim-survivor must be kept confidential. However, if they feel their colleague or a member of their family, such as a child, is in danger, they should contact the police.

You may find colleagues of victim-survivors need practical support and advice if, for example, they are subject to questioning by the perpetrator about the victim-survivors contact details or location. You should advise them and all team members not to give out any information over the phone or by email about another colleague, whether or not they are the victim-survivor of domestic abuse.

Colleagues may fear for their own safety. They may wish to contact the Employee Assistance Programme or seek advice from a relevant external organisation. These organisations may be able to suggest measures that can be put in place to keep them safe. Details of relevant external organisations can be found in **Annex E**. If they feel they are in immediate danger, they should always contact the police by dialling 999.

As a manager, you may wish to conduct a risk assessment with your team member and enable them to change their



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start and finish times, change their working pattern or suggest they change their route to and from the office or work from home.

Colleagues may witness violence or other abuse in the workplace. They should be offered appropriate counselling and other relevant support to overcome any practical and emotional issues that arise consequently. Support can be provided by the [Employee Assistance Programme](#).

Advise for those concerned about the impact of their behaviour on others

Recognising the signs

You may find it helpful to think if you have ever felt or said any of the following:

- When I get angry, I just can't control myself.
- Well, you've got to stand up for yourself, haven't you, otherwise they walk all over you.
- Sometimes when we argue, I shout and my partner is afraid of me.
- I don't know, a few drinks and things just get a bit out of hand.
- I don't know what they mean. I've never hit them. I just pushed them and they fell over. It's all very well for you to talk about me being abusive - you don't know what I have to put up with.

You may also want to think if:

- you check up on your partner or ex-partner frequently (listening to their phone conversations, checking their car mileage, emails, texts)
- you put your partner or ex-partner down (calling them names, criticising them, humiliating them)
- you try to control your partner or ex-partner (telling them who they can or can't see, where they can and can't go, what they can or can't wear)
- your partner or ex-partner is afraid of what you will say or do
- you are being physically violent, emotionally abusing your partner, intimidating your partner or sexually abusing your partner.

Your responsibilities as an employee

You are responsible for ensuring your conduct and behaviour meets the expected standards set out in the Wokingham Borough Council Conduct Policy.

Domestic abuse will not be condoned under any circumstances. This behaviour will be taken very seriously and can lead to disciplinary action which may lead to dismissal.

The Conduct Policy requires you to inform line manager if you are arrested and refused bail, or if you are convicted of a criminal offence. This includes any charges made against you for domestic abuse. Failure to let your line manager know may lead to disciplinary action and dismissal.



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You should notify your manager if you are arrested, charged and released or if you are released under investigation for domestic abuse or any other crime.

The Council recognises that if you are released under investigation, this does not mean you are guilty of an offence. There will be no presumption of guilt. You should read the managers' section of the guidance to understand what action may be taken in relation to your work.

If you do not wish to tell your manager, you can contact HR via HRenquiries@wokingham.gov.uk and advise them. They will let you know what the next steps are in regard to work.

Getting help

Many perpetrators of domestic abuse constantly put the blame on their partner or ex-partner – “I'll stop shouting at you or hitting you if you do this” – “if you do that” – “if you stop winding me up” – “if you do what I say” etc. The only person who is responsible for your actions is yourself. Try to get help now rather than putting it off or denying that you need help.

Perpetrators of domestic abuse have to want to get help for themselves. This means being prepared to work hard and to face up to what you are doing and the damage this causes to your partner or former partner and any children who may be involved in the relationship.

To be able to take responsibility for your actions and to stop blaming others takes strength and courage. If you are a perpetrator of domestic abuse, you can choose what kind of person you want to be. There are agencies which provide workshops to help you to stop this cycle of abuse. Contact details can be found in **Annex E**.



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Advice for managers - managing a perpetrator of domestic abuse

If a team member tells you they have been arrested or convicted of a domestic abuse related offence

If a team member tells you they have been arrested or convicted of domestic abuse, you need to consider what action needs to be taken. You should make it clear to your team member that domestic abuse is a serious matter and is not acceptable. Your team member should understand this type of behaviour may lead to disciplinary action and dismissal from Wokingham Borough Council.

You should advise them you will need to consult with HR to discuss what action needs to be taken.

Released under investigation

If your team member tells you they have been released under investigation, you should treat this information in strictest confidence. Released under investigation doesn't mean your team member is guilty of an offence. It is worth remembering that false accusations can be made.

You should tell your team member that, wherever possible, you will not share the information without their consent. However, you should advise them there may be situations when you have to break confidentiality, for example, if you feel there is risk of harm to any children involved.

You should not be judgmental or make any comments about the allegations or your perceived innocence or guilt of your team member. You should not ask about the investigation or offer any advice. Instead, you should listen to your team member and let them know you will need to consult with HR to determine what happens next in relation to their work. This will include any relevant safeguarding procedures that may need to be put in place to mitigate reputational or operational risk to the council, as well as any risk to residents or colleagues.

You should also reassure your team member that the council recognises being accused of domestic abuse can be very stressful and may affect performance at work. You should advise your team member that you will discuss with HR any steps that can be taken to support them to ensure their safety and well-being is monitored.

Your team member may also wish to speak to the Employee Assistance Programme or contact a relevant external organisation such as Respect for advice and support. Contact details can be found in **Annex E**.

Other ways of becoming aware a team member may be being abusive or controlling

There are other ways you can become aware of a team member's abusive behaviour. For example, an allegation may be shared with you by the person experiencing abuse or by a family member, friend or work colleague. Or, you may have concerns because of the team member's behaviour at work. Below is a list of signs you may wish to consider, although it is important to remember that it may not be possible to assess whether someone is a perpetrator based solely on his or her outward behaviour. Many perpetrators conceal their abuse by behaving pleasantly to most people. You should also not make any assumptions about a person's behaviour on the existence or absence of any of these signs:



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- negative comments made by your team member 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 can be the consequence of their partner defending themselves).

However you become aware of the situation, you should always seek help and support from HR before taking any action.

Next steps

You should familiarise yourself with this guidance as it will help you when considering the next steps. For example, below is a list of things to consider when discussing the case with HR. You will be best placed to provide them with the information they will need to ensure the appropriate action is taken.

Things to consider when discussing a team member's case with HR

When discussing the case with HR you should consider the following:

- do you need to take immediate action to minimise the potential for your team member using their position or work resources to continue their abusive behaviour? For example, if they have access to a computer programme that can help them find their victim-survivor, you should consider withdrawing their access.
- is your team member able to carry out certain duties? For example, it would be inappropriate for a perpetrator of domestic abuse to provide advice or services to vulnerable men, women and children and/or the public. If so, you should consider a change in job role.
- is your team member working in the same location as their partner or former partner? If so, do you need to move either the perpetrator or the victim-survivor to a new location? If you are considering moving the victim-survivor, you should not do this without their consent.
- is your team member released under investigation? If so, are there any issues to be considered at work? For example, is it appropriate to offer suitable support for your team member? If so, what would that support be?

Considering disciplinary action

You should also discuss with HR if disciplinary action is appropriate. Where a team member has committed a criminal offence outside work, they cannot be fairly dismissed without following a disciplinary procedure, even if your team member has been remanded in custody or has been convicted of the offence.

For disciplinary action for out-of-work conduct to be fair, your team member's offence must have some bearing on their employment. You will need to consider what effect the charge or conviction has on their suitability to do the job and their relationship with the council, work colleagues and customers.



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If, for example, your team member is abusive to their partner or a former partner who is employed by the council or they are being abusive during working time, this provides a connection between the offence and their employment. Another example is if your team member is using workplace resources such as the telephone or emails to threaten, harass or abuse their current or former partner and/or involve other colleague.

Disciplinary action does not have to wait until your team member has been convicted of the offence. Where there is a connection between the offence and the employment, the disciplinary procedure must be followed, and a thorough investigation completed before any decision is taken. However, legal advice should be sought before any action is taken.

Wokingham Borough Council understands this can be a difficult situation. You should discuss any concerns you have with HR who will advise and support you through the process. You may also wish to speak to the Employee Assistance Programme who can offer you confidential advice and support.

Considering suspension

If you are considering suspending your team member from work pending disciplinary action, you must seek HR advice first. It is unlawful to suspend an employee without pay unless it is provided for in the contract of employment. To do so would place the council at risk of claims for unlawful deductions from wages and possibly constructive dismissal.

Holding a discussion with your team member

If, after discussing the case with HR, you have further discussions with your team member, you should always consider your own safety and make sure it will not be compromised. For example, you may wish to take another work colleague with you or meet in a public place.

When talking to your team member, do not make any assumptions or judgements. Talking to your team member in a constructive and respectful way will not mean you are excusing their behaviour.

When holding a discussion with your team member, you should:

- be clear that abuse is always unacceptable and is never justifiable
- be clear that abusive behaviour is a choice
- be aware that domestic abuse is about a range of controlling behaviours and not just physical abuse
- be aware that, on some level, your team member may be unhappy about their behaviour.

You should let your team member know if any immediate action is to be taken and what that will be. You should also advise them of any disciplinary action being considered and who will conduct any investigation that may need to take place.

If, during your discussion, your team member expresses a desire to change their behaviour, you should encourage them to seek the professional help they need. For example, you can signpost them to a relevant external organisation such as Respect, which runs a helpline, email and web chat service for perpetrators of domestic abuse looking for help to stop their behaviour, or ideally our local perpetrator intervention. Contact details can be found in **Annex E**.



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Keeping a confidential record of your discussions

If you have any discussions with you team member, any information disclosed should be treated in confidence wherever possible. However, if you suspect immediate danger to another person, you should contact the police by dialling 999. You should keep a confidential record of any discussion you have with your team member and any subsequent action or decisions that are taken. Good records may subsequently help in any legal proceedings or disciplinary hearing involving your team member.



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Annex A - Signs of domestic abuse for the victim-survivor

If you answer yes to any of the following questions, you might be in an abusive relationship.

Emotional abuse

Does your partner or ex-partner ever:

- monitor how you spend your time
- control your daily life, for example where you can go, who you can see, what you can wear
- isolate you from your family and friends
- make unreasonable demands for your attention
- accuse you of flirting or having affairs
- impose “rules” which humiliate, degrade or dehumanise you
- belittle you, or put you down
- blame you for the abuse or arguments
- deny that abuse is happening, or play it down
- stop you going to college or work
- prevent you from accessing transport
- control your money, or not give you enough to buy food or other essential things?

Threats and intimidation

Does your partner or ex-partner ever:

- threaten to hurt or kill you
- threaten to hurt or harm a family pet
- destroy things that belong to you
- stand over you, invade your personal space
- threaten to kill themselves or the children
- read your emails, texts or letters
- harass or follow you?

Physical abuse

The person abusing you may hurt you in several ways.

Does your partner or ex-partner ever:

- slap, hit or punch you
- push or shove you
- bite or kick you
- burn you
- choke you or hold you down



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- throw things?

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse can happen to anyone, whether they're male or female.

Does your partner or ex-partner ever:

- touch you in a way you don't want to be touched
- make unwanted sexual demands
- hurt you during sex
- pressure you to have unsafe sex – for example, not using a condom
- pressure you to have sex?

If your partner has sex with you when you don't want to, this is rape.

Have you ever felt afraid of your partner?

Have you ever changed your behaviour because you're afraid of what your partner might do?



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Annex B - Signs of domestic abuse for managers and colleagues

- Sudden changes in behaviour or changes in the quality of work performance for unexplained reasons, despite a previously strong record of performance.
- Repeated or unexplained absences or unexplained hospital visits.
- A change in work patterns, for example frequently late, asking for leave at the last minute, needing to leave early, being very concerned about timekeeping or wanting to stay late even though there is no business need.
- Having low self-esteem, being extremely apologetic and meek.
- A change in a person's attitude, for example becoming introverted, anxious, frightened, tearful or aggressive.
- Being secretive about their home life.
- Making excuses like tripping or being accident-prone or clumsy to explain an injury. Often the seriousness of the injury does not match up with the explanation.
- Single or repeated injuries with unlikely explanations or the same explanation used repeatedly for different occasions. Bruises or injuries that look like they came from choking, punching or being thrown down. Black eyes, red or purple marks at the neck, and sprained wrists are common injuries in violent relationships.
- Referring to the partner's temper but not disclosing the extent of the abuse.
- Drinking alcohol, taking drugs or smoking – all in excess.
- Having symptoms of depression, such as sadness or hopelessness, or loss of interest in daily activities.
- Talking about taking their own life, attempting suicide, or showing other warning signs of suicide.
- Conduct out of character with previous employment history.
- Having few close friends and being isolated from relatives and co-workers and kept from making friends.
- Having to ask permission to meet, talk with, or do things with other people.
- Having little money available. They may not have credit cards or the use of a car.
- Wearing clothes inappropriate to the weather conditions such as heavy winter clothes in summer or changes in the amount or type of make-up worn
- 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.

Of course, these can all be signs of other sensitive issues. Do not make any assumptions about a person's situation based on the existence, or absence, of any of these signs.



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Annex C – Guidance to managers on practical measures to support victim-survivors of domestic abuse

Contact arrangements

- Sharing work contact details as well as an emergency contact outside work. Arrange with your team member when and who to contact if they do not come into work (examples could include a family member, the police or a trusted friend or neighbour).
- Agree how you will maintain communication during any absences, for example if your team member calls in sick. Assure them you will not disclose their whereabouts to anyone without their agreement. If they do not call you to explain an unexpected absence and you cannot reach them via your agreed method of contact, consider whether they may be in immediate danger. If you think they may be, contact the police on 999 and provide as much information as you can.
- Agree who in the team you can share the contact details with, in case they are needed in your absence, for example when you are on leave.

Working arrangements

- Discuss possible flexible working arrangements. It may help if they change their start and finish times, change their working pattern, or work from home.
- Discuss their objectives and workload making reasonable adjustments where necessary. The stress of experiencing domestic abuse can impact significantly on performance so be mindful of this when agreeing what can be delivered and when. Agree to keep the situation under review and assure them they can change priorities and deadlines when needed.
- If their attendance is a cause for concern, you should approach this sympathetically. You can consider making workplace adjustments to support them to remain in work. These can include adjusting the absence trigger point to ensure they do not inappropriately face disciplinary action over sick absences. If you are not sure how to manage attendance and you are aware domestic abuse is one of the contributing factors, it is likely you may need the speak to HR.
- Any adjustments should be made with the consent of your team member.
- Allow them to access professional services, including counselling, during working hours, to avoid their partner becoming suspicious or aware of what they are doing.
- Consider special leave to attend appointments such as a GP, hospital or other agencies. They may need time off to attend court, visit a solicitor or the police. They may have children and need time off to visit the school or make alternative childcare arrangements.

If your team member is working in the same location as their partner or former partner, you should consider seeking advice from HR or more information on what action can be taken to move either the perpetrator or the victim-survivor to a new location. However, if you are considering moving the victim-survivor, you should not do this without their consent.



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Safe Communication

- If they are receiving harassing emails or calls from the perpetrator, consider changing their work email address and their phone number and, in the meantime, diverting phone calls and emails.
- Agree what to tell their colleagues and how they should respond should the perpetrator telephone.
- Verify the source before communicating – never share ‘missing person’ reports from non-verified accounts on social media or elsewhere i.e. not from a police source.

Identity issues

- If they are attempting to leave an abusive relationship, you should seek advice from HR and/or the Employee Assistance Programme.
- Where necessary, you can seek additional support and advice from other agencies (such as domestic abuse organisations, Witness Protection and the Police).
- They may wish to conceal their identity by using an assumed name at work. If they do, their personal records, payroll records and intranet details may need to be altered. You should contact HRenquiries@wokingham.gov.uk to arrange for this to happen.
- You should consider whether any photographs or descriptions that can identify your team member need to be excluded from publications and websites.
- Your team member may wish to reduce or eliminate information that may be accessed through the Internet including social media sites.

Security arrangements

- Ensure they do not work alone or in an isolated area.
- Where practical, offer changes in specific duties, such as not expecting your team member to answer the telephone or sit on reception.
- Move your team member out of public view, ensuring that they are not visible from reception points or ground floor windows.
- Remind employees never to give out personal information about their colleagues such as contact details/patterns of work, even if that request comes from a family member.
- Agree what to tell colleagues and how they should respond if the perpetrator or other named parties (family or friends) telephones or visits the workplace and asks for them.
- Agree with them to give reception/security staff (where applicable) specific instructions as to how to identify the perpetrator, for example a photo or car registration, should they try to come into the building, or should they tell reception that your team member is expecting them.
- If there is a protection order that prohibits the perpetrator from coming to the workplace, agree with them that you can share these details with reception/security staff as they may be required to call the police where appropriate.
- Remind reception/security staff of their general responsibilities to protect the identity of individuals and never to give out any personal information about their colleagues.
- You may find it helpful to carry out a personal Health and Safety Risk Assessment and to keep a record of any incidents of abuse in the workplace, including persistent phone calls, emails or visits to the workplace.



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- In some cases where your team member's personal safety is at serious risk, it may be necessary to consult the Police about the best way to implement safety measures including safe escape routes.

Travel

- Make sure they have safe arrangements for getting to and from home. If they have concerns, talk to them about how they might change their route, for example by taking a different bus or train time.

Personal information

- You should review the security of all personnel information held. For example, a temporary or new address and bank details should always be held securely and only available to relevant employees.
- If the perpetrator works for the council or partner body, you should make sure they do not have any access to your team member's personal information.
- You should make sure you keep contact with your team member during any absence, while keeping their whereabouts confidential.
- Explain that you will keep a confidential record of your conversations and any incidents that are disclosed to you or that you witness, in case they ever want to use it.

Transfers

- If your team member feels they need to move location, you can consider a transfer or redeployment to another post and/or location. You can seek the advice from HR via HRenquiries@wokingham.gov.uk to discuss the options available to accommodate the move.

Financial support

- If your team member is experiencing financial hardship as a result of domestic abuse, discuss with them the option of contacting our Employee Assistance Programme or their Trade Union, if they are a member, as they may be able to offer additional financial support.
- Discuss if they wish to change their bank details to redirect their salary. However, be mindful this can alert the perpetrator of their intention to leave. They must therefore decide when to take this action.
- Refuge has produced a financial guide called 'My Money, My Life' that they may find helpful.

Remember when discussing the options available to your team member, it is important that they agree to any action being taken so they are in control of the situation at work.



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Annex D – ‘Honour’ based abuse and forced marriage

‘Honour’ based abuse

‘Honour’-based abuse is a form of domestic abuse that is perpetrated in the name of so called ‘honour’. It can exist in any culture or community where males are in a position to establish and enforce control over women’s conduct. However, men can also be victim-survivors. This is sometimes because the relationship they are in is deemed inappropriate, for example if they are gay, have a disability or have assisted a victim of abuse.

It is important not to underestimate or be dismissive of the extent of control over behaviours in some communities. For example, wearing what is considered inappropriate clothing can be seen as bringing shame upon the family or community and can therefore result in retribution.

Escaping ‘honour’-based abuse can be even more difficult than escaping other abusive relationships, as it often involves leaving behind friends, family and community. Families can sometimes go to extreme lengths to trace a family-member considered to have brought shame upon them. For example, they may make false reports to the police that the family member has stolen something from the family.

Issues of confidentiality are always important in domestic abuse situations, but extra care is needed where a team member is the victim-survivor of honour-based abuse. In tight-knit communities, a victim-survivor of ‘honour’-based abuse may be suspicious of any member of that community, which can make accessing support extremely difficult.

If you, or a colleague, experience this kind of abuse, you may wish to contact an organisation such as Karma Nirvana. This is a national charity supporting victim-survivors of honour-based violence across the country. Their contact details can be found in **Annex E**.

Forced Marriage

Forced marriage is a criminal offence. A forced marriage is one in which one or both spouses do not (or, in the case of some adults with learning or physical disabilities or mental incapacity, cannot) consent to the marriage and violence, threats, or any other form of coercion is involved. Coercion may include emotional force, physical force or the threat of physical force, and financial pressure. In an arranged marriage, both parties have consented to the union but can still refuse to marry if they choose to.

Refusal to participate in, or resistance to, a forced marriage can result in honour-based violence as described above. A team member, particularly a young woman or man, who is expressing concern about a family holiday abroad may be worried about the potential for a forced marriage, and any concerns expressed should not be dismissed, nor should disclosures or suspicions that someone is under pressure or coercion to enter into a marriage they don’t want to.

If you, or someone you know, is at risk of, or has been forced into a marriage, the Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) can provide advice and support, and signpost on a range of issues including safety. Their contact details can be found in



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Annex E - LGBT+ (Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender and intersex) specific issues

It is important to remember that domestic abuse can occur in same sex relationships as well as in heterosexual relationships. Research into the experiences of domestic abuse of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) people has highlighted the following specific issues.

- There is a general lack of discussion about domestic abuse in same sex relationships, and the unspoken assumption that domestic abuse occurs only in heterosexual relationships can make it difficult for those affected to recognise that they are experiencing domestic abuse.
- Many LGBTQ people are fearful of coming out. This can be used as a method of control, by threatening to “out” people to family, faith communities, colleagues, employers etc.
- The power dynamic within a same sex relationship can be affected by the length of time someone has been “out”. Someone in their first same sex relationship can be vulnerable to an abusive partner suggesting that their behaviour is the norm in same sex relationships. This can make it extremely difficult for someone to recognise, acknowledge and speak about domestic abuse.
- Victim-survivors of domestic abuse in same sex relationships often feel responsible for the emotional welfare of the abusive partner and protective of them. This can make it very difficult for them to recognise the abuse, and makes them very reluctant to disclose that their partner is abusive.
- Victim-survivors in same sex relationships are less likely to turn to the police for help than those in heterosexual relationships. Research refers to a gap of trust between victim-survivors and mainstream agencies.

If a team member discloses to you that they are experiencing abuse in a same sex relationship, they may be taking a very difficult step and will be placing a high degree of trust in you. It is important to set aside any preconceived ideas you may have and avoid making any assumptions (for example, assumptions as to who is the most powerful or the strongest in the relationship).

If you, or a team member, experience domestic abuse in a same sex relationship, you may wish to contact, or signpost your team member to an organisation such as Galop. This is a national charity, which provides support for LGBT people experiencing domestic abuse. The contact details can be found in **Annex E**.

Specific issues for victim-survivors of domestic abuse who have a disability

There are some specific issues for victim-survivors of domestic abuse who are disabled, and it is important to be aware of, and be sensitive to these issues. An Office for National Statistics report published in 2020 found that:

- 14.7% of women with a long-term illness or disability had experienced domestic abuse, compared to 6.0% of non-disabled women
- 7.5% of men with a long-term illness or disability had experienced domestic abuse, compared to 3.2% of non-disabled men

People who have a disability face many barriers in society, which can be exploited by a controlling and abusive partner. For example, where a person’s partner is also their carer, they have additional opportunities to exercise power and



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control. They can threaten to withdraw care or remove mobility aids to take away the person's independence.

This can make it extremely difficult for a victim-survivor of domestic abuse who has a disability to contemplate reporting the abuse or leaving the situation for fear of losing an element of necessary care.

A common feature of domestic abuse is the erosion of the victim-survivors' self-esteem and confidence, making them feel that they deserve no better. An abusive partner telling a person with a disability that nobody else would ever love them or be interested in them, and they should be grateful that the partner stays with them, can make it very difficult for a victim-survivor to acknowledge the abuse even to themselves, let alone disclose it to anyone else.

People with a disability, particularly those with mental health issues, often fear that they will not be taken seriously or believed if they report abuse and can be very susceptible to an abusive partner repeatedly telling them that no-one will believe them.

A person who has a disability which requires adaptations carried out at their home will find it very difficult to leave that property, as any other property may not meet their needs. The process of accessing and completing adaptations can be lengthy, and costly.

People with a disability often have difficulty accessing support services. Many refuges are not accessible to someone with a disability and many people who have a disability have smaller support networks than those without a disability.

If a team member who has a disability discloses that they are being subjected to domestic abuse, it is important to treat them with the same respect and dignity as you would any other team member. They may need additional support to negotiate a care package if they are contemplating separating from an abusive partner who is also a carer. You may wish to encourage them to contact a local disabled people's support agency or advocacy organisation, as well as, in relevant circumstances, a benefits advisor.



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Annex F - Useful Contacts – Help and Advice

If you are concerned for your own or someone else’s immediate safety, call the police on 999.

24-hour helplines:

Wokingham Domestic Abuse Service: 0118 402 1921 (for male and female victim-survivors – emergency out of hours service available if you need to access a refuge)

National Domestic Violence Helpline for female victim-survivors – 24 hours a day [0808 2000 247](tel:08082000247)

Employee Assistance Programme – Vita health Group– freephone 24 hours a day, 365 days a year 0800 111 6387, or for management support 0800 111 6385. For online information see [Vita Health Group](https://www.vitahealthgroup.co.uk) with EAP log in code: WOKwell. See <https://wokingham.sharepoint.com/Services/Pages/Counselling.aspx> for further details.

There are many other organisations that can offer advice and practical guidance on domestic abuse. Some are listed below, and you can find a full list of Wokingham based services on the [domestic abuse pages of our website](#):

Name	Contact details	Information/support available
Ashiana Sheffield	Tel: 0114 255 5740 ashianasheffield.org	Ashiana has a dedicated team who assist black, asian, minority ethnic and refugee women across the country whose lives have been affected by violence and abuse.
Black Association of Women Step Out (BAWSO)	Tel: 0800 731 8147 www.bawso.org.uk	BAWSO provides advice and support for black and minority ethnic people in Wales providing culturally sensitive and appropriate information on a range of issues such as domestic abuse, forced marriages and female genital mutilation.
Bright Sky	Download free from App store	It is the first app of its kind in the UK, providing nationwide domestic abuse support for victim-survivors and those who may know of someone in an abusive relationship.
Domestic Abuse Service, Wokingham (delivered by Cranstoun)	Helpline 0118 402 1921 available Monday – Friday 9am – 5pm and 24 hours to access refuge accommodation.	Support for victim-survivors, children and those who want to change their behaviour. Support includes helpline; safety planning outreach and advocacy; group based programmes; support for children and young people; interventions for those



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		<p>who wish to make changes to their behaviour.</p> <p>The helpline is also available for practitioners to access advice to enable them to support a client, work colleague, friend or family member</p> <p>The service also provides perpetrator interventions, including a long-term behaviour change programme</p>
Eastern European Service	<p>Call: 0772 524 5777 or email: EasternEuropeanIDVA@refuge.org.uk</p>	Support to domestic violence victim-survivors from the Eastern European Community. Women-only service.
Forced Marriage Unit (FMU)	<p>Tel: 020 700 8151</p> <p>email: fmu@fco.gov.uk</p> <p>email for outreach work: fmuoutreach@fco.gov.uk</p> <p>Facebook: Forced Marriage page</p> <p>Twitter: @FMUnit</p>	The FMU provides a public helpline giving advice and support to victim-survivors of forced marriage. The support provided ranges from safety advice, through to helping a forced marriage victim-survivors prevent their unwanted spouse moving to the UK
Hourglass	<p>Free text: 0786 005 2906</p> <p>24/7 helpline: 0808 808 8141</p>	Hourglass support older people in Wokingham who are experiencing domestic abuse. They also have a 24/7 helpline and link with our local service to support those in the Wokingham area.
Kaleidoscopic	<p>Kaleidoscopic UK website</p> <p>Email: kaleidoscopicuk@gmail.com</p>	Supports adults and children who have been exposed to domestic abuse through peer-based support.
Karma Nirvana	<p>Tel: 0800 599 9247</p> <p>(Monday to Friday 09:00 to 17:00)</p>	Karma Nirvana is a national charity supporting victim-survivors across the country of honor-based abuse and forced marriage.
Men's Advice Line	<p>Tel: 0808 801 0327</p> <p>(Monday to Friday 09:00 to 15:00)</p>	Men's Advice Line is a confidential helpline for men experiencing domestic abuse from a partner or ex-partner (or from other family members).



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National LGBT Domestic Abuse Helpline	<p>Tel: 0800 999 5428</p> <p>(Monday and Thursday 10:00 to 20:00</p> <p>Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday 10:00 – 17:00</p> <p>(13:00 - 17:00 Tuesday is trans specific service))</p> <p>Email: help@galop.org.uk</p>	<p>The National LGBT Domestic Abuse helpline is run by Galop, the leading LGBT anti-violence and abuse charity.</p>
National Stalking Helpline	<p>Tel: 0808 802 0300</p> <p>About stalking Suzy Lamplugh Trust</p>	<p>The helpline provides help and offers support to victim-survivors of stalking, offering free safety tips and delivering community projects.</p>
Refuge	<p>Tel: 0808 200 0247</p> <p>24- hour free phone telephone number</p> <p>www.refuge.org.uk</p>	<p>Refuge is one of the largest single providers of specialist accommodation and services to women and children escaping domestic abuse.</p>
Respect	<p>Tel: 0808 802 4040</p> <p>(Monday to Friday 09:00 – 17:00)</p> <p>www.respect.uk.net</p>	<p>Helpline for those worried about their own, or someone else’s abusive or controlling behaviour.</p>
Southall Black Sisters	<p>Helpline: 020 8571 0800 (open Monday to Wednesday, and Friday, 9.30am to 4.30pm, General enquiries: 020 8571 9595</p>	<p>Support for domestic violence victim-survivors from black and minority ethnic groups and advice on immigration issues. (This is a women-only service)</p>
The Samaritans	<p>Tel: 116 123</p>	<p>The Samaritans is a nationwide charity that provides 24-hour confidential and emotional support for anyone in a crisis.</p>



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Support U	0118 321 9111	Specialist Thames Valley wide service to support members of the LGBT+ community who are experiencing domestic abuse.
Victim Support	Tel: 0845 303 0900 (Monday to Friday 09:00 to 21:00, Weekends 09:00 to 19:00)	Victim Support is the national charity for people affected by crime. It is an independent organization offering a free and confidential service irrespective if the crime has been reported.
Women's Aid (female victim-survivors of domestic abuse)	www.womensaid.org.uk	Support for women affected by domestic abuse. There are many resources on their website, including a survivors handbook.
Women and Girls Network	Freephone advice telephone: 0808 801 0660 or email: advice@wgn.org.uk . Open Monday to Friday, 10am to 4pm, and Wednesday 6pm to 8pm	Providing advice and specialist support for victims of rape or sexual assault and operating a free domestic abuse advice line. Women-only service.

Version Control

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