

POLICIES FOR UNI AFFILIATED UNIONS



violence
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GENDER VIOLENCE AND THE ROLE OF UNI AFFILIATED UNIONS

Domestic violence affects women in all societies of the world, regardless of age or social status, but it has its most harmful effects on ethnic minorities, migrants and the poor, on account of existing social inequalities. Men can also be victims.

Gender-based violence is a violation of women's human rights. Women victimised experience significant short and long term effects related to the violence, such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), physical injury and lost time at work or school. Therefore it is the duty of society to fight and create tools to eradicate it. The lack, or total lack, of commitment to protect women by nation states, questions the stability of their democracies as well as the credibility of nations and the social responsibilities of corporations.

The World Health Organization estimates that 1 out of 3 women suffer from violence, and this is the leading cause of death among women aged 16-44 years.

Trade unions affiliated to UNI will:

1 – Demand governments create mechanisms to prevent and combat violence against women in all its forms, including domestic violence, which in many cases, results in death. The measures should seek to protect women from all forms of violence whether it is physical, mental, moral or monetary and from all types of assailants, whether they be private citizens or governmental entities.

An example of this is the Maria da Penha Law, a Brazilian law adopted in 2011. This law criminalizes domestic violence making it punishable by imprisonment for the offender and protects the victim with measures such as removal from the assailant's home, provision of shelter for the victims away from their assailant, and credit deals and employment for those women who were economically dependent on their aggressor.

Furthermore, and as it happens in Argentina, governmental employees, medical examiners, judges, lawyers, and any other person that might deal with these issues, should have the proper knowledge and training to handle them in a sensitive manner.

2 – Promote campaigns between businesses and society to raise awareness of the importance of eradicating gender violence, explaining that it is rooted in the inequalities present in the traditional roles given to men and women in society, and emphasizing that these must be destroyed in order to create a more equitable society, fair and free from all forms of violence.

Today, there are few studies on gender violence at work. We must be able to quantify the cases to make them visible and fight better. Companies are responsible for the health and safety of workers at the workplace. Therefore they must integrate the issue of gender-based violence at the workplace among the organizational risks and implement a prevention policy .

3 – Demand that companies include the issue in all discussions pertaining to the health of workers and equal opportunities, since people who suffer from violence live in fear with low self-esteem and other impacts that could compromise productivity. People who work with obvious signs of abuse, feels ashamed of their situation and run the risk of being absent from work more often, especially in the case of more serious assaults.

4 - Encourage discussions on the issue with their employees and members and promote awareness among them so they can help fight the damage that violence generates in society.

5 - Include domestic violence in collective agreements (see UNI's ideal policy, procedure, negotiating guide and other supporting materials), discuss it at the negotiating table, explain the "spill-over" of domestic violence into the workplace and demand that companies raise awareness of the subject, instilling in their workers that violence is unacceptable and must be opposed. Likewise, companies must provide counsel for people suffering from violence to help them break the circle of fear and denounce their aggressors.

6 – Demand companies keep in employment those who suffer from domestic violence, not to discriminate against people who miss work for that reason, and that company personnel and social care departments support workers who



are facing this situation.

7 - Have regular campaigns and seminars to inform their employees, members and society in general on this issue, particularly on the 8th of March and the 25th of November, two international days for the fight against violence - days which are also more likely to be reported on by the media.

8 - Encourage discussions about how to fight this issue in the media, which often help to perpetuate stereotypes and present violence against women as something natural. They should also ensure that in the laws pertaining to violence there is a requirement for the issue to be discussed in schools and universities. This issue also needs to be integrated into union training and professional training

9 - Promote a debate, including men, on the portrayal of women in the media, giving priority to the need for a change in behavior.

10 – Ensure that the issue of gender-based violence, including domestic violence, harassment and sexual harassment, as well as homophobia, be constant themes in all discussions of gender.



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE - POLICY

This policy has been agreed between [name of company] and [name of union].

WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

Domestic violence is an abuse of power by a partner, ex-partner or family member. It takes many forms including intimidation, control, isolation and emotional, physical, sexual, financial, mental or spiritual abuse. Domestic violence can also occur between people in an intimate relationship who do not live together, between people in same-sex relationships, between carers and the person in their care and between people in kinship relationships.

Domestic violence tends to increase over time, becoming more serious and more frequent. Domestic violence harms both the victim and others, including children who witness the abuse.

Domestic violence is a serious crime that can happen to anybody in a close personal relationship. It is more common than many people realise. One in four women will experience domestic violence at some point in their lifetime. This means it is likely that all workplaces will have people that have experienced or are experiencing domestic violence as well as those who are perpetrators of abuse.

Domestic violence is significantly under-reported to the relevant authorities.

Research shows that women are more likely to suffer more serious injury and on-going assaults than men. However, it should be acknowledged that men also suffer domestic violence.

THE IMPACT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AT WORK

Domestic violence not only impacts on people's well-being, but it affects the financial strength and success of the companies for which they work. For example, in the UK 75% of those experiencing domestic abuse are targeted at work and it is often possible for perpetrators to use workplace resources such as phones, email and other means to threaten, harass or abuse (CAADV 2012).

[Replace UK example with any data for your country].

For some employees the workplace is a safe haven and the only place that offers routes to safety as they can access support services away from the aggressor. Furthermore, a steady income is often key to a survivor's economic independence and their opportunities to escape from an abusive relationship.

If domestic violence is affecting attendance, performance and safety at work then it is important that the person gets legal protection as soon as possible and that the workplace is included as a protected place. [Amend if this is not the legal arrangement in your country]

THE IMPACT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON CO-WORKERS

The surveys in Australia showed that 50% of those suffering domestic violence disclosed that to a co-worker and that co-workers were often aware, even if there was no disclosure. In addition, co-workers cover for their colleagues and are at risk when domestic violence follows someone to work. Whilst some co-workers are very supportive, others can be resentful so there is a need to educate all workers so they stay supportive.

It is important that the communications and education programme takes into account co-workers, that co-workers know what to do when there is a disclosure of domestic violence and that all trained contact people offer the appropriate support to co-workers.

[This section covers the areas for inclusion in a domestic violence policy.]



RAISE AWARENESS

A policy statement or commitment which opposes all forms of domestic abuse

This can include a commitment to treat domestic abuse seriously, understand the risks and consequences in the workplace, fully support colleagues and take action against perpetrators of domestic abuse.

A clear definition of what domestic violence is

This can be set within the wider violence against women context.

It is important to recognise that while domestic violence can affect both sexes, women's and men's experiences of violence are different. It should also be recognised that there can be additional issues for employees because of their gender identity, ethnic background, religion, age, sexuality or disability.

Pregnant Women

Domestic violence during pregnancy can mean increased risk of infection, premature birth, low birth weight, injury or death to the unborn child, maybe through a miscarriage or stillbirth. In addition, it may cause significant injury or even death for the mother.

There may be difficulties in attending antenatal appointments since the abuser may try to prevent her from doing so, or she may even be reluctant to attend healthcare services if she feels she may be questioned about the abuse.

Information and examples of the different forms of domestic abuse

This will demonstrate that no single act of abuse or harassment defines domestic abuse. Providing information on and examples of types of physical abuse, emotional abuse, mental abuse, sexual abuse and financial abuse will help gain an understanding of the wide range of activities domestic abuse includes.

Statistics to demonstrate the extent and prevalence of domestic abuse

National statistics can be used, and by involving local voluntary groups it may be possible to get statistics for your region or area.

Clear indicators to identify domestic abuse

On average a woman will experience 35 episodes of domestic abuse before seeking help (UK data - Jaffe et al 1986).

Using clear examples and indicators of domestic abuse can make managers aware of the possibility that domestic abuse may be the cause of a number of workplace issues such as lateness, poor performance etc.

The legal position

It is important that the legal framework is included here as a brief guide for all concerned. Please check the legal position in your country.

As an example, the position with protection orders in Australia is set out here:

Getting a domestic violence protection order

Domestic violence is someone exercising power and control over you. Keeping your job and your home is you keeping control over your life. Getting a protection order will help to keep you safe in your home and your workplace.

The police can help you to get a protection order:

- *Generally, a protection order is made by a court. It restricts the abusive person's behaviour, helping you to feel safe.*
- *It does not give the abusive person a criminal record unless they breach it and it doesn't mean that you have to end your relationship.*
- *The order can stop the abusive person contacting you and coming to your home address and/or your workplace.*

Once you get a protection order

Give a copy to your workplace. Remember, you should tell your workplace if you think there is any safety risk to you or others at work.

Report any breaches of the protection order to the police straight away.

Keep records

Make a record of how the domestic violence is affecting you at work: dates, times, details (where, what happened, what was said, any witnesses).

This will help you to report any incidents to the police and provide evidence to a court if necessary. If you report a breach of protection order, remember to ask the police for the incident number and write it down.

Link to other workplace policies

This would include policies on bullying and harassment, dignity at work etc. Company values such as respect may also be pertinent. Making links with existing policies can allow, for example, individuals to change working patterns.

Review the policy on a regular basis

This will gauge how the policy is working at all levels across the company and from the union's perspective. However,

it may be difficult to monitor the uptake of this policy because of the need to maintain confidentiality.

IDENTIFY RESPONSIBILITIES

Clarify the specific roles and responsibilities of managers

This can include practical steps to encourage the disclosure and discussion of abuse and identify appropriate support. Managers should endeavour to support those experiencing domestic abuse in a sympathetic, non-judgemental and confident manner.

Clarify the specific roles and responsibilities for the HR team

This can ensure a central responsibility for developing a policy and procedures on domestic abuse. The HR team can pledge to review and update other policies, procedures and practices that are linked and could affect the implementation of a domestic abuse policy.

Clarify the specific roles and responsibilities of employees

If they feel able to, this can allow people to take basic steps to assist friends and colleagues. By behaving in a supportive manner, an employee can assist an affected colleague in gaining confidence to tackle and report the problems that they might experience.

Trained contact person(s)

The company needs trained contact people at work who can assist when there are disclosures of domestic violence. Union representatives should also be trained as they are often seen as people to whom it is safe to disclose domestic violence.

A commitment to challenge perpetrators

This recognises that abusive behaviour is the responsibility of the perpetrator. People should be aware that misconduct inside and outside of work is viewed seriously – and can lead to disciplinary action being taken. People ought to be aware that domestic abuse is a serious matter that can lead to a criminal conviction. However, it may also be appropriate to support someone who is seeking help to address their behaviour.

An obligation to prioritise confidentiality wherever possible

Managers are responsible for ensuring information is not disclosed and that everyone is aware of their responsibilities in relation to confidentiality.

Communications and Education

There must be a communications and education campaign for all workers so people understand the issues and co-workers know what to do when there is a domestic violence disclosure.

ENSURE PROVISION, SUPPORT AND SAFETY

Clear information on practical and supportive measures in the workplace

There can be a number of clear steps identified which will ensure that those experiencing domestic abuse are able to work in a safe and supported workplace. This may include diverting phone calls or alerting reception and security staff. Links can also be made to an employee assistance programme.

An assurance to prioritise health and safety at work

The dangers of domestic abuse should not be underestimated. If domestic abuse is disclosed, undertaking a risk assessment can ensure that the potential risk to employees and colleagues is lessened. It is important to note each person's needs are different and that any measures should only be used with the authorisation/consent of the individual concerned.

Appoint domestic abuse link staff and provide contact details

This recognises that staff may not wish to go through line managers or HR. Having key link staff means they can be approached in confidence to discuss issues relating to domestic abuse. They would not be counsellors but be provided with specific training and have clear responsibilities. People linked to the unions are ideal candidates for these roles as they are often seen to be independent.

A clear commitment to provide training to all staff on the implications of domestic abuse in the workplace and what the domestic abuse policy offers

This will ensure that everyone is aware of domestic abuse, the policy and the support it offers. Local domestic abuse experts are key partners to assist in providing this training. More detailed training can be provided to managers.

A commitment to educate all staff on the policy

Everyone should be made aware and have information on the policy and its aims. This can include displaying posters and including information on domestic abuse within other training sessions, for example harassment and bullying.

A list of local and national support and advice agency contacts



This will give people experiencing domestic abuse the opportunity to access vital advice on financial, health and housing issues as well as legal assistance.

Provide counselling and safety discussions

Counselling will aid the victim in understanding that the abusive behaviour is not normal and should not be tolerated. Safety discussions will assist the person to develop a safe plan of action to keep them and their children as safe as possible.

A designated contact for further information on the policy

This will allow people to identify a person who can signpost colleagues to the most appropriate sources of advice

PRACTICAL WORKPLACE SUPPORT – KEY PRINCIPLES

[Name of company] commits to give the following support and entitlements to help people break the cycle of domestic violence:

1. **Dedicated additional paid leave** for people experiencing family or domestic violence
2. **Confidentiality** of people's details will be assured and respected
3. **Workplace safety planning** strategies to ensure protection of individuals will be developed and clearly understood by the parties concerned
4. **Referral** of people to appropriate domestic violence support services
5. Provision of appropriate **training** and paid time off work for agreed roles for nominated contact persons (including union representatives or health and safety representatives as necessary)
6. People entitled to domestic violence leave will also be able to access **flexible work arrangements** where appropriate
7. People will be **protected against adverse action or discrimination** on the basis of their disclosure of, experience of, or perceived experience of domestic violence

All employees who experience abuse will be supported regardless of gender and the type of abuse.

In cases where both the aggressor and victim are employees, it may be necessary to implement the harassment and bullying at work policy together with any appropriate disciplinary action.

[Name of both organizations] undertake to promote campaigns to fight domestic violence and its negative impact on people's health, life, family and work, and to stress the need to eradicate these practices and adopt new ones.

We also pledge to promote the debate against domestic violence and the need for men and women to review their roles to fight violence through conversations with all employees, supervisors and managers.

This policy will be implemented in collaboration with the trade unions.

References

CORPORATE ALLIANCE AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE. (2012) Why is CAADV important? [online]. London: CAADV. Available at: <http://www.caadv.org.uk/why.php> [Accessed 7 December 2012].

JAFFE, P., WOLFE, A. and TELFORD, A. (1986) The impact of police charges in incidents of wife abuse. Journal of Family Violence. Vol 1, No 1. pp37–49.

WALBY, S. (2009) The cost of domestic violence: update 2009. Lancaster: Lancaster University.



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE – PROCEDURE FOR MANAGERS AND SUPERVISORS

This procedure has been agreed between [name of company] and [name of union] and supports the policy document.

THE 10 STEP APPROACH

These low-cost, common-sense actions will be taken to manage the impact of domestic violence in the workplace,

Recognise the problem

1. Look for sudden changes in behaviour and/or changes in the quality of work performance for unexplained reasons.
2. Look for changes in the way an employee dresses, for example excessive clothing on hot days, changes in the amount of make-up worn.

Respond

3. Believe someone if they disclose experiencing domestic violence – do not ask for proof.
4. Reassure them that the organisation has an understanding of how domestic violence may affect their work performance and explain the support that can be offered.

Provide support

5. Divert phone calls and email messages and look to change a phone extension if someone is receiving harassing calls.
6. Agree with the person what to tell colleagues and how they should respond if the aggressor telephones or visits the workplace.
7. Ensure the person does not work alone or in an isolated area and check that the individual has arrangements for getting safely to and from work.
8. Keep a record of any incidents of abuse in the workplace, including persistent telephone calls, emails or visits to the workplace.
9. Put up domestic abuse helpline posters around the workplace, in break rooms and on the back of toilet doors

Refer to the appropriate help

10. **Refer** the individual to the trained contact person. They will have a list of the support services offered in your area that is easily accessible and will refer employees to appropriate organisations that deal with domestic abuse.

FACILITATING A CONVERSATION

If a manager suspects someone is experiencing domestic violence, they should facilitate a conversation to discuss this and identify and implement appropriate support.

Shying away from the subject can perpetuate fear of stigma and increase feelings of anxiety. Often people will not feel confident in speaking up, so a manager making the first move to begin a conversation can be key.

Managers should ask indirect questions, to help establish a dialogue and show empathy.

Examples of questions that could be used:

- How are you doing at the moment? What issues would you like to discuss?
- I have noticed recently that you are not yourself. What's the matter?
- What might be contributing to your frequent sickness absence/ under-performance at work?
- How are things at home?

After opening an empathetic dialogue, then some direct questions such as:

- Is anyone hurting you at home? Is anyone threatening you at home?

If there is a domestic violence disclosure then you need to ask:

- What support do you think might help? What would you like to happen? How?

The manager does not deal with the abuse itself but makes clear that people will be supported and outlines what help is available.

Managers must provide a non-judgemental and supportive environment and avoid victim blaming.



Respecting the employee's boundaries and privacy is essential - even if managers disagree with the decisions being made regarding someone's relationship, it is not their role to express an opinion.

Further guidance will be given to all managers/supervisors to raise their awareness of the company's policy on domestic violence and its impact at work so they can work to the 10 steps.

KEY PRINCIPLES

The key principles of practical support in the policy will be implemented across the company and are expanded upon below.

1. **Dedicated additional paid leave** for people experiencing domestic violence. This should include, but is not limited to paid time off for appointments with specialist agencies including the police, the courts, support agencies, housing specialists, solicitors, banks, children's schools and health care, both physical and mental.
2. **Confidentiality** of people's details will be assured and respected. All personal information concerning this issue will be treated as in strictest confidence.
3. **Workplace safety planning strategies** to ensure protection of individuals will be developed and clearly understood by the parties concerned. Practical actions may include:
 - Considering a change to an individual's work location. For example, if someone is in a role which involves direct contact with the public e.g. reception, a move may be required.
 - Offering an advance of pay or changing payment methods.
 - Reviewing any home-based working arrangements.
 - Changing an individual's contact details at work and ensuring these remain confidential.
4. **Referral** of people to the trained contact person and then to appropriate domestic violence support services. This might also include paying the costs of such services, travelling costs etc.
5. Provision of appropriate **training** and paid time off work for agreed roles for nominated contact persons (including HR, union representatives, health and safety representatives etc.)
6. People entitled to domestic violence leave will also be able to access **flexible work arrangements** where appropriate. This might include working different hours, days, shifts etc.
7. People will be **protected against adverse action or discrimination** on the basis of their disclosure of, experience of, or perceived experience of family and domestic violence.



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE – NEGOTIATING GUIDE

Establish the facts

Use the UNI policy statement to obtain general information about domestic or family violence.

Back that up with data particular to your own country and, if possible, from the company you are targeting.

Adapt the survey from Australia's "Safe at home, safe at work" campaign (on the UNI website – insert URL) if you need to gather your own data.

Be clear on the legal position in your country.

Marshal your arguments

Be ready to explain how domestic violence "spills over" to the workplace and how the workplace can be key to accessing help and support – see below.

Use the data under "The Business Case" below to influence the company.

"Spill over" to the workplace

Domestic violence may:

- Affect the member's ability to get to work and/or be on time for work
- Necessitate the member taking time off work
- Affect the member's and co-workers' ability to stay safe at work
- Impact on the member's work

Members may be:

- Receiving abusive phone calls, text messages or emails
- Affected by the abusive person turning up at the workplace, contacting co-workers or the company, or because the abusive person works in the same workplace
- Feeling unwell, sleep deprived or distracted
- Affected by injury

Stats to justify the connection between domestic violence and work

The surveys in Australia showed that 30% of workers have suffered from domestic violence and, of those, half said the violence had followed them to work. This "spill-over" of domestic violence into work impacts on attendance, performance and safety.

The capacity to stay financially independent is very important in surviving domestic violence and so remaining employed is vital.

Impact of domestic violence on co-workers

The surveys in Australia showed that 50% of those suffering domestic violence disclosed that to a co-worker and that co-workers were often aware, even if there was no disclosure. In addition, co-workers cover for their colleagues and are at risk when domestic violence follows someone to work. Whilst some co-workers are very supportive, others can be resentful so there is a need to educate co-workers so they stay supportive.

Domestic violence impacting at work

If domestic violence is affecting attendance, performance and safety at work then it is important that the person gets legal protection as soon as possible [and that the workplace is included as a protected place – amend if this is not the legal arrangement in your country].

Pregnancy

Domestic violence during pregnancy can mean increased risk of infection, premature birth, low birth weight, injury or death to the unborn child, maybe through a miscarriage or stillbirth. In addition, it may cause significant injury or even death for the mother.

There may be difficulties in attending antenatal appointments since the abuser may try to prevent her from doing so, or she may even be reluctant to attend healthcare services if she feels she may be questioned about the abuse.

As an example, Women's Aid in the UK ran a campaign in 2005 about domestic violence against women in pregnancy; if you want further information please see

<http://www.womensaid.org.uk/page.asp?section=000100010010000400020003>



The importance of the workplace

People experiencing domestic violence are often subject to disciplinary action and lose their jobs because their behaviour, being late for example, is misinterpreted. However, a steady income is often key to a survivor's economic independence and their opportunities to escape from an abusive relationship.

For some employees the workplace is a safe haven and the only place that offers routes to safety as they can access support services away from the aggressor.

Campaign

Ensure members and non-members are aware that domestic violence is on the union's agenda, use it to recruit new members, ask people to volunteer to be a specialist representative to assist members suffering from domestic violence.

The UNI website has a guide for union representatives and a leaflet for members that you can adapt.

There is a great video (unfortunately only in English) at

http://m.youtube.com/watch?noredirect=1&v=C3A4oYXv8yw&desktop_uri=%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DC3A4oYXv8yw%26noredirect%3D1

Support services

Get a list of the support services offered in your area that is easily accessible and get the company to use it and keep it updated.

The business case

Supporting people who have experienced or are experiencing domestic violence makes business sense. Not only is this a reflection of good management practice but also of corporate social responsibility.

See if you can get any data for your country. If not, as an example, in England and Wales £1.9 billion a year (Walby 2009) in economic output is lost due to decreased productivity, administrative difficulties from unplanned time off, lost wages and sick pay. Domestic violence can cause employees to be distracted at work, arrive late, leave early or miss work, and can increase employee turnover.

Colleagues may also be affected. They may be followed to or from work, or subject to questioning about the victim's contact details or locations. They may have to cover for other workers while they are off, try to fend off the abuse and may fear for their own safety. Furthermore, colleagues may be unaware of the abuse or not know how to help.

Introducing an effective workplace policy and practice will be a good investment to retain skilled and experienced staff, thereby increasing their commitment to the company. This approach will also avoid the high costs of recruiting and training new staff.

All employers have a duty of care and health and safety laws ensure workers have the right to work in a safe environment where risks to health and well-being are considered and dealt with efficiently.

An effective workplace policy on domestic violence can help to ensure that employers are complying with the law.

Check the laws that apply and see if there are any additional or specific points that you should highlight.

Being a good employer includes supporting people through new or difficult periods in their lives.

Having a domestic abuse workplace policy demonstrates that domestic abuse is not tolerated within or outside the workplace. It shows a commitment to provide support for people and to take action against perpetrators. Remember to cover the situation where the perpetrator is at the same workplace. There may be existing policies that would apply in such cases.

Make the link to other workplace policies such as bullying and harassment, dignity at work etc. Company values such as respect may be pertinent.

Trained Contact Person(s)

The company and, ideally, the union needs trained contact people at work who can assist when there are disclosures



of domestic violence. The company needs to offer this service if it is to help people suffering from domestic violence and these trained contact people should also offer support to co-workers.

Communications and Education

These are vital for a successful implementation of any agreement you reach, so include the plans for communication and education in your negotiations. There needs to be an education campaign for all workers, so people understand the issues and manager, supervisors and co-workers all know what to do if there is a domestic violence disclosure.

Genuinely limited resources?

Even with limited resources there are steps that can be taken to address the effects of domestic violence in the workplace. In many cases it is about being aware and signposting to the organisations that provide specialist support.

See the UNI ideal procedure for managers and supervisors for the 10 step approach.

Start Negotiations

Armed with all the information and the support generated by your campaign, you are now ready to negotiate with the company.

Use UNI's ideal policy and procedures to make a good agreement for your members.

Good Luck!

Remember to let UNI know how you get on! Thank you.

References

Research any references in your own country, otherwise the following may assist:

CORPORATE ALLIANCE AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE. (2012) Why is CAADV important? [online]. London: CAADV. Available at: <http://www.caadv.org.uk/why.php> [Accessed 7 December 2012].

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WALBY, S. (2009) *The cost of domestic violence: update 2009*. Lancaster: Lancaster University.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE – PROCEDURE FOR CO-WORKERS

This procedure has been agreed between [name of company] and [name of union] and supports the policy document.

IMPACT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON CO-WORKERS

Surveys in Australia show that 50% of those suffering domestic violence disclosed that to a co-worker and that co-workers were often aware, even if there was no disclosure. In addition, co-workers cover for their colleagues and are at risk when domestic violence follows someone to work. Whilst some co-workers are very supportive, others can be resentful so we want to educate co-workers so they stay supportive.

It is important that co-workers know what to do when there is a disclosure of domestic violence. Also, please contact the trained contact people who can assist you.

THE 10 STEP APPROACH

These low-cost, common-sense actions will be taken to manage the impact of domestic violence in the workplace,

Recognise the problem

1. Look for sudden changes in behaviour
2. Look for changes in the way an employee dresses, for example excessive clothing on hot days, changes in the amount of make-up worn.

Respond

3. Believe someone if they disclose experiencing domestic violence – do not ask for proof.
4. Reassure them that the organisation has an understanding of how domestic violence may affect their work performance and explain the support that can be offered.

The company will provide support

You may need to engage the person's manager or supervisor in order to implement some of the following actions:

5. Divert phone calls and email messages and look to change a phone extension if someone is receiving harassing calls.
6. Agree with the person what to tell colleagues and how they should respond if the aggressor telephones or visits the workplace.
7. Ensure the person does not work alone or in an isolated area and check that the individual has arrangements for getting safely to and from work.
8. Keep a record of any incidents of abuse in the workplace, including persistent telephone calls, emails or visits to the workplace.
9. Put up domestic abuse helpline posters around the workplace, in break rooms and on the back of toilet doors

Refer to the appropriate help

10. Refer the individual to the trained contact person. They will have a list of the support services offered in your area that is easily accessible and will refer employees to appropriate organisations that deal with domestic abuse.

FACILITATING A CONVERSATION

If you suspect someone is experiencing domestic violence and you feel able, then facilitate a conversation to discuss this. Shying away from the subject can perpetuate fear of stigma and increase feelings of anxiety. Often people will not feel confident in speaking up, so a colleague making the first move to begin a conversation can be key.

You should ask indirect questions, to help establish a dialogue and show empathy.

Examples of questions that could be used:

- How are you doing at the moment?
- I have noticed recently that you are not yourself. What's the matter?
- How are things at home?

After opening an empathetic dialogue, then some direct questions such as:

- Is anyone hurting you at home? Is anyone threatening you at home?



If there is a domestic violence disclosure then you need to ask:

- What support do you think might help? What would you like to happen? How?

It is important to be non-judgemental and supportive and avoid victim blaming.

Respecting your colleague's boundaries and privacy is essential - even if you disagree with the decisions being made regarding someone's relationship, it is not your role to express an opinion.

Co-workers do not deal with the abuse itself but make clear that people will be supported and outlines what help is available.

Further guidance is available from the trained contact person and from the union.

KEY PRINCIPLES

The key principles of practical support in the policy will be implemented across the company and are expanded upon below. Again, you may need to engage the person's manager or supervisor in order to implement some of the following actions:

1. **Dedicated additional paid leave** for people experiencing domestic violence. This should include, but is not limited to paid time off for appointments with specialist agencies including the police, the courts, support agencies, housing specialists, solicitors, banks, children's schools and health care, both physical and mental.
2. **Confidentiality** of people's details will be assured and respected. All personal information concerning this issue will be treated as in strictest confidence.
3. **Workplace safety planning strategies** to ensure protection of individuals will be developed and clearly understood by the parties concerned. Practical actions may include:
 - Considering a change to an individual's work location. For example, if someone is in a role which involves direct contact with the public e.g. reception, a move may be required.
 - Offering an advance of pay or changing payment methods.
 - Reviewing any home-based working arrangements.
 - Changing an individual's contact details at work and ensuring these remain confidential.
4. **Referral** of people to the trained contact person and then to appropriate domestic violence support services. This might also include paying the costs of such services, travelling costs etc.
5. People entitled to domestic violence leave will also be able to **access flexible work arrangements** where appropriate. This might include working different hours, days, shifts etc.
6. People will be **protected against adverse action or discrimination** on the basis of their disclosure of, experience of, or perceived experience of family and domestic violence.

