

Policy Implementation Guidelines

Guidance for Managers and HR Teams

This document provides practical guidance for managers and HR teams on recognising, responding to, and supporting employees experiencing domestic abuse. It accompanies the SafePolicy™ Workplace Policy and should be read alongside it.



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About this document

This document provides practical guidance for managers and HR teams on recognising, responding to, and supporting employees experiencing domestic abuse. It accompanies the SafePolicy™ Workplace Policy and should be read alongside it.

Institutions investigate moments. Abusers operate across time.

Why This Matters

Under UK law, employers are responsible for ensuring a safe and healthy workplace. Having a domestic abuse policy and the operational capacity to implement it can help demonstrate that your organisation is taking reasonable steps to meet its health, safety, safeguarding, equality, and wellbeing responsibilities.

Statutory context

The Employment Rights Act 2025 has received Royal Assent. Employers should continue monitoring developments relating to workplace rights and any future statutory provisions connected to domestic abuse leave or safe leave entitlements.

Policy Scope and Applicability

Communicate it clearly: make every employee, permanent, temporary, contractor, intern, aware of the policy. It can stand alone or be part of existing wellbeing or absence policies.

Update other policies: ensure sickness, leave, performance, and disciplinary rules reflect domestic abuse considerations.

Who it covers

- **Employees:** full statutory rights
- **Workers** may be entitled to certain employment protections, including protection from discrimination under the Equality Act 2010 where applicable.
- **Contractors:** no employment rights, but including them in policy scope strengthens your support message

Adapt the policy to your organisation's workforce structure.

Understanding Domestic Abuse

Under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, abuse encompasses behaviour between two connected adults aged 16 or over, including current or former partners, family members, or carers. Children who witness or experience the effects of domestic abuse are also recognised as victims in their own right.

Abuse may be a single incident or a repeated pattern and includes:

- Physical or sexual violence
- Threatening, violent or coercive behaviour
- Economic control or financial abuse
- Psychological, emotional, spiritual, digital or other abuse
- Image-based abuse, including the creation or distribution of manipulated or AI-generated content such as deepfakes

Abuse may also include reputation-based tactics such as false allegations, malicious complaints, or fake online reviews intended to damage an individual's professional or personal standing.

Abuse affects anyone, regardless of gender, race, sexuality, or background.

Types of Abuse Explained

1. Physical Abuse

Any behaviour causing or threatening physical harm, including hitting, choking, weapon use, restraint, confinement, or medical abuse such as withholding medication or denying access to medical aids or treatment.

2. Verbal Abuse

Persistent harmful communication including name-calling, constant shouting, public humiliation, and deliberate belittling or mocking behaviour.

3. Controlling and Coercive Behaviour

Behaviours intended to isolate, dominate or intimidate. This may include monitoring communications, restricting contact, or pattern-based partner control, including after separation.

Legal context

Post-separation controlling or coercive behaviour is a criminal offence in England and Wales under the Serious Crime Act 2015, as extended by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. From 5 April 2023, the cohabitation requirement was removed, meaning the offence now applies to ex-partners who no longer live together. Continued patterns of control after a relationship ends, including attending a victim's workplace uninvited as part of a broader pattern, may be prosecuted under this offence.

4. Sexual Abuse

Any non-consensual sexual activity including rape, sexual harassment, forced participation in sexual acts, or sexually degrading behaviour. Legal consent requires freedom and capacity to choose.

5. Emotional and Psychological Abuse

Systematic undermining of mental wellbeing through intimidation, manipulation, gaslighting, sleep deprivation, or turning support networks against the victim.

6. Economic Abuse

Aims to undermine a person's financial independence. In the workplace, this might look like enforced late arrivals, prohibited breaks, travel restrictions, or restricting access to salary or facilities.

7. Tech-Facilitated Abuse

Use of digital tools such as phones, email, internet, and smart devices to stalk, harass, or control. This can include forced password sharing, hidden tracking, or tampering with workplace systems.

This may also include the use of AI tools to generate false images, videos or messages, or to impersonate the victim in ways that damage their reputation or employment.

8. Stalking and Harassment

Persistent unwanted contact including following, excessive communication, unwanted gifts, or spreading information about the victim online or in person.

9. Spiritual, Honour-Based Abuse, FGM and Forced Marriage

Includes abuse justified or enacted through cultural or religious beliefs, and extends to practices such as forced marriage or so-called honour crimes.

The Scale of the Problem

- For the year ending March 2024, 2.3 million adults in England and Wales, 1.6 million women and 712,000 men, experienced domestic abuse in the past 12 months (4.8%).
- Over their lifetimes, one in five adults (approximately 20.5%) have experienced domestic abuse.
- ONS data found 6.6% of women and 3.0% of men reported abuse in the last year.
- The Femicide Census reveals that in England and Wales, a woman is killed by a man every three days on average, with 62% of these murders committed by a current or former partner.
- Domestic abuse-related crimes made up nearly 16% of all police-recorded offences in the year to March 2024.

These figures demonstrate why workplaces must be prepared. At a probable minimum prevalence of 5 to 10%, a workforce of 500 people is likely to include 25 to 50 people affected by domestic abuse at any given time.

Recognising Warning Signs

Abuse is often hidden. Look out for:

- Persistent calls, texts or emails from partners or ex-partners, sometimes at work or into breaks
- Unexpected gifts or deliveries
- Noticeable changes: withdrawal, emotional volatility, secrecy
- Inconsistent attendance or sudden lateness
- Wearing concealing clothes, possibly to hide injuries
- Signs of stress: fatigue, insomnia, irritability
- Isolation from colleagues or suppressed participation
- Sudden drop in productivity or quality of work
- Control over internet or devices while remote working
- Unexplained injuries or evasive explanations
- Expressing concern about the safety of pets, or reluctance to leave home due to fear of harm to animals

None of these signs confirm abuse, but they warrant a supportive, not accusatory, conversation. See the Manager Companion for scenario-based practice in approaching these conversations.

Embedding Check-Ins Into Standard HR Processes

Disclosing domestic abuse can be incredibly difficult. Many people may not recognise that what they are experiencing is abuse, particularly if the behaviour has become normalised over time. Routine workplace processes such as appraisals, return-to-work interviews, and performance reviews provide safe and supportive opportunities to open a conversation.

Consider embedding open-ended questions into these interactions:

- During appraisals or return-to-work meetings: “How are things at home?”
- During performance-related conversations: “Is there anything you would like to share with us?”

These questions should be asked with sensitivity, in a private setting, and by someone trained to respond appropriately.

Supporting Disclosures

Offer points of contact

Designate at least two trusted, trained contacts, and where possible ensure diversity including gender, so employees can choose who they feel most comfortable speaking to.

Ensure confidentiality

Identify private areas or safe codes, such as signals during video calls. Remember that confidentiality has limits: see the Workplace Policy for the circumstances in which escalation is required.

Listen empathetically

- Acknowledge their courage
- Use gentle, open-ended questions: “How are you coping?”
- Avoid judgement, including questions such as “Why didn’t you leave?”
- Avoid gendered assumptions

Clarify your role

Explain what you can do and signpost specialist services. Do not try to solve it yourself.

Use guided questions to establish a safety plan, including:

- › Does the perpetrator know where you work?
- › Do they work here or have any connection to the organisation?
- › Have you been followed, monitored, or approached at or near the workplace?
- › Are they contacting you during working hours or interfering with your role?
- › Has the behaviour escalated recently, including threats or stalking?
- › Are there any upcoming events, travel, or public-facing duties that increase risk?
- › Is there information you want shared with HR or security to support your safety?
- › What immediate adjustments would help you feel safer?

Always ask if they are comfortable with those around them being informed to support safety measures.

Practical Workplace Adjustments

Adapt support on a case-by-case basis, flexibility is key. Possible measures:

- Adjust start and end times or break patterns
- Allow remote or home working, or shift to office-only if preferred
- Provide new access lines, emails, or internal numbers
- Temporarily relocate desk or office, or arrange buddy checks
- Adjust workload, deadlines, or meeting schedules
- Approve leave for court hearings, solicitor or therapy appointments
- Offer paid safe leave where possible, best practice is up to 10 days, with additional flexibility depending on individual circumstances

Consider dependencies: care arrangements for children, and financial support such as salary advance, change of pay details, or emergency funds.

Statutory context

The Employment Rights Act 2025 has received Royal Assent. Employers should monitor commencement dates for domestic abuse leave provisions and update arrangements accordingly.

Pregnancy and Parental Leave Considerations

Domestic abuse may begin or escalate during pregnancy and the postnatal period. Managers and HR should take additional care when supporting employees who are pregnant or on parental leave.

Consider:

- Maintaining safe and confidential communication during leave
- Not assuming disengagement if contact is limited or inconsistent
- Reviewing safety risks ahead of return to work
- Offering flexibility in return-to-work arrangements
- Providing additional wellbeing or safeguarding check-ins where appropriate

Security and Record-Keeping

- ✓ If necessary, change work mobiles, emails, or logins
- ✓ Security staff to be notified, with consent, and shown photos or details of perpetrators if there is a known risk
- ✓ CCTV and monitoring measures must comply with UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.
- ✓ Document all interactions: date, time, facts only, no assumptions. Records may be required for legal or protective purposes

- ✓ Maintain domestic abuse-related records securely and separately from general personnel files
- ✓ Retention periods should align with organisational policy, legal obligations, and data protection requirements. Many employers retain employment-related records for around six years after employment ends.
- ✓ For safeguarding records involving ongoing risk, consider longer retention where legally justified
- ✓ Ensure secure disposal when the retention period expires
- ✓ Document any legal requests for records such as court orders or police investigations

Clare's Law: Supporting Employee Requests

The Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (Clare's Law) allows individuals to request information about a current or ex-partner's history of violence. HR can support employees by:

Right to Ask

- Informing employees of their right to make a request to police
- Providing time off for appointments with police if needed
- Offering a private space to make initial contact calls

Right to Know

- Understanding that police may proactively contact individuals at risk
- Supporting employees who receive concerning information through the scheme
- Helping connect them with specialist support services following disclosure

While you cannot make requests on behalf of employees, you can provide information about the scheme and practical support for those wishing to use it.

Perpetrator Pathways and Discipline

Organisations must be prepared to respond where an employee is identified as a perpetrator of domestic abuse. This is particularly critical where:

- The behaviour impacts a colleague
- Workplace systems or resources are used to facilitate abuse
- The behaviour creates a risk to others within the organisation

Employers may initiate formal disciplinary procedures up to and including dismissal, restrict access to systems, sites, or colleagues, and implement risk management measures to protect staff.

Where appropriate, individuals may be signposted to specialist perpetrator programmes such as the Respect Phoneline. However, referral does not replace accountability.

The safety of victims and the wider workforce must remain the primary consideration in all decisions.

Domestic Homicide and Trauma

If abuse leads to a fatality, your organisation may be asked to commission or contribute to a Domestic Homicide Review (DHR), sometimes referred to more broadly as a Domestic Abuse Related Death Review (DARDR). Offer trauma-informed support: Employee Assistance Programme, counselling, compassionate leave, for affected staff. Recognise anniversaries or triggers and remain available for future care.

Specialist Support: External Resources

Direct employees to specialist services. The following are available across the UK:

National and Universal

- › **Refuge National Domestic Abuse Helpline:** 0808 2000 247 (24 hours, freephone)
- › **Men's Advice Line:** 0808 801 0327 | for male victims
- › **ManKind Initiative:** 0808 800 1170
- › **Galop (LGBTQ+):** 0800 999 5428
- › **Surviving Economic Abuse:** survivingeconomicabuse.org
- › **Bright Sky (app):** bright-sky.org.uk | practical support and local services
- › **Hollie Guard (personal alarm app):** hollieguard.com
- › **Samaritans:** 116 123 (24 hours)

Faith, Cultural and Community Specific

- › **Karma Nirvana** (honour-based abuse and forced marriage): 0800 5999 247
- › **Muslim Women's Network:** 0800 999 5786
- › **Jewish Women's Aid:** 0808 801 0500
- › **Southall Black Sisters** (Asian, African, African-Caribbean women): southallblacksisters.org.uk
- › **IKWRO** (Middle Eastern and Afghan women): ikwro.org.uk

Disability and Additional Needs

- › **Stay Safe East** (deaf and disabled victims): staysafe-east.org.uk
- › **Sign Health Domestic Abuse Service:** signhealth.org.uk
- › **Respond** (people with learning disabilities): respond.org.uk

Digital and Reputation-Based Abuse

- › **Revenge Porn Helpline:** 0345 6000 459 | revengepornhelpline.org.uk
- › **Refuge Tech Abuse Team:** refugetechsafety.org

Children and Young People

- › **NSPCC:** nspcc.org.uk

- › **The Mix** (under 25s): 0808 808 4994 | themix.org.uk
- › **The Hideout** (children): thehideout.org.uk

Pets

- › **Dogs Trust Freedom Project** (dog fostering): 0800 298 9199 | dogstrust.org.uk
- › **Cats Protection Lifeline** (cat fostering): 03000 121212 | cats.org.uk

Legal and Financial

- › **Rights of Women** (free legal advice): 020 7251 6577 | rightsofwomen.org.uk
- › **Domestic Abuse Alliance** (civil legal support): 0800 101 7110
- › **Shelter** (housing advice): 0808 800 4444 | shelter.org.uk

Employer Networks

- › **Employers' Initiative on Domestic Abuse (EIDA)**: eida.org.uk, free membership, resources and guidance
- › **Employers Domestic Abuse Covenant (EDAC)**: edacuk.org

Perpetrator Support

- › **Respect Phoneline**: 0808 802 4040 | respectphoneline.org.uk

In an emergency, always call 999.

A full implementation checklist and workplace safety planning template are provided in the Employer's Toolkit.

Accessibility

Employers should ensure that all workplace policies are produced in an accessible format. This means presenting information in clear, plain language and offering alternative formats such as large print, audio, or digital versions compatible with screen readers. Accessible policies empower all employees, including those with disabilities, neurodivergent individuals, and those with limited literacy or language proficiency, to understand their rights and responsibilities.

Manager Implementation Toolkit: Recognise, Respond, Adjust

1. Recognise: Spotting the Signs

Abuse is often hidden, so managers should look for uncharacteristic changes in behaviour.

- **Physical indicators:** unexplained injuries, wearing concealing clothing even in warm weather, or appearing excessively fatigued
- **Work performance:** a sudden drop in productivity, missed deadlines, or uncharacteristic lateness and absenteeism
- **Behavioural changes:** withdrawal from the team, emotional volatility, or appearing secretive and anxious
- **Digital or economic signs:** excessive personal calls or texts during work, or a partner exerting control over devices during remote working sessions

2. Respond: The Initial Conversation

When an employee discloses abuse, the goal is to listen without judgement and validate their experience.

- **Listen and believe:** acknowledge the individual's courage in coming forward and use gentle, open-ended questions
- **Avoid blame:** never ask “Why didn’t you leave?” or make assumptions based on gender or background
- **Define your role:** be clear that you are there to support and signpost, not to act as a counsellor or solve the problem yourself
- **Clarify confidentiality:** explain that while you will keep the conversation private, you have a legal duty to escalate if there is a risk to children or an immediate threat to life

3. Practical Safety Planning

- **Physical security:** arrange desk relocation away from windows or entrances, or provide a buddy for arrival and departure
- **Communication safety:** change work phone numbers or email addresses, and set up pre-agreed signals for remote video calls
- **Financial protection:** discuss payroll confidentiality, changing bank details, or providing a salary advance if economic abuse is involved
- **Working hours:** adjust start and end times to make the commute less predictable for a perpetrator
- **Post-separation risk:** be aware that risk may increase after a relationship ends

4. Refer: Professional Support Pathways

- **Emergency:** if there is immediate danger, always call 999
- **National Helplines:** signpost to the Refuge Helpline (0808 2000 247) or the Men's Advice Line (0808 801 0327)
- **Clare's Law:** inform the employee of their Right to Ask the police about a partner's history of violence
- **Perpetrator support:** if an employee discloses they are a perpetrator and wishes to change, signpost to the Respect Phoneline

5. Record and Review

- **Fact-based notes:** document dates, times, and specific facts only, avoid assumptions or personal opinions
- **Secure storage:** keep domestic abuse records separate from the general personnel file
- **Ongoing support:** recognise that recovery is a long process and continue to offer adjustments or trauma-informed care as needed

A structured Disclosure Log is provided as part of the SafePolicy™ suite.

Employee Frequently Asked Questions

What counts as domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence, or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been personally connected. This includes current or former partners and family members. Abuse can be physical, emotional, psychological, economic, digital or reputation-based.

If I tell my manager, will it be kept confidential?

We handle all disclosures with sensitivity and respect. Information is shared only on a need-to-know basis to ensure your safety. There are limited circumstances where we must escalate, such as if there is a risk to children, a threat to life, or an immediate danger of serious harm. If we must share information, we will explain this to you clearly.

Can the company help me stay safe at work?

Yes. We can implement a range of practical workplace adjustments tailored to your needs. This might include changing your work phone number or email, adjusting your start and finish times, or moving your desk to a more secure location. We can also help you create a safety plan for your commute or when working from home.

Am I entitled to time off?

We provide reasonable workplace adjustments to support your wellbeing. This includes access to paid safe leave where possible, recommended up to 10 days, as well as additional flexibility depending on your situation.

Will this affect my job security?

No. We commit to never penalising or disadvantaging an individual for experiencing domestic abuse. Our goal is to support you so that you can remain safe and in work.

What is Clare's Law and can the company help?

Clare's Law (the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme) allows you to ask the police for information about a current or ex-partner's history of violence. While the company cannot make the request for you, we can provide a private space to make the call and give you time off for any necessary police appointments.

This document forms part of the SafePolicy™ Free Baseline Series by Safe Haven Education. It should be read alongside the Workplace Policy, Employer's Toolkit, Manager Companion, and Disclosure Log.

For regulated sector governance frameworks, please see SafePolicy™ Professional Series.