



Epping Forest District Council

DOMESTIC
ABUSE
WORKPLACE
POLICY

People Guidance



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Epping Forest
District Council

Domestic Abuse Workplace Policy



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District Council**

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OVERVIEW

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- **Aims of the policy**
- **How to respond**
- **DA workplace Champions**

Domestic Abuse Workplace Policy

Policy overview:

As a council we are committed to a zero-tolerance approach to domestic abuse towards our employees.

The policy sets out our commitment to take efficient and effective action to deal with all reports of incidents of domestic abuse towards our employees. It explains that we will take them seriously and provide support tailored to the needs of the individual. Working across services and with partners we will provide non-judgemental, tailor-made support for those experiencing Domestic Abuse or perpetrators who voluntarily wish to seek advice and support to address their behaviour.

Definition

Within the [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#) and this policy, domestic abuse is defined as:

- physical or sexual abuse
- violent or threatening behaviour
- controlling or coercive behaviour
- economic abuse
- psychological, emotional or other abuse

The definition includes modern day slavery, coercive control, honour-based violence, forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

Economic abuse is any behaviour that has an adverse effect on a person's ability to do either to:

- acquire, use or maintain money or other property
- obtain goods or services.

It doesn't matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or part of an ongoing pattern of behaviour.

For the definition and policy to apply, both people must be aged 16 or over and personally connected. This means people who:

- are married to each other
- are civil partners
- have agreed to marry (whether or not the agreement is still in place)
- have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether or not the agreement is still in place)
- are, or have been, in an intimate personal relationship with each other
- are, or have been, parents of the same child or children
- are relative/parents

Children under 18 are also recognised as survivors in their own right if they see, hear or experience the effects of abuse or are related to the survivor or the perpetrator.

Aims of the policy:

- Support all employees experiencing domestic abuse and ensure their health, safety, and well-being at work with a supportive and flexible approach
- Assist line managers in helping employees experiencing domestic abuse
- Assist colleagues of employees who are experiencing domestic abuse
- Support perpetrators who voluntarily wish to seek advice and support to address their behaviour

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- Maintain confidentiality and restrict information to those who need to know.

We recognise that any employee may be affected by domestic abuse as:

- a survivor/victim
- an individual witnessing domestic abuse in their household
- a perpetrator

Principles of policy

We understand that disclosure may be difficult and we aim to take a trauma informed approach allowing staff to disclose only when they feel ready and safe to do so.

We guarantee that information given by employees experiencing domestic abuse remains confidential. We will not ordinarily share this with other people without the survivors/victims permission.

Exceptions to this may occur when:

- there are safeguarding concerns about children or vulnerable adults
- we need to act to protect the safety of an employee

We will treat any disclosure, or conviction of a domestic abuse-related offence with due care, ultimately aiming to reduce risk and support change.

Guidance for Managers

Employees experiencing domestic abuse may not feel able to tell people at work of their situation or approach their manager. However, other issues may alert a manager to the possibility of domestic abuse.

We should follow the “4Rs”:

1. Recognise the problem (look for signs and ask)
2. Respond appropriately
3. Refer on to appropriate help
4. Record the details

How to Respond

Understand it can be difficult for employees to make a disclosure of domestic abuse, and your support is important:

- be sensitive/non-judgemental/practical/supportive/discrete.
- prioritise safety over work efficiency.
- allocate some private time and space to listen.
- Do not seek proof of abuse.
- Do not contact the abuser.
- Do all the survivor/victim to decline support offered.
- Do not adopt the role of being a support worker yourself.
- If the employee or any colleagues are in immediate danger, call 999.

All disclosures of domestic abuse and reported concerns should be treated as strictly confidential.

When responding to the employee, line managers should consider using their discretion, in line with existing policies on sensitive disclosures.

If the employee is uncomfortable discussing the situation with their line manager, consider offering an appropriate point of contact, possibly of the same gender, to advise the employee directly and on a confidential basis. This might be a one of the Domestic Abuse Workplace Champions, who can also advise managers on how to manage sensitive disclosures and proceed safely.

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The recommended option for anyone experiencing domestic abuse is to be referred to specialist practitioners trained to assess risk and advise on safety. Refer or signpost the employee to a domestic abuse helpline, web resource or external specialist domestic abuse service. Please refer to Southend Essex Domestic Abuse Board (SETDAB) Website for key contacts.

<https://setdab.org/>

Hybrid/Remote working

When employees are working from home it is even more important to ensure you stay in touch – particularly with those employees who may be experiencing domestic abuse. This contact could take the form of regular video or phone calls, or where this presents risk of being overheard, through emails or text messages. This could be the only access to support for those facing domestic abuse so it is important to make sure this contact is maintained for their protection. Should you lose contact, take swift action to re-establish it. If you believe there is an immediate risk of harm to someone, or it is an emergency, you should always call 999.

Employers Initiative on Domestic Abuse (EIDA)

EFDC is a member EIDA, it may be difficult to spot the signs of domestic abuse as it is often a 'hidden' crime. However, as members of EIDA, EFDC will help to end the misconception that 'what happens at home is not our business'. It is our business, and we should all feel a responsibility to help those who feel afraid or unable to speak out.

Perpetrators of domestic abuse within the workplace

The Council will not tolerate or condone domestic abuse, regardless of the identity or seniority of the perpetrator. However, it recognises the need to offer appropriate support to employees who disclose that they themselves are perpetrators of domestic abuse but genuinely want to change their behaviour.

If the Council becomes aware that an employee is, or may be, perpetrating domestic abuse, it will take appropriate action. Any domestic abuse that endangers another employee or uses company equipment to inflict that abuse, such as mobile phones or laptops, may result in disciplinary action under the organisation's disciplinary policy up to and including dismissal for Gross Misconduct.

In some cases, it may be appropriate to provide support to an employee who is seeking to address their behaviour, for example by providing access to specialist support services. This will be decided on a case-by-case basis.

Supporting employees/your team – making reasonable adjustments

The following is a list of possible adjustments that could be considered to help employees experiencing domestic abuse. Any possible adjustment will be fully discussed with the employee and their opinions sought as to suitability.

- If the employee is absent from work, a method of communication should be arranged with a line manager so that they are aware the individual is safe
- Identify a work contact for support and an emergency contact should the Council be unable to contact the individual
- Allow the employee to change work patterns or workload and allow

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flexible (or more flexible) working or leave (which could be paid or unpaid) to facilitate any practical arrangements required. This could include seeking legal advice, attending counselling or support group meetings or to attend court. Arrangements could also be put in place to facilitate day-to-day activities such as the school run and childcare through school holidays

- Diverting telephone calls and e-mails to a separate folder
- Alerting reception if the perpetrator/alleged perpetrator is known to come to the employee's workplace
- Checking the employee has arrangements in place for safely getting to and from home
- Consider car parking arrangements
- Consider allowing the employee to use an assumed name at work
- Ensure communication is maintained with the employee during any absence, whilst maintaining the confidentiality of their whereabouts
- Review the security of their personal information, such as temporary or new address, bank or healthcare details
- If appropriate and possible, facilitate transfer to another post
- With the employee's consent, advise colleagues of the situation on a need-to-know basis and agree what the response should be if the perpetrator/alleged perpetrator contacts the workplace
- With the employee's consent provide a photograph with any relevant information of the perpetrator/alleged perpetrator to reception and the Concierge Team.

Equality and Diversity

We have carried out an Equalities Impact Assessment of the Policy in accordance with our public sector duty under the Equality Act 2010.

When making decisions we will have due regard to:

- eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and other conduct prohibited by the Act
- advancing equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- fostering good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

We recognise survivors'/victim's experiences may be partly defined by background, economic status, gender, sexual orientation, ability, age, religion or beliefs ethnic group or immigration status. We understand that some may face discrimination and we will consider the individual needs of each survivor/victim when tailoring our approach.

Although domestic abuse can affect anyone, certain people may be disproportionately affected or particularly vulnerable and some groups will experience specific forms of domestic abuse. We also understand there are cultural and other barriers to reporting domestic abuse. We will take all of this into account in the support we provide.

We will train employees to understand how domestic abuse affects individuals differently and work with specialist providers to make sure survivors/victims get the right support.

Epping Domestic Abuse Workplace Champions

Domestic Abuse Champions are colleagues who have completed specialist training to spot the signs of domestic abuse. They are fully equipped with the understanding,

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knowledge, and skills to respond safely and appropriately, offer support and signpost survivors/victims to specialist support

The champions are

Caroline Wiggins – Directorate Specialist

Karan Morgan-Jones - Domestic Abuse Support Specialist

Lynn Maidment – Senior Safeguarding officer

Sevda Kaygili – Safeguarding officer

Their aim is to

- Be a point of contact for information relating to domestic violence and abuse;
- They are a safe 'go-to' person for any employee who wants to talk to someone about their situation or have concerns for a colleague;
- They will listen in a supportive non-judgemental way to colleagues who are living with or perpetrating domestic abuse;
- They will explain and explore measures that can be taken in the workplace to increase the individuals safety, agree a course of action and ensure what's agreed is implemented;
- Advocate between employer and employee should the need arise;
- Keep accurate records of any disclosures made;
- Be fully aware of confidentiality;
- Raise awareness within the organisation and enhance the overall knowledge and understanding of domestic abuse;
- Ensure up to date and accessible information is available in relation to support services for victims.

Resources

SETDAB <https://setdab.org/>

Please refer to the SETDAB Website for details of Support for Victims, Perpetrators and Professionals

Possible appendices (responding to colleagues experiencing domestic abuse Dept of Health)

Work productivity signs:

- Change in the person's working patterns: for example, frequent absence, lateness or needing to leave work early.
- Reduced quality and quantity of work: missing deadlines, a drop in usual performance standards.
- Change in the use of the phone/email: for example, a large number of personal calls/texts, avoiding calls or a strong reaction to calls/texts/emails.
- Spending an increased amount of hours at work for no reason.

Changes in behaviour or demeanour

- Conduct out of character with previous employment history.
- Changes in behaviour: for example, becoming very quiet, anxious, frightened, tearful, aggressive, distracted, depressed etc.
- Isolating themselves from colleagues.
- Obsession with timekeeping.
- Secretive regarding home life.
- Worried about leaving children at home with abuser.

Physical signs

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- Visible bruising or single or repeated injury with unlikely explanations.
- Change in the pattern or amount of make-up used.
- Change in the manner of dress: for example, clothes that do not suit the climate which may be used to hide injuries.
- Substance use/misuse.
- Fatigue/sleep/eating disorders.

Other signs

- Perpetrator stalking employee in or around the workplace.
- Perpetrator exerting unusual amount of control or demands over work schedule.
- Flowers/gifts sent to employee for no apparent reason.
- Isolation from family/friends.

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Questions for you to consider in relation to workplace safety and examples of workplace adjustments

Questions for the employee

Q Does the alleged perpetrator know where the employee works?

Q Have they ever been followed on their way to/from work?

Q Is the employee frightened of anything specific that might take place at work or to and from work?

Q Does the perpetrator have their work email address and/or work telephone number?

Q What information can be shared with the wider team or relevant staff to ensure any changes are implemented and they can deliver an appropriate response?

Contact arrangements

- Retain both a work contact and an emergency contact at home (not the perpetrator).
 - Arrange in advance when and who to contact if an employee doesn't come into work (family member/police/neighbour etc.).
 - Maintain communication with the individual during any absence, while keeping their whereabouts confidential from the perpetrator and other agreed persons.
- Safety to and from work
- Change the route to and from work (e.g. different bus or train time).
 - Change the location of where they work or consider a transfer.

- Change the start and finish time of work hours.
- Provide a security escort to and from a car / transport links.

Safety while at work

- Change the locks/codes to enter the workplace.
- Consider a personal or workstation alarm.
- Consider an alternative entrance to, or exit from the workplace.
- Consider screening access to the workplace. If possible and required, enable reception/security to identify the perpetrator (photo, car registration), and advise them on what to do if the perpetrator arrives at the workplace.

Communication safety

- Review the security of all employee records and personal information.
- Change email addresses/work phone number or divert incoming phone calls and emails.
- Issue instructions to all staff NOT to reveal the employee's personal details or their whereabouts to anyone, including family members. Managing responsibilities at work
- Consider flexible working or changing work patterns.
- Adjust workload (extend deadlines, reassign responsibilities).
- Consider additional support /supervision/debriefing sessions.
- Provide special leave or time off during the day to attend appointments or court.

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