

# Domestic violence/abuse policy and guidance

## Introduction

---

The purpose of this policy is to:

- raise awareness of domestic violence/abuse and its likely impact on the workforce
- set out the council's approach in supporting employees who are affected by or experiencing domestic violence/abuse
- provide guidance for employees and their managers

## Policy and scope

---

1. Oxfordshire County Council condemns any form of domestic violence/abuse as unacceptable. Those choosing to use violence/abuse must be held legally and socially accountable.
2. This policy applies to all employees working for the council, including those working from council premises, from home and at other locations.
3. The council has a duty to ensure employees are safe at work, including minimising any risk from violence or abuse from colleagues, clients, visitors and others.
4. The council is committed to the welfare of its employees and will ensure any employee experiencing or affected by domestic abuse or violence is able to:
  - raise the issue with their manager in the knowledge that the disclosure will be treated seriously, sensitively and confidentially
  - access support and advice from the council as their employer
  - work in a safe environment where risks are identified and reduced, as far as possible
  - participate in all aspects work, free from discrimination

## Definition

5. 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. This can encompass but is not limited to the following types of abuse:

- psychological
  - physical
  - sexual
  - financial
  - emotional
6. It also includes so called 'honour' based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage.

## Statistics

- One in four women will experience domestic violence/abuse in her lifetime (Council of Europe 2002; A Health Care Issue. London. BMA 1998)
- Domestic violence/abuse often continues and may escalate in severity after separation (Home Office 1999)
- About 2 in 5 of all victims are men
- Victims are likely to be assaulted by their partner 35 times before going to the police
- Every minute police in the UK get domestic violence/abuse related calls (Betsy Sanko & Home Office 2002)
- The impact on children living in a household where there is domestic violence/abuse can be profound and long-lasting, affecting emotional wellbeing, behaviour, attainment, risk-taking, substance misuse and long-term life chances
- Domestic violence/abuse is a primary indicator of child protection – nearly 75% of children on the child protection plans live in households where domestic violence/abuse occurs

## Impact of domestic violence

7. Domestic violence/abuse damages the lives of victims, including children who may be direct victims of domestic violence/ abuse or witnesses to it, perpetrators, those close to them and their communities.
8. Domestic violence/abuse can cause:
- poor performance and absenteeism at work
  - permanent disability
  - long-term mental health problems and even death.

## Advice and support for employees & managers

9. Further guidance for employees can be found at Appendix 1 and for managers at Appendix 2. You can also seek support and information from your line manager, a HR colleague, the Employee Assistance Programme, Occupational Health and/or trade union representative. These teams all have trained members of staff who are also part of a network of professionals supporting victims of Domestic violence/abuse(DA champions) for more information please go to [www.reducingtherisk.org](http://www.reducingtherisk.org) .
10. Free and confidential help is also available from a number of organisations in Oxfordshire. Click [here](#) for information including emergency contact numbers.

## The role of managers

11. Managers will:
  - listen and take a sensitive, non-judgemental approach when dealing with employees who are affected by or directly experiencing domestic violence/abuse
  - treat disclosures from employees sensitively and confidentially where appropriate (see section 9 & 10)
  - assess the risk of harassment or violence to the employee and the wider team at work, and look at ways of minimising the risks to keep them safe
  - help the employee access support and advice including the Occupational Health and Staff Care service and external specialist agencies
  - explore, with the employee, the range of options for supporting them at work e.g. change of working pattern and/or work location, avoiding working alone, changing employee's telephone number (see guidance for managers Appendix 2)

## The role of colleagues

12. If you believe a colleague is experiencing domestic abuse or violence it is important to ensure they have access to information about sources of help and support.
13. The HR Advice team within County HR, Occupational Health, Employee Assistance Programme and Trade Unions can provide confidential advice to any employee who is supporting a colleague or suspects the abuse of a colleague is taking place.

## Confidentiality

14. Confidentiality is essential for an employee who is experiencing domestic violence/abuse. In most circumstances, whatever a line manager or HR Adviser is told will remain confidential and will not be revealed to anyone else without permission. An exception is where there are concerns about a child's welfare. See point 16.

## Child protection concerns

15. It is emotionally damaging for children to live in a home where there is domestic abuse/violence. People experiencing domestic abuse/violence often worry what will happen to their children if they tell someone. There is help for you and your children to be safe and reduce the risk. [Domestic Abuse - Oxfordshire](#)
16. The council wants to support employees to protect children and work together to see if there is any help they can offer. If you have any concerns please contact one of our duty social workers for further advice, you can have a no names consultation which means you do not have to discuss the victims details unless deemed appropriate:
  - Banbury Assessment Team: 01865 816670
  - Oxford Assessment Team: 01865 323048
  - Abingdon Assessment Team: 01865 897983
17. If a manager is given information which leads them to believe that a child has suffered or is at risk from suffering harm then they have a responsibility to inform Children's Social Care about this and will seek your agreement to do so. Your manager may pass their concerns on without agreement if they remain concerned. Managers should discuss this with a HR Adviser before doing so.
18. From January 2005 the legal definition of harming children has been extended to include the harm they suffer by seeing or hearing the ill treatment of another, particularly in the home.

## Dignity at Work

19. The council's Dignity at Work policy expressly states that harassment at work is unacceptable and often unlawful. Any employee who breaches this policy may be subject to disciplinary action. Managers must ensure employees know that jokes and comments trivialising, condoning or even encouraging violence or abuse are totally unacceptable and should deal promptly with any incidents brought to their attention.
20. Employees subjected to or observing this behaviour can raise their concerns through the council's [Resolving Grievances policy](#) or [Whistleblowing procedure](#).

## Council employees who carry out acts of domestic violence/abuse

21. Employees who carry out acts of domestic violence/abuse against a fellow employee will be in breach of the council's [Dignity at Work policy](#).

22. An employee's conduct outside of work may also affect their professional reputation and the reputation of the council, and such cases could lead to disciplinary action including dismissal.
23. Help and advice for perpetrators is available from Respect on 0845 122 8609 [www.respect.uk.net](http://www.respect.uk.net)
24. Employees charged or convicted in court should declare this formally to their line manager. Where the manager believes the charges/conviction have implications in terms of the employee's work role, an investigation will be carried out and appropriate action taken.
25. If an employee makes false accusations against a fellow employee they will be subject to disciplinary action.

## Monitoring and review

In introducing this policy an equality impact assessment has been undertaken.

This policy is regularly reviewed.

### Related Policies

- Violence to employees at work
- Data protection
- Emergency Leave Scheme
- Dignity at Work
- Officers Code of Conduct
- Resolving Grievances at Work

### Head of Human Resources

**July 2013 (Amended Jan 2015 & July 2015)**

# APPENDIX 1

---

## Advice & guidance for employees

This guidance has been produced for Oxfordshire County Council employees who are experiencing or affected by domestic abuse or violence.

The council, as your employer, has a duty to ensure you are safe at work, including minimising any risk from violence or abuse from colleagues, clients, visitors and others.

Oxfordshire County Council believes that every employee who is experiencing, or has experienced, domestic violence or abuse has a right to raise the issue with their manager, in the knowledge that the matter will be treated sympathetically and confidentially.

## Help and services available in Oxfordshire

You can get free and confidential help from a number of organisations in Oxfordshire. Visit [Domestic Abuse Oxfordshire](#) for more information including emergency contact numbers.

### **Employee Assistance Programme & Occupational Health Service**

The Employee Assistance Programme provides a range of confidential support to help staff deal with work based and/or personal problems. This includes individual counselling with someone understanding, accepting and supportive.

Go to the [Employee Assistance Programme](#) for contact information.

Managers can also consult the service for advice in dealing with cases where domestic violence/abuse is, or is suspected to be, an issue.

The council's [Occupational Health Service](#) is also available for advice to staff and managers.

## Role of managers

Council managers will take all reasonable steps to support employees experiencing or affected by domestic violence/abuse. They will ensure you are able to work in a safe environment and will help you access advice and assistance to deal with the situation.

If you wish to discuss your situation with your manager, he or she will:

- ensure discussions are confidential, as far as possible (if a manager fears for the safety of a child/ren they will need to make a referral to social care, but will discuss this with you first)
- take you seriously and listen without making any judgements
- understand if you wish to involve a third party, such as a colleague, trade union representative or friend, rather than speaking to your manager on your own
- be aware that there may be additional issues facing you because of your age, gender, sexuality, ethnic background, race or disability.
- explore the options available to support you at work and to ensure you are able to work in a safe environment
- help you access advice and support

## Alternative contacts

If you do not feel able to approach your manager, you can contact: a HR Adviser, the Employee Assistance Programme, Occupational Health Service or a trade union representative.

These teams all have trained members of staff who are also part of a network of professionals supporting victims of Domestic violence/abuse. For more information please go to [www.reducingtherisk.org.uk](http://www.reducingtherisk.org.uk) .

## Safety at work

Where there is potential for domestic abuse or violence to occur in the work place, your manager will assess the risk to you, and to other employees if relevant, and put measures in place to reduce the risk. Your manager should consider the risk of violence partners or ex-partners visiting the workplace, abusive phone calls, or intimidation or harassment by the alleged perpetrator. In some cases the alleged perpetrator may also be an employee of the council.

Your manager has a duty to maintain a secure environment for all employees. To do this it may be necessary to explore, with you, the possibility of informing colleagues of any potential risks. If you agree to this approach, colleagues will be reminded that the information is confidential.

## Some options to consider with your manager:

- a) improving security measures at the entrance to the building
- b) interception of telephone calls
- c) a temporary or permanent move to another work location
- d) avoiding late or lone working

- e) issuing a mobile phone and/or lone worker alarm
- f) alerting receptionists/hall-keepers if there is a risk the perpetrator may visit the workplace
- g) change phone numbers or remove details from directories
- h) change of duties – for example not expecting you to answer the telephone or sit on reception
- i) Allow you to sit out of public view i.e. making sure they are not visible from reception points or ground floor windows
- j) agree with you what to tell colleagues and how they should respond if the abuser telephones or visits the workplace
- k) consider working times and patterns, to ensure you are less at risk at work, and on your journeys to and from work
- l) making sure that the systems for recording your whereabouts during the day are adequate
- m) changes to working arrangements either on a temporary or permanent basis – see [Flexible Working policy](#).
- n) paid or unpaid time off – see [Emergency Leave scheme](#).
- o) change salary payment arrangements so that your salary can be paid into a 'safe' account

## Confidentiality

Information about employees experiencing and receiving support for domestic violence/abuse will remain confidential as far as reasonably practical.

Your manager will keep any information you share with them confidential, unless there are circumstances that warrant sharing it. This could include where there are child protection issues.

If you give information to a manager or another council officer that suggests a child is at risk from abuse (whether physical, emotional, sexual or neglect, or as a witness to abuse), that person should inform you that he/she will make a referral to the council's Social Care team.

## APPENDIX 2

---

### Advice & guidance for managers

This document provides guidance to managers who:

- are concerned that an employee may be a victim of domestic violence/abuse
- have been told by an employee that they are experiencing domestic violence/abuse.

All managers are encouraged to do the online domestic violence/abuse awareness module – [www.oscb.org.uk](http://www.oscb.org.uk)

### Dealing with concerns about an employee

26. If an employee does not arrive for work as expected, without prior agreement, and they don't report in as required under the sickness monitoring policy, you should try and contact them immediately.
27. Be alert to the possibility of domestic violence/abuse when you are managing concerns about an employee's attendance, health or performance
28. If you suspect domestic violence/abuse may be root cause of poor attendance or performance, try to create a supportive environment in which the employee feels able to talk to you and disclose the violence/abuse if they wish to do so. You should not pressure the employee for information in this respect.

### Responding to a disclosure and supporting employees

29. Listen to the employee and take their disclosure seriously.
30. Do not be judgemental or make comments i.e. about the perpetrators behaviour or the victim's response. Validate the person feelings and experiences
31. Reassure the employee that the council has an understanding of how domestic violence/abuse can affect them including their work performance and what can be done to support them.
32. Direct the employee to sources of support and services and let them use an office/phone or computer to make calls or access help.

33. Recognise the employee's need for a positive response, they may only want to talk at first or they may want support from someone else. Take the lead from the individual but continue to validate.
34. Avoid being judgmental if the employee chooses to continue in an abusive relationship. Don't pressurize the individual into leaving or making any immediate decisions. Leaving can be a very dangerous time so needs to be done in a measured way.
35. You have discretion to allow reasonable time off for any employee who is seeking help to escape abuse e.g. to consult a solicitor or attend a housing appointment. Time off can be granted as Emergency Leave.
36. Where you suspect or discover that domestic violence/abuse is the cause of the employee's absence or health problems focus on supporting the employee and refer them to Occupational Health and the Staff Care Service.
37. Employees may wish to work flexibly or reduce their hours of work, because of the effects of domestic violence/abuse and you should consider such requests positively in order to support and accommodate the employee wherever possible, even if it is just for a short period of time.
38. You can offer to change salary payment arrangements so that an employee's salary can be paid into a 'safe' account.
39. Have arrangements in place for cover if someone needs to leave work suddenly. Encourage the individual to stay in touch and return whenever they feel they can.

## Assessing the risks to the employee at work

40. If you become aware of domestic violence/abuse you should explore, confidentially, with the employee, any possible risk they may be subject to while they are at work. If this is a possibility, you should carry out a risk assessment and take action to minimise the risks. Some actions you could consider include:
  - a) improving security measures at the entrance to the building
  - b) interception of telephone calls
  - c) a temporary or permanent move to another work location
  - d) avoiding late or lone working
  - e) issuing a mobile phone and/or lone worker alarm

- f) alerting receptionists/hall-keepers if there is a risk the perpetrator may visit the workplace
  - g) change phone numbers or remove details from directories
  - h) change of duties – for example not expecting the employee to answer the telephone or sit on reception
  - i) allow the employee to sit out of public view i.e. making sure they are not visible from reception points or ground floor windows
  - j) agree with the employee what to tell colleagues and how they should respond if the abuser telephones or visits the workplace
  - k) consider working times and patterns, to ensure the employee is less at risk at work, and on their journey to and from work
  - l) make sure the systems for recording the employees whereabouts during the day are adequate
41. Recognise that each person's needs are different and any measures should only be used with the consent of the individual concerned.
42. Assess any potential risk to the team. Ask the individual how much information they feel that they can share with the team. It may be possible for the team to help their colleague e.g. by going out on lunch-breaks with them/screening work calls.

### Dealing with threatening/violent incidents at work

43. Where incidents at work these should be recorded and followed up under the Health and Safety Policy/Violence at Work policy. If a perpetrator visits the employee's place of work and becomes threatening and/or violent then the police should be called. Employees who need to take out an injunction against the perpetrator in the vicinity of the workplace must consult Legal Services.
44. Do not get into the position of trying to negotiate between the victim and the abuser

### Confidentiality

45. Maintain confidentiality at all times. Personal information about domestic violence/abuse must only be shared with other parties within the council where this is strictly necessary (for example to refer the matter to Occupational Health) and where the employee has given permission. An escalation of violence often happens if the abuser finds that the victim has confided in someone.

46. Make sure files containing information about those experiencing domestic violence/abuse do not contain details of current addresses. Managers should ask individuals where they want correspondence sent to. Addresses may need to be held separately to ensure the abuser has no way of accessing them.
47. Be aware that there may be employees who are themselves perpetrators of domestic violence/abuse. Confidentiality is of paramount importance, as both victim and perpetrator may be employees of the county council.

## Sources of advice and information

48. The council has a network of trained staff who are also part of a network of professionals supporting victims of Domestic violence/abuse (DA champions). For more information please go to [www.reducingtherisk.org.uk](http://www.reducingtherisk.org.uk) . These staff work in the following teams and can offer advice to managers and employees:
  - HR Advice Desk 03300 240 849 [hradvisedesk@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:hradvisedesk@oxfordshire.gov.uk)
  - Occupational Health Service 01865 415500 [oxford.clinic@people-am.com](mailto:oxford.clinic@people-am.com)

## Employee Assistance Programme & Occupational Health Service

49. The Employee Assistance Programme provides a range of confidential support to help staff deal with work based and/or personal problems. This includes individual counselling with someone understanding, accepting and supportive.
50. Go to the [Employee Assistance Programme](#) for contact information.
51. Managers can also consult the service for advice in dealing with cases where domestic violence/abuse is, or is suspected to be, an issue.
52. The council's [Occupational Health Service](#) is also available for advice to staff and managers.