



Rockwood Nursery School

LANCASHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

DIRECTORATE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

AUGUST 2023

The following guidance has been developed to aid schools where employees may be experiencing domestic violence.

How is domestic violence defined?

The Government defines domestic violence as "Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality".

Domestic Violence is the abuse of power and control over one person by another through coercive and controlling behaviour, which can take many forms, such as, physical, psychological, sexual, emotional, verbal, and financial abuse that takes place within an intimate or family-type relationship.

Domestic Violence occurs across society regardless of race, ethnic or religious group, class, or disability. Domestic violence can also take place in lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender relationships, and can involve other family members, including children.

What responsibilities do the Governing Board and Headteacher have if it is suspected an employee is a victim of domestic violence?

All employers have a responsibility for the health, safety and wellbeing of employees in the workplace. In some cases, domestic violence can impact on work including on the health and safety of the person concerned.

If you suspect your employee is experiencing domestic violence, you should raise this with them supportively within the context of your health and safety responsibilities and duty of care.

Recognising there is a problem, is an important first step for the employee and your support is part of the process. However, you are not expected to be a counsellor or deal with the complex issues that arise from victim support, but you do need to know what support the school can offer and be able to direct your employee to the professional support agencies.

Remember, you are not an expert, you should not take any action without your employee's consent, and you should not give specific advice on what action your employee should take. You have not failed if your employee stays with a violent partner or other family member.

You should contact your Schools HR Manager for advice if you have any concerns or questions.

What are the signs of domestic violence?

Your own gut feeling about the people you work with is often your best indicator that something may not be right, don't ignore this and fail to help.

The signs of domestic violence from a victim perspective might include:

- Poor attendance

- Poor performance
- Uncharacteristic moods and depression
- Signs of repeated injuries
- Inappropriate or excessive clothing (E.g., in summer months wearing jumpers/long sleeves)
- An obsession with time
- Avoidance of socialising
- Being unable to attend business trips or functions
- Being dropped off and picked up from work
- Receiving repeated texts or phone calls at work (being checked up on)
- Reluctance to turn off mobile phone at work
- Substance use/dependence

It may be that there is another explanation for your observations, but as a responsible employer, you should raise the issue of Domestic Violence if you have sufficient grounds to believe this could be a possibility.

What if an employee doesn't open up to me or is defensive?

This is a sensitive subject to raise and so you may find it helpful to talk this through with your Schools HR Manager before initiating the conversation. It may be that when exploring with an employee about whether they are experiencing domestic violence, they don't want to talk to you and become defensive in order to protect themselves. This could be for a number of reasons such as embarrassment, or other concerns such as what might happen to the information they give you and whether they can trust you with this information. They may also feel that it is their fault.

Be prepared for the employee not to disclose information during your first discussion, but let them know that if they would like to discuss any matters that may be affecting them, that you will be available to support them via internal support mechanisms such as Occupational Health or the Employee Assistance Programme, or by signposting to expert support agencies (*see below*).

Why don't victims of domestic violence just leave an abusive relationship?

Leaving an abusive relationship does not guarantee that the violence will stop. The period in which a victim is planning to or is about to leave is often the most dangerous time for them and their children; and at the point of leaving, it is not uncommon for the abuse to escalate with the abusive partner making threats to harm or kill their victim.

It must be the victim's decision to leave an abusive relationship, only when **they** feel safe should they leave. Do not try to push one form of action over another.

As a Headteacher, it is not your responsibility to advise on options for your employee which could potentially make matters worse and put your employee at risk. However, it is your responsibility to offer help and know what the school can do to support employees in relation to domestic violence issues.

Who can advise and support me as a manager?

- Your Schools HR Manager
- Occupational Health
- Health and Safety

Where can the victims of domestic violence get help?

There is help available. Victims of domestic violence have access to Lancashire County Council's health and wellbeing services in the form of the Employee Assistance Programme, Occupational Health and, subject to a recommendation from Occupational health, to access counselling support.

There are also external agencies that can provide expert emotional support to victims, and also practical advice on keeping safe, money worries, planning how to leave the abusive partner, finding safe accommodation, worries about children and concerns about the legal system.

You can also suggest that the employee contact their Trade Union or Professional Association for advice.

What if I suspect my employee is a perpetrator of domestic violence?

In this case, you should seek advice from the Local Area Designated Officer for Children's' Safeguarding and your Schools HR Manager to discuss the individual case. This will enable you to properly assess the most appropriate way to approach the issue.

What records should I maintain?

Records you should maintain are:

- Notes of all conversations (even if you feel initially they won't lead to anything)
- OHU referrals
- Risk Assessments (plans to ensure safety)
- Accident/incident forms
- Return to work interview forms
- Attendance records

What should be included in an OHU referral specific to domestic violence?

A referral to Occupational Health must provide as much detail as possible about the physical or mental symptoms of your employee coupled with the elements (background) of domestic violence that are affecting the health and wellbeing of the employee (or others). Please remember that your employee may access a copy of the referral at any time and therefore you should only include information within the referral that you are content for the employee to see.

You may consider telephoning Occupational Health to discuss the details of the referral with a professional, to seek advice on your concerns and what to include in your referral.

Consider how Occupational Health make and maintain contact with your employee. You may need to identify an alternate address and telephone number to prevent Occupational health information being sent to the employee's home address.

What should be included on a risk assessment (safety plan)?

Undertake a workplace risk assessment and consider what you can offer the employee to ensure their safety as far as reasonably practicable.

Considerations on a risk assessment (safety plan), should be:

- can you make a reasonable temporary adjustment to your employee's duties, times of work, location
- do you need to review contact details with your employee so you can remain in regular contact
- ensure you know your employee's whereabouts and consider how the risks to their safety could be minimised if they do home visits or you are a split site school
- is there a need to screen calls and emails
- do you have a list of telephone numbers you may need in an emergency
- agree with your employee what to tell colleagues to protect their safety, along with the safety of the employee
- ensure that personal data is protected from the abuser.

If there are existing HR issues related to an employee who is a victim of domestic violence, do the policies still apply?

When domestic violence is a factor, this does not mean that the school's adopted policies/procedures should be ignored. However, careful consideration should be given to the impact of domestic violence in the context of implementing school policies. Your Schools HR Manager will be able to provide case specific advice to aid you.

Is domestic violence a crime?

There is no single criminal offence of "domestic violence". However, many forms of domestic violence are crimes, for example, harassment, assault, rape, false imprisonment etc. If you think a crime could have been committed, take advice from your Schools HR Manager and/or the Local Authority Designated Officer for Children's Safeguarding. It may also be necessary to take advice from the police.

How can I support a colleague?

- Listen to them
- Tell them that they are not alone and that there is help available
- Give them time to talk, but don't push them to go into too much detail if they don't want to
- Advise them to seek help via their Trade Union as well as explaining the support you can offer through (for example) Occupational Health and the Employee Assistance Programme
- Allow them to make their own decisions
- Don't make decisions for them

Never give advice or encourage your employee or colleague to take one specific course of action; only they will know what is best for their circumstances.

Encouraging a colleague to leave an abusive relationship or take action which they are not comfortable with could put them in serious danger or make them see you as someone not to trust.

Victims of domestic abuse often face huge obstacles, such as nowhere to go, no money and no one to turn to for support. Be patient. There still needs to be support even if it looks like the victim is choosing to stay in an abusive relationship.

Sources of Advice and Assistance

Listed below are several sources of Advice and Assistance for staff who have/are experiencing Domestic Abuse.

Internal Support:

Employee Assistance Programme:

The employee assistance programme offers you counselling and advice on a variety of personal, family or workplace issues.

The service is provided by an independent mental health company, Wellbeing Solutions. There is no cost to you and all calls are confidential.

You and any member of your family (living at your address and aged over 16) can contact the employee assistance helpline 24-hours a day, 365 days a year. The service will arrange for either a counsellor or an advisor to call you back at a convenient time.

How to access:

Online: www.employeeassistance.org.uk

Phone: 0800 0542 301

Use the access code - lancsedu

External Support:

Lancashire Victim Service: [Victims - Lancashire Victim Services](#)

No Excuse for Abuse: [No Excuse for Abuse | Domestic Abuse Lancashire](#)

The Mankind Initiative: [Types of domestic abuse - \(mankind.org.uk\)](#)

The Silent Solution Guide: [Silent_solution_guide.pdf \(policeconduct.gov.uk\)](#)

Switchboard: [Helpline - Brighton & Hove LGBT Switchboard](#)

Victim Support: [Domestic abuse or coercive control during Covid-19 - Victim Support](#)

White Ribbon: [White Ribbon UK](#)

Women's Aid: [Home - Women's Aid \(womensaid.org.uk\)](#)