

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE – BREAKING THE CHAIN

Domestic Violence and the Workplace

At first glance, one might wonder why BBSRC as an employer needs to take a stance on helping to tackle domestic violence – surely it is a personal issue that should remain in confidence outside the workplace?

However, this is not the case as domestic violence can affect those within an organisation in a number of ways including increased stress, increased absence, reduced productivity and even violence in the workplace, endangering our employees.

Research estimates that domestic violence claims the lives of two women each week and 30 men per year, and that it will affect 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men in their lifetime. Based on these figures it is likely that BBSRC will have employees who are either at risk from, affected by, or perpetrate domestic violence.

Domestic violence is wholly unacceptable and inexcusable behaviour, and responsibility lies with the perpetrator. BBSRC strives to create a working environment that promotes the view that violence against people is unacceptable and that such violence will not be condoned. Acts of harassment and bullying, violent, threatening or abusive behaviour are considered as misconduct (potentially gross misconduct) under the disciplinary policy and may lead to dismissal. Employees should also be aware that conduct outside of work could lead to disciplinary action being taken because of its impact on the employment relationship.

BBSRC will not discriminate against anyone who has been subjected to domestic violence, in terms of their existing employment or career development.

What is domestic violence?

Any violence between current and former partners in an intimate relationship, wherever and whenever the violence occurs. It may include physical, emotional, sexual or financial abuse.

What can BBSRC do?

BBSRC is committed to providing guidance for employees and managers to address domestic violence and its effects on the workplace.

We will make assistance available to employees involved in domestic violence. This may include:

- respecting the confidentiality of those who come forward for help;
- resource and referral information;
- special considerations at the workplace for employee safety;
- work schedule adjustments or leave necessary to obtain medical, counselling or legal assistance;
- consideration of moving the employee to another workplace (if available).

In responding to domestic violence BBSRC will respect the right to privacy and confidentiality of employee's who are victims of domestic violence.

In this leaflet we set out some advice and guidance in identifying and responding to domestic violence. It also gives details of support organisations.

Identifying domestic violence

Domestic violence victims may have performance problems such as chronic absenteeism or lower productivity and therefore managers may be the first to become aware that an employee is experiencing domestic violence. Other indicators to consider include:-

- arriving uncharacteristically late without explanation;
- inappropriate or excessive clothing;
- repeated injuries, or unexplained bruising or explanations that do not fit the injuries;
- uncharacteristically depressed, anxious, distracted or having trouble concentrating;
- changes in the quality of work performance for no apparent reason;
- receiving repeated upsetting calls/faxes/e-mails, or being a victim of vandalism or threats;
- obsession with time or avoiding lunch breaks or socialising outside work;
- needing time off for appointments.

However, the effects of domestic violence will vary amongst individuals and these indicators alone should not be used to identify whether or not someone has been abused. If domestic violence is suspected, any discussion about the employee's situation should take place in privacy. Any questions should be asked with care and sensitivity, reinforcing that, as far as possible, confidentiality will be respected. A suggested opening question might be:

'I noticed the Is there something wrong, maybe here or outside work?'

If an employee chooses not to confide, that decision must be respected - they may choose to confide at another time.

What can managers do?

Managers need to develop a sensitive and non-judgmental approach when dealing with employees who have experienced domestic violence. This may include:-

- a) taking time to listen to the employee and taking seriously what they say;
- b) ensuring that any discussion about the employee's situation takes place in private and respects confidentiality;
- c) understanding that the employee may not wish to approach their immediate line manager and may prefer to involve a third party such as a colleague, HR or a trade union representative;
- d) if an employee does not wish to speak to their immediate line manager, they should be advised of the difficulties that may arise if the manager is not aware of the relevant facts and circumstances (for instance if there is a potential health and safety issue or if other action is being taken on performance or absence monitoring);
- e) being aware that there may be additional issues faced by the employee because of their age, sex, maternity or pregnancy, marriage or civil partnership, sexuality, race, disability, religion or belief, etc;
- f) being non-judgmental - the employee may need some time to decide what to do and may try many different options during this process. Research has shown that it can take a long time and be extremely difficult to break free of a violent relationship. It should not be assumed, therefore, that because an individual returns or stays in a violent relationship that the violence was not severe or did not take place. On average, a woman will suffer 35 assaults before she reports it to the Police;
- g) advising employees of the support agencies available. However, if the employee does not want to contact such agencies, this wish must be respected.

What can HR do?

HR can advise employees and managers on BBSRC responses to domestic violence situations. They can ensure that all employees are aware of information available and local organisations who offer help and advice. They can work with managers to grant leave, adjust work schedules, sort revised pay arrangements, help develop workplace safety plans with the local Health and Safety Officer, and co-operate within the legal rights of criminal justice agencies involved in specific cases.

Absence options for employees experiencing domestic violence

Those experiencing domestic violence are encouraged to explore with their line manager and/or HR department the paid leave options that are available to help the employee cope with the situation before considering a formal period of unpaid leave. Depending on the circumstances this may include:

- arranging flexible work hours so that the employee can seek protection, go to court, look for new housing, seek counselling, arrange child care etc;
- considering the use of sick absence, part time working, informal unpaid leave etc, particularly if requests are for a short period of time (less than a week).

What can colleagues do?

Take time to listen to an employee who confides that they are experiencing domestic violence, providing a sensitive, non-judgmental response which includes messages such as they are not alone, nor to blame, that they do not deserve to be treated this way and that there is help available. The information divulged must be kept confidential, unless the employee gives permission for it to be passed to others.

What can those experiencing domestic violence do?

Remember that they are not alone, admit what is actually happening and know that there are agencies who can listen and help. In addition, they can talk to a manager, trusted colleague, HR staff, staff support group/employee assistance member, trades union representative.

Employees are encouraged to notify their manager in confidence, of any likely absence from work. Leave options and possible alternative work arrangements can be discussed, as well as workplace safety.

Employees who are perpetrators of domestic violence

Are encouraged to seek immediate help from one of the support organisations listed.

Acts of harassment and bullying, violent, threatening or violent behaviour are considered as misconduct (potentially gross misconduct) under the disciplinary policy and may lead to dismissal. Employees should also be aware that conduct outside of work could lead to disciplinary action being taken because of its impact on the employment relationship.

Sources of Further Information, Advice and Support

National Domestic Violence Helpline

A national 24 hour helpline providing access to advice and support for anyone experiencing domestic violence, including information on refuges and their availability throughout the UK. The free phone helpline number is 0808 200 0247. The helpline is run jointly by Women's Aid and Refuge.

Email: info@womensaid.org.uk

Website: www.womensaid.org.uk

Scottish Women's Aid and Domestic Abuse Helpline

Helpline: 0800 027 1234

Website: www.scottishwomensaid.co.uk
www.domesticabuse.co.uk

This 24 hour helpline can provide support as well as housing, legal and benefits advice for all parts of Scotland.

Welsh Women's Aid

Helpline: 0808 200 0247 (24 hour)

Website: www.welshwomensaid.org

Refuge

Helpline: 0808 200 0247 (24 hour)

Website: www.refuge.org.uk

Email: info@refuge.org.uk

This national helpline offers advice and support to anyone experiencing domestic violence. Refuge provides safe, emergency accommodation through a network of refuges throughout the UK. It also offers a children's programme, individual and group counselling for women who have suffered abuse, help with resettlement and an outreach project for women from ethnic minority communities.

Police Domestic Violence Units

There are a number of police domestic violence units, which have staff specially trained to help people experiencing domestic violence. They work closely with other organisations such as local solicitors and women's aid groups. For details of the nearest domestic violence unit contact the local police station.

Survivors UK

Helpline: 0845 122 1201 (Monday, Tuesday and Thursday 7p.m. – 10p.m.)

Email: info@survivorsuk.org

Website: www.survivorsuk.org

A national helpline for men who have been victims of violence, sexual assault and rape. The helpline may be able to arrange counselling or a support group if you live in the London area. If you live outside London, they may be able to provide details of a similar service in your area.

M-Power

Helpline: 0808 808 4321 (Thursday evenings only 8p.m. – 10p.m.)

Email: support@male-rape.org

Website: www.male-rape.org.uk

A national helpline for men who have been assaulted, raped or abused in childhood or adult life. The helpline also supports partners (male and female) and family members of abused men.