



Employers' Guidelines on
Domestic Abuse

Foreword

This reference booklet is intended to guide employers in the identification and management of employees experiencing domestic abuse. It is also valuable to personnel with particular responsibility for occupational health and / or employee assistance programmes. It provides clear and concise information to assist in recognising, responding and referring appropriately where an employee is experiencing domestic abuse.

The information in this resource has been guided by the experience of members of the Public Awareness Sub-committee of the HSE Mid-West Regional Advisory Committee on Violence Against Women and a number of Human Resource Managers in the Mid-West region. It has also drawn on the work of employer and trade union organisations plus other bodies nationally and internationally.

Recognise
Respond
Refer

Recognise • Respond • Refer

What is Domestic Abuse?

Domestic Abuse is defined as threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, verbal, sexual, financial or emotional) inflicted on one person by another where they are, or have been, intimate partners or family members.¹ Domestic abuse is a pervasive issue not confined by class, age, ethnicity, race, sexuality, religion or disability.

The term '*domestic abuse*' is used throughout this document and victims of domestic abuse are referred to by the pronouns '*she*' and '*her*'. Domestic *abuse* emphasises the abusive nature of the relationship, the range of abuses involved and the reality that, while physical abuse is often present, this is not always the case.

As the definition states, domestic abuse takes place in different forms of adult intimate relationships, including abuse of women by men, abuse of men by women and abuse within homosexual relationships.

A Workplace Issue

In an increasingly competitive economy and tight labour market where every cost needs to be identified, the cost of domestic abuse can often be overlooked by employers. The effects may have a significant financial impact on the employer and the economy.²

Problems at home may impact directly on work performance. Issues such as illness, financial difficulties or substance use may be identified and addressed by management. Domestic abuse, however, often remains hidden behind a wall of shame or embarrassment. It has profound effects on some people both personally and professionally. It may have a detrimental impact on an employee's job performance through increased stress, absenteeism or poor timekeeping, as well as physical and mental effects on the individual such as exhaustion and depression.³

Co-workers may be drawn into the situation. For example, they may cover up for the victim by performing her duties, offering excuses for her performance or by spending time during work hours trying to support her.⁴

It is important to develop a pro-active response to domestic abuse in the workplace. This can be done by raising awareness among employees and ensuring that designated staff members are clear on how to respond appropriately to disclosures of abuse. This helps to create a safe and supportive environment for employees and may in turn encourage those employees who are experiencing abuse to seek support.

The principle message for employers is to **RECOGNISE** domestic abuse, **RESPOND** with empathy and **REFER** to services that are appropriate to the employee's needs.⁵

Recognise:	Know the signs and indications of abuse
Respond:	Know how to deal with the issue of abuse
Refer:	Make a good, appropriate referral

1 Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Northern Ireland Office (2006) *Developing a Workplace Policy on Domestic Violence and Abuse: Guidance for Employers*, Ref No: 7/2006, Belfast: Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Northern Ireland Office.

2 SIPTU (2004) *Domestic Violence and Abuse: Policy and Guidelines for the Workplace*, Dublin: SIPTU.

3 Ibid.

4 Overgaard, W. and McCaw, B. (2008) 'Domestic violence: the hidden workplace cost for employers', *California Broker Magazine*, available: www.calbroker.com [accessed 06 December 2010].

5 Kenny, N. and Ni Riain, Á. (2008) *Domestic Violence: A Guide for General Practice*, Dublin: Irish College of General Practitioners.

Recognise Domestic Abuse

An employee who experiences domestic abuse may not tell work colleagues about her situation or approach her manager directly with her problems. It is far more likely that the manager will become aware of associated issues. As with other welfare concerns, early identification that an employee is experiencing difficulties will more likely lead to appropriate help being offered. This in turn could mean that the employee is able to deal with the situation far more effectively.⁶

Possible signs of domestic abuse may include⁷:

- Arriving late to work or high absenteeism without explanation
- Uncharacteristic depression, anxiety, distraction or problems with concentration
- Changes in the quality of work performance for no apparent reason
- Receiving repeated upsetting calls/texts/emails
- Being obsessed with time
- Needing regular time off for appointments
- Inappropriate or excessive clothing or make-up
- Repeated injuries or unexpected bruising or explanations that do not fit the injuries sustained
- Working increased hours for no apparent reason

It is important to note that this is not a checklist. Some people experiencing domestic abuse may display no outward signs. Individuals experiencing domestic abuse may suffer a broad range of physical and emotional consequences. For some, the abuse greatly affects their lives over a significant period of time and the process of recovery can be long and hard. Others may be able to recover and start a new life relatively quickly after leaving an abusive relationship.

Many perpetrators of domestic abuse will continually abuse their partners at work e.g. through constant phone calls, arriving at the workplace or waiting outside. These threats, or perceived threats, can be enough for a victim to leave her employment through fear or embarrassment as to how her employer and fellow employees will react to her situation. Many victims, in their attempts to get away from the abuse, are forced to leave the area in which they live. This makes it more difficult, if not impossible, for them to get to work. Loss of job security and the subsequent loss of financial independence can compound the problems victims have to overcome when dealing with domestic abuse⁸. Employers should be aware that even if the person leaves the relationship the abuse can often continue and in some cases become more severe at this stage.

6 Liston, L. while on placement in the Southill Domestic Abuse Project (2008) *Employee Domestic Violence Policy Guidelines for Employers/Designated Person*, Limerick: The Southill Local Area Network on Violence against Women.

7 Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Northern Ireland Office (2006) *Developing a Workplace Policy on Domestic Violence and Abuse: Guidance for Employers*, Ref No: 7/2006, Belfast: Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Northern Ireland Office.

8 SIPTU (2004) *Domestic Violence and Abuse: Policy and Guidelines for the Workplace*, Dublin: SIPTU.

Creating Workplace Awareness of Domestic Abuse

Consideration should be given to the following:⁹

- Routinely reminding all staff never to divulge personal information about employees to callers
- Providing information and leaflets on domestic abuse to employees
- Including articles about domestic abuse in the company's newsletter and publications
- Making people aware of helpline numbers e.g. displaying posters in prominent locations; putting "helpline" stickers on the back of toilet doors; including the helpline numbers in payslips
- Ensuring that key staff receive training to enable them to recognise and respond appropriately to suspicions and/or disclosures of domestic abuse
- Inviting specialist services into the workplace to speak to staff as part of a health awareness programme or as a volunteer/fundraising initiative by staff

Respond to Disclosures of Domestic Abuse

It takes courage to disclose information about domestic abuse and it can be traumatic. However this may be alleviated if the employer takes the disclosure seriously, believes what is said and follows the guidelines set out below:

- Create an environment where employees feel safe and able to talk about issues that are affecting them
- Choose a private place to talk – a quiet place away from others
- Be attentive and listen carefully. Give the employee time to say what she wants
- Be reassuring and do not blame or judge. Reassure her that she is not to blame for whatever has happened
- Do not ask leading questions or make suggestions. Let her speak in her own time. Do not stop her recalling significant events but do not make her repeat the story unnecessarily
- Do not offer advice under any circumstances or attempt reconciliation but rather provide details of the support services that are available
- Do not over-react. Be aware of your own feelings and remain calm. An overly emotional response can silence the person disclosing ¹⁰
- Do not recommend couple counselling – this can be very unsafe where there is domestic abuse
- Managers should make a managerial commitment rather than a personal commitment to help a member of staff resolve any non-work issue ¹¹
- ***The Confidentiality Policy of the company should be applied to all disclosures of domestic abuse.***

⁹ Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Northern Ireland Office (2006) *Developing a Workplace Policy on Domestic Violence and Abuse: Guidance for Employers*, Ref No: 7/2006, Belfast: Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Northern Ireland Office.

¹⁰ The Mid-West Regional Planning Committee on Violence against Women (2008) *Good Practice Guidelines for Violence Against Women Prevention Education in Post-Primary Education Sector, Limerick, Clare and North Tipperary*, Limerick: The Mid-West Regional Planning Committee on Violence against Women.

¹¹ Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Northern Ireland Office (2006) *Developing a Workplace Policy on Domestic Violence and Abuse: Guidance for Employers*, Ref No: 7/2006, Belfast: Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Northern Ireland Office.

Refer to Local Services

Details of Local Services

It is useful to give these phone numbers to an employee experiencing domestic abuse so that she can make a call if and when she wishes. Offer her a private place to make the call.

Clare: Clare Haven Services, Ennis – 065 6822435
Refuge and supports for women and children

Limerick: ADAPT Services, Limerick – 1800 200504
Refuge and supports for women and children
Southill Domestic Abuse Project – 061 313025
Supports for women
Rape Crisis Mid-West – 1800 311 511
Support Services for survivors of sexual abuse

Tipperary: Ascend Services, Roscrea – 0505 23379
Support Services for women and children

If there is immediate danger dial 999 (or 112 from a mobile phone)

An Garda Síochána:

Clare:	Ennis	065 6848100	Ennistymon	065 7072180
	Kilrush	065 9051017	Shannon	061 365900
Limerick:	Henry Street	061 212400	Roxboro	061 419555
	Newcastle West	069 20650	Bruff	061 382103
	Askeaton	061 392102		
Tipperary:	Cahir	052 7445637	Clonmel	052 6177640
	Roscrea	0505 24230	Thurles	0504 25111