

Manager Companion

Domestic Abuse Awareness Essentials: Workplace Edition

This companion translates awareness into practical manager guidance through scenario practice, guided questions and an evidence-informed business case for organisational action. It does not replace specialist support.



Licence and Use

© 2026 Safe Haven Education.

This document may be downloaded and used for internal organisational purposes only. It may not be reproduced, resold, or distributed externally without prior written permission from Safe Haven Education.

About this document

This companion translates awareness into practical manager guidance through scenario practice, guided questions and an evidence-informed business case for organisational action. It does not replace specialist support.

Institutions investigate moments. Abusers operate across time.

This companion is designed for three uses: individual manager self-study following the Essentials course; facilitated team sessions or manager workshops; and reference during live situations when a concern arises.

A calm, non-judgemental first response from a manager can make it easier for an employee to disclose and access support.

How to Use This Document

Work through each scenario individually or as a group. Read the context, consider your response, then read the best practice guidance and discussion notes. Where a role-play prompt is provided, practise the manager script before reading the debrief.

Managers are not expected to investigate, counsel or resolve situations involving domestic abuse. The purpose of this document is to build confidence in recognition and first response, and to ensure managers know exactly what to do next.

Part One: Scenario-Based Practice

Scenario 1: The Performance Issue That May Not Be One

Context

An employee who was previously high-performing has become withdrawn, missed two deadlines and appears anxious during calls. A colleague mentions their partner phones them repeatedly during the working day. You are their line manager.

Decision point: what do you do?

- | | |
|---|---|
| A | Start a formal performance management process |
| B | Do nothing unless performance deteriorates further |
| C | Raise concerns privately and ask if the employee is okay |
| D | Contact HR immediately without speaking to the employee first |

Best practice response

C. Raise concerns privately and ask if the employee is okay. A low-pressure check-in creates an opening for disclosure without requiring the manager to have evidence or certainty.

Why this matters

- Behaviour that looks like a capability issue may have an underlying cause that requires support. Where appropriate, checking in with the employee before beginning a formal performance process may help identify whether something outside work is affecting them.
- Withdrawal, changes in performance and repeated contact from a partner may be indicators of domestic abuse or coercive control, but should not be treated as proof that abuse is occurring.
- Escalating to HR without speaking to the employee first removes their agency at a moment when they may already feel they have none.

Manager script

"I have noticed you do not seem yourself recently and I wanted to check in. You do not have to share anything, but if something outside work is affecting you, I want you to know that support is available and we can talk about what that might look like." [Pause. Listen. Do not fill the silence.]

Reflection

- What assumptions did you initially make about this employee's behaviour?
- Would you have raised this without having completed this training?
- What would your organisation's next step be if the employee disclosed something concerning?

Scenario 2: Financial Distress

Context

An employee has requested two salary advances in three months and unexpectedly declined a promotion. Their partner calls them at work about money. They appear anxious around pay day.

Decision point: what do you do?

- A Decline further advance requests and refer to payroll policy
- B Raise concern about financial wellbeing and explore what support is available**
- C Report suspected misconduct or financial irregularity
- D Suggest they speak to a financial adviser

Best practice response

B. Financial distress, changes in career decisions and repeated contact from a partner about money may indicate economic abuse, but there may be other explanations. The workplace may be the employee's only access to independent income and a safe space to discuss what is happening.

Manager script

"I wanted to check in about the last few months. I am not here to question your decisions, but I noticed things seem to be difficult and I wanted to make sure you know what support is available. Is there anything going on that I should be aware of, even if it is outside work?"

Reflection

- Would declining the advance request have been the easier path? What would have been the cost of that?
- Does your organisation have a process for flagging financial distress as a potential safeguarding concern rather than a payroll issue?

Scenario 3: Workplace Safety Risk

Context

An employee's partner has telephoned the office three times this week and attended the workplace once without warning. When present, the partner speaks over the employee and appears controlling. Colleagues are uncomfortable.

Decision point: what do you do?

- A Ignore it unless the behaviour escalates further
- B Ask the employee if they want you to speak to their partner on their behalf
- C Follow your organisation's safeguarding process and consider immediate workplace safety risks**
- D Contact the partner directly to address their behaviour

Best practice response

C. This is now a workplace safety issue. The behaviour may be escalating. The risk potentially extends to colleagues and to the physical safety of the workplace.

Critical

Do not contact the alleged perpetrator directly in response to the disclosure. This may alert them to the disclosure and could increase risk to the employee. Follow the organisation's safeguarding and workplace safety procedures instead.

Why this matters

- Repeated or unwanted attendance at a partner's workplace may form part of coercive or controlling behaviour, harassment or stalking, including after separation.
- Colleagues witnessing this may also need support and should not be left without guidance.
- Employers have duties under health and safety law and a common law duty of care towards workers. Workplace risks arising from domestic abuse should therefore be considered alongside other risks to health, safety and wellbeing.

Scenario 4: Direct Disclosure

Context

An employee comes to you and says: “I think I might be in an abusive relationship.”

Immediate response: your role in this moment

- Stay calm and grounded, even if what you hear is distressing
- Listen without interrupting or directing the conversation
- Validate what they have shared
- Signpost rather than solve

Manager script

“Thank you for telling me. I am really glad you felt you could. You are not alone in this and there is support available. I want to involve you in decisions about what happens next, and I will explain if there is anything I need to share or escalate and why. Is there anything you need right now, or would it help to talk through what support might look like?”

Do	Do not
Listen without interrupting	Ask why they have not left
Acknowledge their courage	Promise full confidentiality
Ask what would be most helpful	Contact the alleged perpetrator
Explain the limits of confidentiality calmly	React with shock or strong emotion
Signpost to specialist services	Make decisions on their behalf
Agree with the employee whether and when a follow-up would be helpful	Attempt to investigate

Scenario 5: The IT Request That May Not Be Routine

Context

An employee approaches IT or their manager asking urgently to change their work email address, reset all passwords and be issued a new work phone. They seem anxious and ask for it to be done quietly and without it being logged.

Decision point: what does IT or the manager do?

- | | |
|----------|---|
| A | Treat as a standard IT request and process in the usual way |
| B | Delay the request until proper authorisation has been obtained |
| C | Treat as a potential safeguarding concern, explore the employee's immediate needs and follow the organisation's appropriate confidential process |
| D | Refuse on the grounds that no explanation has been provided |

Best practice response

C. Urgent requests to change credentials or communication details, particularly when accompanied by anxiety and a request for discretion, may indicate a safety or monitoring concern. The request should be handled promptly and sensitively in accordance with the organisation's security and safeguarding procedures.

Organisational learning

Where a credential change relates to a safeguarding concern, organisations should have a process for handling the request securely and involving only those functions that need the information. The safeguarding reason should not be recorded in routine IT systems where this would create unnecessary access to sensitive information.

Scenario 6: The Alleged Perpetrator in the Organisation

Context

An employee discloses domestic abuse. During the conversation it becomes clear that the person alleged to have caused harm works in the same organisation and has a role in IT with access to internal systems, including HR records and building access logs.

Decision point: what is the priority action?

- | | |
|----------|---|
| A | Wait until a formal investigation has concluded before taking any system action |
| B | Move the employee who has disclosed to a different team or floor |
| C | Promptly involve the appropriate HR, IT and information security contacts to assess access risk and consider proportionate protective measures |
| D | Keep the situation fully confidential with no action until the employee requests it |

Best practice response

C. This creates a potential insider-risk and safeguarding issue. Where the person alleged to have caused harm has privileged access to HR systems, building systems or communications infrastructure, the organisation should promptly assess whether that access creates a risk to the employee or organisational information and determine proportionate protective measures.

Critical

Not B. Do not automatically move the employee who has disclosed. Discuss their safety needs with them and consider proportionate measures that address the source of the workplace risk.

Why this matters

- Access to HR records may reveal the employee's home address, emergency contacts, working patterns and salary.
- Access to building management systems may reveal when and where the employee is present.
- IT system access may enable monitoring of communications, sabotage of work, or interference with the employee's professional reputation.
- Record the access-risk assessment and any action taken in accordance with the organisation's information-governance, security and safeguarding procedures.

In regulated environments, access risk and any action taken should be documented in accordance with applicable governance and data protection obligations.

Scenario 7: Reputation-Based and Digital Abuse

Context

An employee reports that false complaints have been submitted in their name to a regulatory body, negative reviews have appeared online attributing statements to them that they did not make, and there are indications that AI-generated images are being circulated online. They believe their former partner is responsible.

Decision point: what do you do?

- | | |
|----------|---|
| A | Treat as a personal matter outside the scope of employer responsibility |
| B | Advise the employee to handle it privately and seek their own legal advice |
| C | Treat as a potential safeguarding and workplace risk and consider whether legal, information-security, data-protection or regulatory input is required |
| D | Ignore unless it begins to directly affect clients or the organisation's reputation |

Best practice response

C. These behaviours may create safeguarding, professional, legal or information-security concerns that affect the employee at work. The organisation may need to support the employee in responding and should keep an accurate record of what has been reported, any available evidence and the organisational action taken.

Why this matters in regulated environments

In regulated sectors including financial services, legal and healthcare, false complaints made to professional bodies or regulators can affect professional or regulatory standing, fitness to practise or, where applicable, fitness and propriety. The organisation has an interest in supporting the employee and maintaining an accurate record of what was reported and how the organisation responded.

Part Two: Questions a Manager Can Ask

Principles: open-ended, non-judgemental, optional. You are creating a safe space, not conducting an interview. The employee is never obliged to answer.

Opening Questions

Use these when you have noticed a change but have no specific information.

- › “I have noticed a few changes recently and I just wanted to check in. How are you doing?”
- › “Is there anything outside work that is affecting you at the moment? You do not have to share anything, but I want you to know that support is available.”
- › “You do not seem yourself lately. I am not raising this as a performance issue. I am raising it because I wanted to check how you are doing.”

If Concern Increases

Use these if the employee's response suggests something more significant may be happening.

- › “Do you feel safe at the moment?”
- › “Is there anything happening that is making it harder for you to be at work?”
- › “Would it help to know what support is available, even if you are not ready to talk about anything specific?”
- › “Is there anyone you are already speaking to about what is going on?”

If Disclosure Happens

Use these after an employee has shared something with you. Your goal is to validate, not to direct.

- › “Thank you for telling me. I appreciate that this may not have been easy to share.”
- › “What would feel most helpful right now?”
- › “I want to involve you in decisions about what happens next. I will also explain if there is anything I need to share or escalate and why.”
- › “Can I share some information about the support that is available, whenever you feel ready?”

Questions to Help Identify Workplace Safety Needs

For use when an employee has disclosed and you need to understand whether there are immediate or workplace-related safety concerns. Ask with care, and only what is necessary.

- › “Does this person know where you work?”
- › “Have they ever contacted you at work or come to your workplace?”
- › “Is there anything at work that you feel would help you feel safer?”
- › “Are there any upcoming events, travel or changes to your working arrangements that concern you?”

Boundaries: What Managers Must Not Do

A manager's role is to	A manager must never
Ask once, clearly and safely	Investigate or gather evidence
Create space for disclosure	Contact the alleged perpetrator under any circumstances
Accept the answer given	Promise absolute confidentiality
Signpost to specialist services	Make decisions on the employee's behalf
Follow the organisation's safeguarding process	Share the disclosure beyond those who need to know
Maintain confidentiality within legal limits	Ask repeatedly if the first answer was "I am fine"

Part Three: The Business Case

Note on sources and figures

Domestic abuse research varies in scope, methodology and year of data collection. The figures below are drawn from published UK Government and research sources as cited. They should be presented with their sources and not combined into composite claims beyond what the original research supports.

The Evidence Base

Figure	What it means for employers	Source
£14bn	Estimated lost output from time off work and reduced productivity associated with domestic abuse in England and Wales, year ending March 2017	Home Office, 2019
£316m	Estimated annual cost to UK businesses associated with absence and reduced productivity due to domestic abuse	Vodafone Foundation / KPMG, 2019
36% to 75%	Range of estimates from research reviewed by UK Government of employed victims who reported being targeted by an abusive partner while at work	GOV.UK Workplace Support Review
54%	Of employers say domestic abuse caused the quality of an employee's work to suffer	Durham University / Vodafone Foundation, 2018
5%	Of employers had a specific domestic abuse policy in place at the time of research	Durham University / SOM, 2018

The Cost of Inaction

Without appropriate policy, guidance and manager training, organisations may:

- Misidentify abuse as a performance or conduct issue, leading to disciplinary action against the employee
- Mishandle disclosures or workplace consequences in ways that create employment-law, equality or employee-relations risk
- Miss workplace risks associated with an employee who may be perpetrating abuse
- Miss opportunities to support employees whose attendance, performance or ability to remain in work is being affected by abuse
- Face reputational consequences if a serious incident occurs and the organisation had no policy or training in place

Domestic abuse can create workplace risks affecting safety, wellbeing, attendance, performance and retention. A clear organisational response helps managers recognise concerns, respond consistently and understand when specialist or organisational support is needed.

Safe Haven Education provides specialist workplace domestic abuse training, consultancy and governance frameworks. Founded by Deniz Erdem, a qualified domestic abuse practitioner with senior commercial leadership experience and lived experience of non-physical pattern-based abuse.

For Operational and Governance tier services, including SafePolicy™ Professional Series for regulated organisations, visit safehaveneducation.org.