

Domestic Abuse Guidance and Toolkit

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1. Guidance for Staff

This guidance should be read in conjunction with the Domestic Abuse policy which together provide a framework for staff and managers to seek help and support if they are affected by domestic abuse.

2. Manager's responsibilities

On average high-risk victims¹ live with domestic abuse for 2.3 years, and standard risk² victims for three years and experience 50 incidents before getting effective help. Line managers have a crucial role to play in enabling employees experiencing domestic abuse to seek help. The role of the line manager is to:

- listen and believe
- do not judge
- clarify with the employee what support/help they are seeking
- be aware that working at home or away from their usual workplace may be a cause of genuine concern or anxiety for employees who are victims of domestic abuse
- keep confidential notes of all discussions, ensuring confidentiality in maintaining records and discussing support
- to **signpost** individuals to the professional support that is available and make it clear through the policy and their own actions, that employees will be supported
- ensure that access to the policy and guidance is available to every employee
- where domestic abuse is identified, respond appropriately and effectively
- maximise safety for all employees carrying out their duties
- arrange appropriate risk assessments
- consider and discuss the range of supportive measures available from either the council or through independent domestic abuse support services with the employee
- be aware of what appropriate services and policies are available
- act with integrity and be accountable for your own actions
- consider safeguarding issues and act accordingly

¹ High-risk; those assessed as at high risk of serious harm, injury or death

² Standard Risk; also known as complex / medium risk. Those assessed whose lives are seriously disrupted by DA

- seek advice from HR if it becomes known that an employee has committed an act of domestic abuse

The council has developed violence and aggression awareness courses to deal with incidents where an employee is verbally abused or threatened or physically assaulted in the course of their duties. However, this course is not suitable for victims of domestic abuse as it does not deal with the psychology of being abused. Specialist learning programmes of this type are available on-line through Stepping Stones or Luton All Women's Centre.

Managers may have to consider additional factors if incidents in the workplace relate to domestic abuse. For example, it might involve a violent partner, ex-partner or family member visiting the workplace, making abusive phone calls, sending e-mails or intimidating or harassing the employee. Managers will also need to consider the implications for staff working from home if this is the location of where the abuse occurs.

Where there are issues such as these, the manager should, with the victim consider the following preventative and supportive measures:

- support the employee to establish their own personal safety plan, taking into account who the employee would like to include in their support network
- improve security measures on entry to building, ensuring no access is available to unauthorised visitors
- remind colleagues, including those receiving visitors and telephone calls not to divulge personal information about employees, such as addresses, telephone numbers or shift patterns
- offer temporary or permanent changes in the work place, work times and patterns that will minimise an employee's risk both at work and during their journeys to and from work, taking into consideration the council's lone working guidelines. This could include relocating the individual within the workplace to ensure that they are not visible from reception points or ground floor windows
- offer a change in specific duties such as not requiring the employee to answer phones or work in reception areas, or in exceptional circumstances, consider redeployment to another post if an alternative option is not available
- agree how to make colleagues aware of how to respond if the perpetrator rings or calls at the workplace. With the victim's consent, provide colleagues with a description of the perpetrator and other relevant details such as car registration numbers. These steps will help to heighten awareness of security in the workplace
- if there is a need for such discussions with colleagues, in agreement with the employee, the manager should remind staff that the information about the domestic abuse situation is confidential. Any unauthorised breach of confidentiality could lead to disciplinary action being taken against them
- ensure systems for recording employee's whereabouts during the day are adequate, and where work requires visits outside the office, consider how risks can be minimised. This could include a change in working duties, ensuring the employee is accompanied by a colleague and that a mobile phone is carried by the employee

- record any incidents of violence in the workplace, including persistent phone calls, e-mails or visits to the employee by their partner/ex-partner. A record should also be kept of any witnesses to these incidents as these records could be used in any criminal proceedings or civil action against the alleged perpetrator
- when considering preventative and supportive measures, the manager may be required to take account of whether these are operationally appropriate, however ensuring the safety of employees should be of primary concern throughout this process

3. All employees

- have a duty to follow the policy and guidance and if they do not understand anything, speak to their manager, the employee assistance programme provider (EAP), local HR service, trade union or a domestic abuse co-ordinator/worker
- be supportive and non-judgemental towards colleagues
- maintain confidentiality – do not discuss or share sensitive information or colleagues' working or contact information
- report any incidents of unwelcome contact, harassment or intimidation which you become aware of at work by or on behalf of an alleged perpetrator
- discuss any safeguarding concerns with your manager and report them to the MASH team

4. Employees who are victims or survivors of domestic abuse

If you are the victim or a survivor of domestic abuse you may feel that you are unable to talk to anyone about your situation. You may be afraid or worried about the consequences that this might have on you, your family, your home, your job or your income.

You do not need to keep this to yourself; there is help available either through the council or independently through the links below (see FAQ10 and Paragraph 6). However, you are encouraged to disclose that you are at risk from domestic abuse in order to receive the help and support of the council and management.

The council's EAP operates an independent professional 24 hour telephone based information and counselling service which is provided free to council employees.

Employees (and managers) can use the service to discuss in confidence, issues that are affecting their personal or work lives. By contacting the Employee Assistance Programme an employee can discuss their concerns and explore how they can be supported with their situation. Their identity is not disclosed to the council and they can use the service at any time to obtain information and guidance on a range of subjects including:

- emotional support for individuals affected by domestic abuse
- supporting individuals in crisis
- supporting groups of employees affected by a traumatic incident
- financial and legal advice

To discuss these or any other issues with a qualified counsellor, in confidence, please contact:

Spectrum Life on telephone number 0808 196 2016. Although a male or a female may answer your call, if you would prefer your counsellor to be of a specific sex, please make your wishes known. [Further information can be found on Employee Assistance Programme page here.](#) Please use organisation code LUTON. The council also has specialist officers who work with families experiencing domestic abuse who can offer advice and guidance and will be able to signpost you to appropriate agencies – contact the MASH team on x7653.

5. Frequently Asked Questions / What should I do if?

When does the Domestic Abuse Policy apply?

This policy applies to all employees (excluding those employed by schools). Luton Council will also offer support to agency and contract employees as far as is reasonably possible.

It is the council's expectation that line managers will support victims and survivors of domestic abuse showing empathy and flexibility.

What should I do if it is reported to me either by the employee, or by another employee?

- If you are not the line manager check that the employee is happy for you to speak to the line manager or someone in the management team.
- Seek advice from the specialist domestic abuse officer and/or your Human Resources Operations contact or the EAP provider.
- Be clear about the boundaries of your role both for the employee and for yourself. You are unlikely to be a trained counsellor and this role is better carried out by professionals in the field. See below.
- Check that the employee is happy to talk to you or whether he/she would prefer to talk to someone else e.g. someone of the same sex etc. Do not ask the employee to provide a reason for wishing to talk to someone else; provide options e.g. Trade Union, HR representative or domestic abuse specialist. If the victim nominates a specific person then consideration should be given to whether the nominated individual is able and willing to speak with them.
- Talk to the employee in a private room without interruptions and keep the contents of the meeting as confidential as possible. Do not be unnecessarily intrusive.
- Think about how last minute unexpected absences can be approved and catered for e.g. who will the employee contact, how the absence will be recorded etc. See FAQ5.
- Think about what temporary support can be offered in terms of temporary/permanent changes to working patterns and times, relocation (especially if the employee is in a customer facing role), redeployment (seek further advice),

change of work phone number(s), email address, enabling/facilitating the employee to use a different name at work, ensuring a safe working environment (especially if the abuser also has access to council premises or is also a Council employee) etc.

- Be supportive in approving time off for attendance at relevant appointments e.g. with support agencies, solicitors, court appointments, welfare agencies etc. See FAQ5.

What if I, or work colleagues, suspect that an employee is suffering from domestic abuse?

- Every employee and manager has a duty to speak to an employee if they suspect they are suffering domestic abuse. If the employee does not have the kind of relationship where asking the victim about it would be a good idea, then the employee should report it to the line manager.
- If you speak to an employee and they decline support, then keep a confidential record of the conversation.
- Highlight the domestic abuse policy to the employee and advise them of the role of the EAP, the domestic abuse specialists and the relevant agencies.
- It is appreciated that this may be a difficult conversation to have, but you do have to remember that domestic abuse can result in very serious consequences and as such cannot be ignored.
- Be mindful that there may be no visible signs that an employee is a victim of domestic abuse and by the time they make a disclosure they may have already experienced a significant amount of harm.

What if I find out that an employee's sickness absences are as a result of domestic abuse?

- You cannot go back and alter an employee's sickness absence record. However, you should check previous return to work forms for the reason given for the absence at that time.
- You can record any absences on the return to work form as "Personal as discussed with line manager" to preserve the employees confidentiality as far as is possible.
- You can talk (with the employees permission) to Occupational Health/ HR to extend the sickness triggers for employees in these circumstances

How can I approve time off for an employee to attend appointments etc.?

- Special leave, either paid or unpaid, for appointments with agencies, solicitors, court appointments, housing departments/associations, welfare agencies, schools etc. can be requested. Where possible appointment details such as the date, time and location of the appointment should be provided.
- In addition consideration should be given to granting annual leave, unpaid leave, flex leave etc. as appropriate.
- Such leave requests will be filed securely, on the employee's electronic file.

What do I do if I suspect that work is the only safe space for an employee and home working is a regular expectation?

- Keep in touch with employees you know, or fear, may be facing abuse and where you have the employee's permission to do so, also alert colleagues to keep in touch with those they suspect may be facing abuse. This could take the form of regular video or phone calls, so that you can have face-to-face contact with employees, or where this presents risk of being overheard, through emails or text messages. For those facing domestic abuse, this could be their only access to support
- Consider agreeing scheduled calls/appointments with vulnerable colleagues working from home so that they are aware that someone will be in touch at a given time. Also ensure you agree what action to take if they do not answer at the scheduled time i.e. calling the Police or an emergency contact etc.
- Agree a code word NOW so that they can signal that they need help. Something like "I wanted to talk to you about the ANI* project." * ANI being the acronym for Assistance Needed Immediately
- Continue to signpost employees to support services, in particular:
 - Supermarkets and pharmacies that can provide a safe place to ask for help.
 - The **Bright Sky** mobile app, free to download from the App Store or Google Play, provides support and information to anyone who may be experiencing domestic abuse or is concerned about someone they know
- Consider and discuss with the employee, flexibility around working from an office base. Employees who have raised issues about domestic abuse should be enabled to come to work as normal.
- Where it is clear that working from an office or different base is the safest option for the employee then this option must be supported and implemented.

Concerns about safety of dependants in the household?

What do I do if I am concerned about the safety of any dependants in the household? (E.g. children, elderly relatives or other persons for whom the employee is a carer)

- You have a duty to report this to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub, or the emergency duty team out of standard office hours

- The processes and procedures that apply to the investigation of domestic abuse will be followed as appropriate
- If a member of staff is abusing another member of staff, they may be subject to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO process) where children may be affected.

Contact from the employee's family

What do I do if the employee's partner/spouse, ex-partner or family member phones and expresses concern about the employee's behaviour?

- You should not discuss an employee's details with a third party even if they are the employee's partner/spouse, ex-partner or family member
- You particularly need to be very cautious if the third party wishes to seek advice about the employees behaviour at work – this may appear to be well meaning but could be an attempt to cover up/given what appears to be a reasonable explanation for the abuse
- If you are in any doubt seek advice from your HR advisor before taking the call or making any comment whatsoever

What do I do, if an employee asks for support in dealing with their abusive behaviour?

- Provide information on what services are available. Check out with the employee what support they are seeking
- Unpaid time off will only be granted for employees enrolled on an accredited programme. Before agreeing to any time off – proof of the accredited programme (i.e. dates and provider) should be sought

Employees convicted of domestic abuse

What should I do if I find out that an employee has been found guilty via the criminal justice system of a crime relating to domestic abuse?

- Seek advice from the departmental HR team – there are a number of factors to be considered including :
 - The employee's role in the council
 - The content of any publicity surrounding the conviction e.g. has this brought the council into disrepute
 - The severity of the sanction – e.g. does it involve a custodial sentence etc.

Contact details of support agencies for victims

- The council's Employee Assistance Programme Spectrum Life telephone number 0808 196 2016
- **Bedfordshire Domestic Abuse Partnership (BDAP): 24 hour Domestic Violence Helpline 0808 2000 247**
- National Domestic Violence Helpline - Freephone: 0808 2000 247
- Victim Support – 0845 3030900 the specialist DA support at victim support is via the Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVA) telephone number 01582 488777
- Luton Women's Aid telephone number 01582 391856
- Domestic Violence Unit (Police) telephone number 01582 394384
- Luton Law Centre (Legal Advice charity) telephone number 01582 482000
- Samaritans – 116 123 (free from any phone)
- **LGBT Domestic Abuse Helpline freephone telephone number 0800 999 5428**
- MALE (Men's Advice Line) telephone number 0808 801 0327
- [Mankind](#) Support and services for male victims of domestic abuse here telephone number 01823 334244

6. Resources for employees experiencing domestic abuse:

[Bedfordshire Domestic Abuse Partnership BDAP](#) **24 hour Domestic Violence Helpline telephone number 0808 2000 247**

[24 Hour National Domestic Violence Helpline](#), run in partnership between Women's Aid and Refuge. Telephone number 0808 2000 247

[Bright Sky app](#), to support those experiencing domestic abuse as well as concerned friends and family members.

[ManKind Advice and support for men experiencing domestic abuse](#)

[Independent Domestic Violence Advisor Service hosted by Victim Support](#) – providing domestic abuse support services (Luton IDVA telephone number 01582 488777 Monday to Friday: 8am to 5pm)

[Women's Aid](#) provide life-saving services and support to women, children and young people affected by domestic abuse – includes advice on how to cover your tracks on line

[Direction for Bedfordshire](#) is a dedicated, confidential service that gives you free advice, guidance and the help you need – whether you are an offender or know someone who has criminal convictions

[The Signpost Hub](#) offers free and confidential support to anyone affected by crime whether or not it has been reported to the police