



Domestic abuse

A guide for school staff



The charity for everyone
working in education

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Introduction

Anyone can be affected by domestic abuse, including those working in schools. Domestic abuse is very common. In the vast majority (but not all) of cases, it is experienced by women and perpetrated by men. With a high proportion of the workforce in schools being women, it is likely at least one woman at your school will be affected by it.

Schools can play an important role in supporting staff experiencing or suspecting domestic abuse. Schools can help to ensure that survivors — those effected by domestic abuse - are not penalised in the workplace because of their experiences.

In this guide we:

- Explain what domestic abuse is
- Explore why it is relevant in schools
- Tell you how to spot signs
- Discuss how to support yourself or colleagues if domestic abuse is taking place
- We share advice on how to address this as a school leader
- We include information on where you can find out more and access support



What is domestic abuse?

Women's Aid defines domestic abuse "as an incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and violent behaviour, including sexual violence, in the majority of cases by a partner or ex-partner, but also by a family member or carer."

This mirrors the UK cross-government definition. It is also known as domestic violence and gender based violence. It can include, but is not limited to behaviours that frighten, intimidate, terrorise, manipulate, hurt, humiliate, blame, injure, or wound someone.

These behaviours fall under these categories:

- Coercive control (a pattern of intimidation, degradation, isolation and control)
- Psychological and emotional abuse
- Physical violence and abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Financial or economic abuse
- Harassment and stalking
- Online or digital abuse
- Stalking
- Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)
- Forced Marriage
- So called 'honour' crimes or honour based abuse



Why is this important in schools?

Domestic abuse is a workplace issue. With almost one in three women aged 16-59 experiencing domestic abuse in her lifetime¹, it is highly likely that education staff will be affected by it. They may be affected as a survivor, perpetrator, or through having a colleague, friend or loved one experience it.

Domestic abuse has a significant and extremely negative effect on people's lives and safety, including at work. **These workplace impacts might include:**

- Reduction in performance, confidence and self-esteem
- Increased absence from work
- Increased sick leave
- Reduced ability to get to work (e.g. if they are threatened, injured or have money or transport restricted by their partner)



Colleagues may also be affected, for example:

- Threats and questioning from a colleague's abuser
- Covering for colleagues in their absence
- Increased stress or concern for their colleagues

The stigma attached to seeking help is huge. Education staff who have experienced domestic abuse will likely be so focused on surviving that they haven't had the capacity to seek support. This can have a knock on effect with staff being put on performance management, restricted duties, or being dismissed due to changes in performance. By the time most women reach a refuge, they have lost their jobs.

Employers have a duty of care to employees and a legal responsibility to provide a safe work environment. Preventing and tackling domestic abuse is an integral part of this. By making domestic abuse a workplace issue, survivors will be better supported and hopefully sooner. This will help the survivor and also support schools to retain staff, reduce absence, increase motivation and performance, and improve wellbeing at work, through good workplace relations.



Domestic abuse can happen to anyone of any age, gender, ethnicity, or sexuality.

Domestic abuse can occur within a range of relationships and affects people of all education levels and socioeconomic backgrounds. Incidents are rarely isolated, and often escalate. Other societal inequalities that people face (such as poverty, racism, ablism or homophobia) can compound the impact that domestic abuse has, and make getting support harder. You can read more about how domestic abuse affects different people in different ways on pages 14-17 of this **NEU guide**.

¹Office for National Statistics (2019) Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview: November 2019

If you are experiencing domestic abuse

If you think you may be in an abusive relationship but aren't sure, you can read more about spotting the signs of domestic abuse in **this guide** from the Victim Support.

If any of the things listed are happening in your relationship, the best thing to do is to talk to someone. This isn't always easy, but getting help is the best way to try to end the abuse. At school, this might be a trusted colleague, your line manager, or your Union representative.

You can also find a list of helplines and other support services at the end of this resource.

If you think you may be perpetrating abuse you can contact **Respect**, an organisation set up to support those who are perpetrating abuse and who want to stop.



If you or someone else is in imminent danger, ring the police on 999. If you need support about anything relating to domestic abuse call the 24 hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline free on 0808 2000 247.

If you are worried about a colleague

You can do the following to support colleagues:

- Speak to relevant staff about increasing the visibility of domestic abuse resources and signposting material across the school in staff areas
- Put up a domestic abuse poster in your staffroom and staff toilets. The NEU **have a resource** that can be used for this
- Learn about the signs of domestic abuse and how to respond if someone discloses to you. Encourage colleagues to do the same
- Ask if your school has a domestic abuse policy and work to get one in place
- Have conversations about domestic abuse with colleagues to try to break the stigma that surrounds domestic abuse



Spotting the signs of domestic abuse:

The signs will be different for everyone and it won't always be obvious that people are experiencing abuse. Some things to look out for include:

- Changes in attendance, or increased sick leave with no obvious explanation
- Needing time off more often for appointments
- Unexplained injuries, bruising or attempts to cover up or explain injuries that don't quite fit
- Excessive clothing being worn (to hide injury)
- Having to take repeated phone calls during work time from a partner
- Problems with withdrawal, concentration, anxiety and performance for no apparent reason

If a colleague discloses domestic abuse to you it is important to:

- Listen and believe them, and take them seriously - be patient
- Remind them they are not alone, show support and kindness and make no judgements about your colleague's choice of response to the abuse
- Encourage them to seek support from a professional - this can be done by calling confidential helplines listed at the end of this document
- Offer them information and direct them to support from domestic abuse organisations - or offer to find out more about this for them
- Stay connected - keep in touch and ask how they are doing, and make sure you do this in a way they've agreed to (to keep them safe)
- Don't give advice beyond your expertise
- Look after yourself - these are hard things to hear, so make sure you look after yourself and speak to someone confidentially (e.g. Education Support's helpline) if you need to



If you or someone else is in imminent danger, ring the police on 999. If you need support about anything relating to domestic abuse call the 24 hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline free on 0808 2000 247.

If you think a colleague may be experiencing abuse but hasn't disclosed directly to you:

- Tread gently - this is very sensitive
- Offer opportunities for disclosure - suggest one to one coffees or chats in private, safe spaces
- Stay connected with your colleague so they know someone is looking out for them
- Contact a confidential helpline, HR or speak to a union rep if you need further advice

Saying things like:

“
I'm really glad you told me

“
You aren't alone

“
This isn't your fault

“
How can I help

will all help to give reassurance to the person who has disclosed abuse.



If you are a school leader or line manager



It's essential that people feel comfortable disclosing domestic abuse at work if they need to. To make this a reality, schools need to work to address the stigma around domestic violence and create an environment where staff are comfortable talking about it.

The role of the Headteacher:

Headteachers have a duty to ensure that people feel able to disclose abuse to the right staff within a school.

This doesn't mean that the headteacher is the only person somebody can disclose to, but that they ensure that there are named, visible members of staff, whether in HR or other departments, that people know they can approach if they have a concern or issue. Most importantly headteachers need to ensure that staff know they will be supported if they speak up and to communicate what that support looks like.

How to make your school supportive of survivors of domestic abuse

- 1 Develop and implement a **domestic abuse policy** which outlines support available and the school's commitment to supporting your workforce
- 2 Train all managers to spot the signs of domestic abuse and how to support staff in an inclusive and appropriate way
- 3 Normalise conversations about domestic abuse at work - try using exercises like **mythbusters**
- 4 Communicate clearly, via the policy, and to staff, that domestic abuse is a significant problem, particularly for women
- 5 Make sure signposting to domestic abuse information is visible and up to date across the school so people can self-refer to support
- 6 Ensure that any performance review processes are halted if domestic abuse is disclosed
- 7 Ensure that absence management due to domestic violence is treated appropriately
- 8 Train all staff on domestic violence
- 9 Make sure at least one female colleague is a nominated point of contact on domestic abuse issues, to reflect the disproportionate impact domestic abuse has on women
- 10 Put in place practical measures to support the safety of all staff, including those who may be experiencing domestic abuse

The role of the line manager:

Schools should ensure that line managers are aware of the signs of domestic abuse and comfortable with having conversations on the subject in a non-judgemental, non-threatening, sensitive and private way.

With the right training line managers can provide the following support in the event of disclosure of domestic abuse from a colleague:

- Signposting to available support from or at the school e.g. an Employee Assistance Programme, domestic abuse policy or resources
- Suspend any capability procedures which have arisen from absence or performance issues relating to domestic abuse
- Consider carrying out a workplace risk assessment to make sure risk at school is minimised for the survivor and other colleagues
- Offer flexible working patterns to try to offer safety and improved wellbeing for the person who disclosed domestic abuse
- Follow up regularly to ensure people experiencing domestic abuse feel remembered and supported.

When disclosure takes place a plan will need to be put in place to ensure the safety and wellbeing of affected staff. It is likely this plan will involve

practical steps that support the individual - all plans should be survivor led and agreed.

Examples of what this practical support might look like include:











- Ensuring access to work is maintained, as work is often a place of safety. This may include providing secure entry systems and car parking spaces
- Designating an ongoing support point of contact who offers confidential check-ins
- Alerting reception / security staff to the issue, reminding them not to share information about the survivor with others, and agreeing a response should the perpetrator of abuse present at the school
- Adjusting workload and targets taking into account the impact of the abuse
- Offer flexibility to working patterns, hours, and location
- Ensuring paid time off is given to attend relevant appointments e.g. in courts, with lawyers, support agencies etc
- Enabling attendance at counselling or other recovery support
- Ensuring that no capability procedures are implemented and that absence is managed sensitively



More information and support for individuals and schools



Remember, no one deserves to be abused and it is never the survivors' fault. Help is available from a range of organisations.

-  You can find local services using the **Women's Aid directory**
-  Wales based 24 hour helpline - **Live Fear Free** Helpline for Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse, & Sexual Violence: 0808 80 10 800 / Text: 07800 77333 / info@livefearfreehelpline.wales
-  Scotland based 24 hour helpline - **Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline** 0800 027 1234 You can call the Helpline using a text relay service helpline@sdafmh.org.uk
-  England based 24 hour helpline - **National Domestic Abuse Helpline** 0808 2000 247 The Helpline can be accessed using the BT Type Talk Service for Deaf or hard-of-hearing callers. You can also contact the helpline online.
-  Northern Ireland based 24 hour helpline - **Domestic & Sexual Violence Helpline:** 0808 802 1414 / help@dsahelpline.org
-  Male Survivors - **Men's Advice Line** 0808 801 0327 / info@mensadviceline.org.uk
-  **Karma Nirvana** - Helpline for 'honour'-based abuse and Forced marriage 0800 5999 247. You can also contact them online.
-  **The National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender + Domestic Abuse Helpline** 0800 999 5428 / help@galop.org.uk
-  **Victim Support** - free information line 0808 16 89 293
-  **Education Support** - Free and confidential support for teachers and education staff 08000 562 561 / support@edsupport.org.uk

Organisations which run training on domestic abuse that schools may want to engage with include:

-  Women's Aid
-  Galop
-  Imkaan
-  Respect

Sources:

- <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2019/12/12/news/union-warns-of-teachers-living-in-abusive-relationships-1788037/>
- <https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/what-is-domestic-abuse>
- <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/what-is-domestic-abuse/>
- <https://neu.org.uk/media/13351/view>
- <https://www.bitc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/bitc-wellbeing-toolkit-domesticabuseforemployers-june2021.pdf>

