



# **Domestic Abuse Workforce Policy**

**February 2019  
Reviewed June 2021**

**<https://www.healthysurrey.org.uk/your-health/domestic-abuse>**

## CONTENTS

1	PURPOSE
1.1	Background
2	SCOPE
3	POLICY
3.1	Domestic Abuse and the Workplace
3.2	Possible Signs of Domestic Abuse
3.2.1	Workplace performance
3.2.2	Physical
3.2.3	Emotional
3.2.4	Behavioural
3.2.5	Other
3.3	Confidentiality
3.4	Right to Privacy
3.5	Anti-Discrimination
3.6	Absence Options for Employees Experiencing Domestic Abuse
3.7	Safety at Work
3.8	Providing Support for Employees
4.0	National Guidance for Employers

## APPENDICIES

Appendix 1:	Potential Questions that can be used where an employee is suspected of experiencing Domestic Abuse
-------------	--

## 1. PURPOSE

Mole Valley District Council is committed to supporting employees who are experiencing domestic abuse and providing guidance for employees and management to address the occurrence of domestic abuse and its effects on the workplace.

### 1.1 Background

Everyone has the right to a life free from abuse in any form. Domestic abuse is wholly unacceptable and inexcusable behaviour, and responsibility for domestic abuse lies with the perpetrator.

Mole Valley District Council strives to create a working environment that promotes the view that abuse against people is unacceptable and that such abuse will not be condoned.

It also recognises that individuals can be exposed to domestic abuse without being abused themselves e.g. the child of a parent who abuses the other parent and this can have traumatic effects.

Domestic Abuse can be carried out by a partner or ex-partner (married, co-habiting or single sex relationship), by a family member, or by another person living in the same household. This includes issues such as honour based violence and forced marriage. Family members are defined as mother, father, son, daughter, brother, sister and grandparents, whether directly or indirectly related, in-laws or stepfamily.

Domestic abuse can be a single incident or a series of incidents and can include:

**Psychological** - Intimidation, threats to harm, threats to kidnap children, blackmail, destruction of pets, property, mind games and stalking

**Physical** - Inflicting or attempting to injure, grabbing, pinching, biting, kicking, stabbing, weapons, withholding medications, food, funds

**Sexual** - Marital rape, acquaintance rape, forced sex after physical beating, fondling, and forced prostitution

**Financial** - Maintaining control of earned income, withholding money and running up debt in the victim's name

**Emotional** - Undermining or attempting to undermine the victim's sense of worth, constant criticism, name calling, insults, put downs, silent treatment, repeatedly making and breaking promises, harming or making threats to harm pets

**Controlling behaviour is:** a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour

**Coercive behaviour is:** ‘an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim’. (Home Office 2013)

## **2. SCOPE**

This policy applies to all staff employed within Mole Valley District Council.

## **3. POLICY**

### **3.1 Domestic Abuse and the Workplace**

It is important to promote the understanding that everyone has the right to a life free from abuse in any form. Domestic abuse is wholly unacceptable and inexcusable behaviour, and responsibility for domestic abuse lies with the perpetrator. Mole Valley District Council strives to create a working environment that promotes the view that abuse against people is unacceptable and that such abuse will not be condoned.

### **3.2 Possible Signs of Domestic Abuse**

Survivors of domestic abuse are often reluctant to discuss their situation with their employer or work colleagues. However, there are some signs which might indicate that they are experiencing such problems. It is important to remember that not all survivors behave in the same way, and the following will not be applicable in all cases. Similarly, it is important to note that staff who demonstrate some of the characteristics noted will not always be victims of domestic abuse.

Special attention may be warranted when for example behaviour changes significantly or if uncharacteristic behaviour is demonstrated for a sustained period.

#### **3.2.1 Workplace performance**

- Absenteeism without proper explanation.
- Frequent arriving at work late or needing to leave early.
- Uncharacteristic displays of anxiety, depression, distraction or problems with concentration.
- Change in the quality of work with no apparent explanation.
- Receiving upsetting telephone calls, text messages, emails etc. or being the victim of vandalism or threats.
- Obsession with time.
- Significant changes in an employee’s dress sense.
- Increase in hours worked for no apparent reason.

### **3.2.2 Physical**

- Repeated burns, bruises or other injuries (often with attempts to hide these).
- Injuries in areas of the body consistent with falls, walking into doors or other explanations given.
- Injuries to the chest, breast and abdomen (women are more likely to be injured in these areas and are common injuries in pregnancy)
- Injuries to the face, head or neck.
- Evidence of sexual abuse, or frequent gynaecological problems in women.
- Frequent unexplained visits to the Doctor or explained with vague symptoms.
- Frequent use of pain medication.
- Significant weight loss or gain.

### **3.2.3 Emotional**

- Panic attacks, anxiety and / or depression.
- Exhibiting severe stress reactions.
- Emotional exhaustion, lack of emotional control.
- Impaired thinking.
- Decreased concentration / attention span.
- Eruptions of aggressiveness, anger out of control.
- Alcohol or drug misuse.
- Frequent use of minor tranquilisers.
- Preoccupied with or distracted by the welfare of their children.

### **3.2.4 Behavioural**

- Displays of fright.
- Elevated startled response.
- Withdrawal or personal isolation.
- Low self-esteem.

### **3.2.5 Other**

- Secretive about home life.
- Partner may attempt to limit their work or social contacts.
- Partner may ridicule them in public.
- Partner exerts unusual amount of control over their life.

Whilst the above characteristics can be common in those that experience domestic abuse, it is also possible that survivors may demonstrate minimal or occasionally no disruption to their usual behaviour. Where a manager suspects or is made aware that a member of staff suspects that domestic abuse may be affecting a colleague, the provision in this policy should be followed.

Further guidance on potential questions to ask where an employee is suspected of experiencing Domestic Abuse is attached at Appendix 1.

### **3.3 Confidentiality**

Mole Valley District Council respects an employee's right to confidentiality and recognises that employees that have been or are a victim of domestic abuse normally have the right to complete confidentiality. However, in circumstances of safeguarding children or adults from abuse, the child and adult safeguarding services may need to be involved. Complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in these situations.

### **3.4 Right to Privacy**

Mole Valley District Council respects an employee's right to privacy in the event a survivor does not wish to inform their organisation or department that they have been or are experiencing domestic abuse.

### **3.5 Anti-Discrimination**

Mole Valley District Council will not discriminate against anyone who has been or is experiencing domestic abuse, in terms of his or her existing employment or career development.

Mole Valley District Council is aware that domestic abuse survivors may have performance problems such as chronic absenteeism or lower productivity as a result of domestic abuse.

When addressing performance, absence and safety issues, Mole Valley District Council will make reasonable efforts to consider all aspects of the employee's situation and/or safety issues.

### **3.6 Absence Options for Employees Experiencing Domestic Abuse**

Mole Valley District Council will make every effort to assist an employee experiencing domestic abuse. If an employee needs to be absent from work due to domestic abuse, the length of the absence will be determined by the individual's situation through collaboration with the employee, line manager, Human Resources, and Occupational Health where appropriate.

Employees, managers, and supervisors are encouraged to first explore paid leave options that can be arranged to help the employee cope with the situation without having to take a formal unpaid leave of absence. Depending on circumstances, these options may include:

- arranging flexible work hours so the employee can seek protection, go to court, look for new housing, enter counselling, arrange child care, etc
- considering use of sick time, job sharing, compensatory time, paid leave, informal unpaid leave, etc., particularly if requests are for relatively short periods

### 3.7 Safety at Work

Mole Valley District Council has a duty to ensure the safety of its employees and will actively provide support to employees to minimise the risk to their safety while at work, if they make it known to the Council that they are experiencing domestic abuse.

This support may include:

- work schedule adjustments
- workplace relocation (if available)
- safe access to / from car parks or public transport
- referral to Occupational Health for support
- Employee Assistance Scheme
- referral to the Transactional HR & Systems Manager to consider alternative methods of salary payment if the abusing partner has access to bank accounts

Managers should consider the following guidance when dealing with staff members who have experienced domestic abuse. Where necessary managers should contact local specialist domestic abuse outreach services for advice and guidance and:

- ensure that discussions take place in privacy, and as far as possible are confidential;
- ensure that employee's concerns are taken very seriously, taking time to listen to them, understanding what they tell you, and ensuring a non-judgemental approach.
- understand that employee may wish to involve a 3rd party, such as a colleague, trade union representative, or friend, rather than or in addition to speaking to their line manager; and
- be aware that there may be additional issues facing the employee because of their age, gender, sexuality, ethnic background, religion, race or disability.

The role of the manager is not to deal with the abuse itself, but make it clear through our 'Domestic Abuse / Support for Staff Policy' that employees will be supported and to outline help that is available.

There are numerous local and national resources available to those with concerns about Domestic Abuse. Initial concerns can be raised with the Surrey Against Domestic Abuse Partnership for advice and referral where appropriate.

#### **Surrey Against Domestic Abuse Partnership**

Offering information, support and advice for anyone interested in or subject to domestic abuse;

<https://www.healthysurrey.org.uk/your-health/domestic-abuse>

**Surrey Helpline** - 9am to 9pm, 7 days a week: 01483 776822

### **3.8 Providing Support for Employees**

Mole Valley District Council will make support available to employees involved in domestic abuse and will provide support through our line managers, Human Resources, Occupational Health, Employee Assistance Scheme and referral to external agencies if appropriate.

Their role is to:

- be available and approachable to employees experiencing domestic abuse
- listen, reassure and support individuals
- keep information confidential (subject to the requirements of child and adult safeguarding)
- respond in a sensitive and non-judgemental manner
- discuss steps that can be taken to help this person stay safe in the workplace
- provide employees with support options
- sign post employees to seek the advice of other relevant and specialist support agencies

As part of the Council's commitment it supports the White Ribbon UK campaign 'to end male violence against women, once and for all.' Senior managers and staff are encouraged to become White Ribbon Ambassadors and Champions.

<https://www.whiteribbon.org.uk/>

### **3.9 Perpetrators**

Mole Valley District Council recognises that perpetrators of domestic abuse may wish to seek help and support voluntarily. They will have access, when appropriate, to help and support in accordance with that laid out in this policy.

Employees who are identified perpetrators must also be aware that conduct outside of work could lead to disciplinary action being taken where there is an impact on the employment relationship.

### **4.0 National Guidance for Employers**

Further information and guidance can be found in the CIPD and Equality and Human Rights Commission guidance booklet 'Managing and Supporting Employees Experiencing Abuse' September 2020.

[https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/managing-supporting-employees-experiencing-domestic-abuse-guide\\_tcm18-84538.pdf](https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/managing-supporting-employees-experiencing-domestic-abuse-guide_tcm18-84538.pdf)



**Appendix 1: Potential Questions that can be used where an employee is suspected of experiencing Domestic Abuse.** (CIPD 'A Guide for Employers September 2020')

If a manager suspects that an employee is experiencing domestic abuse, they should facilitate a conversation to be able 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 employees will not feel confident in speaking up, so a manager making the first move to begin a conversation can be key.

Managers should ask the employee indirect questions, to help establish a relationship with the employee and develop empathy. Here are some examples of questions that could be used.

- How are you doing at the moment? Are there any issues you would like to discuss with me?
- I have noticed recently that you are not yourself. Is anything the matter?
- Are there any problems or reasons that may be contributing to your frequent sickness absence /or under performance at work?
- Is everything alright at home?
- What support do you think might help? What would you like to happen? How?

Avoid victim blaming. It is important that managers are able to provide a non-judgemental and supportive environment. Respecting the employee's boundaries and privacy is essential.

Respect an employee's decisions about their relationship and understand that a victim of domestic abuse may make a number of attempts to leave their partner before they are finally able to do so. It's important that managers are aware of the effects of coercive control.

**The role of the manager is not to deal with the abuse itself, but make it clear through our 'Domestic Abuse / Support for Staff Policy' that employees will be supported and to outline help that is available and signposting them to professional sources of support.**

Approved by: Alison Wilks

Date: 07/07/2021

Version Control: V2 Published 09/07/2021