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**Line Manager's Guide to Handling Domestic Abuse**

# **Introduction**

Managers have to deal with more than just regular work problems in today's changing workplace. One important issue they need to understand is domestic abuse (DA) and domestic violence (DV). This issue can affect anyone, regardless of gender, financial health, or culture. Managers should know that DA or DV can appear in many ways, and dealing with it requires a careful and sensitive approach.

Keeping things secret and being safe from the abuser are the most important concerns in domestic abuse. If the abuser finds out what the victim is doing or saying, it can be very dangerous for the victim. This fear of being discovered can make the abuse even worse and make it harder for the victim to escape.

Feeling ashamed about the abuse is also a big problem. When signs of abuse show up, it usually means it's been happening for a while or has recently gotten worse. This makes victims doubt themselves and feel bad about who they are. Victims of DA are known to be potentially subject to at least 35 events of DA before any occurrence of DV. This included coercive control, which affects the individual's self-esteem, confidence and thought processes.

Money issues make things even more complicated. Both the victim and the abuser often try to control the money, especially when the victim wants to get away from the abuser. Victims might keep things secret in this tricky situation, and abusers can be sneaky, too. This makes it tough for anyone outside the relationship to figure out what's really happening.

Sadly, both the victim and the abuser can get so emotionally attached to the relationship that they defend it no matter what, even if it's hurting them. This is a really serious problem when discussing work-related matters which have been impacted by their relationship, sickness, absence increases, lateness, or decreased performance.

This guide focuses on two important things. First, it highlights that gender isn't just male or female, and we need to be understanding of everyone's gender experiences. Domestic violence can happen to people of any gender, so recognising this helps create a safer and more inclusive workplace.

Second, it talks about the issue of subconscious bias, especially when it comes to people from working-class backgrounds. Stereotypes and preconceived ideas about class can affect how managers handle domestic violence cases. The guide gives real examples and practical tips to spot and reduce these biases so your workplace can be empathetic and supportive for all employees.

By the end of this guide, you'll be better prepared to deal with cases involving domestic abuse or violence, considering different gender identities and addressing biases. Together, we can make your workplace safer and more inclusive for everyone, regardless of their background.

Unconscious bias can manifest in various ways when it comes to individuals in the context of domestic abuse or violence cases. Here are some examples:

# **Assuming Financial Independence:**

Managers might unconsciously assume that individuals are financially independent or not financially vulnerable, leading them to downplay or not recognise victims' financial constraints. This bias can result in a lack of understanding and support for the victim's need for resources.

# **Blaming the Victim**

Unconscious bias may lead some managers or colleagues to subconsciously or even openly blame victims for their circumstances, believing they should have made different choices to avoid domestic abuse or violence. This can manifest as victim-blaming attitudes and hinder the provision of proper support and any trust the victim has in the employer.

# **Overlooking Red Flags**

Unconscious bias can lead managers to overlook or downplay red flags of domestic abuse or violence in an employee's situation. They may attribute signs of abuse to other causes, such as stress or personal problems, rather than recognising them as potential indicators of a domestic abuse/violence situation.

# **Discounting Emotional Impact**

Managers might unconsciously assume that the employees are more resilient or less affected by emotional trauma, leading to inadequate emotional support for victims. Particularly if the victim is good at disguising or downplaying their situation. This bias can result in a failure to acknowledge the psychological toll that domestic violence takes on victims.

# **Lack of Flexibility in Workplace Policies**

Managers may have an unconscious bias against making accommodations for employees experiencing domestic abuse. They might assume that these individuals can't or won't need workplace flexibility, such as time off or schedule adjustments, to address their situations effectively.

# **Judging Access to Support Networks**

Unconscious bias can affect managers' perception of an individual's support network access. They may assume that these individuals have strong family or community support and may not require workplace assistance, even when that's not the case.

# **Understanding How Gender May Influence How Managers Respond to Domestic Violence Cases in the Workplace:**

* **Stereotyping Victims**

Managers may have preconceived notions that domestic abuse only happens to women and that only their partner may be the perpetrator of the abuse or violence. This stereotype can lead to disbelief or lack of support when a male employee or an employee in a same sex relationship reports domestic abuse or if the employee is experiencing DA/DV from a parent or child, making it harder for them to seek help.

* **Assumptions about Perpetrators**

Managers might assume that only men can be perpetrators of domestic violence. This assumption can prevent them from recognising cases where a female employee is the aggressor, potentially leaving the real victim without support.

# **Lack of Awareness**

Some managers may not be well-informed about the unique challenges faced by homosexual, non-binary, or transgender individuals in domestic violence situations. This lack of awareness can result in inadequate support or misunderstanding of their needs.

# **Language and Communication**

Gendered language and communication styles can impact how managers approach the issue. For example, using gender-neutral language when discussing domestic abuse can help create a more inclusive environment where all employees feel comfortable seeking help.

# **Resource Allocation**

Managers may allocate resources based on gender assumptions, such as providing more support to female employees without considering that male employees, differently gendered, or homosexual people may also be victims. This unequal allocation can lead to an unfair and ineffective response.

# **Sensitivity to Disclosure**

Female employees may feel more comfortable disclosing domestic violence experiences to female managers due to shared experiences or perceived empathy. Other employees may have different comfort levels when discussing these issues, affecting how managers respond. It is important to ask the employee their preferred person to support them.

# **Supportive Measures**

Managers may offer different types of support based on gender or sexual orientation stereotypes. For example, they may assume that women need emotional support while men need practical solutions, missing the individual needs of each victim.

Cultural or racial bias may also affect the employee's situation and their attitude to their situation. It is important to explore their cultural situation with the employee to understand fully any additional barriers to a safe living environment that the employee is experiencing.

To address these issues, managers need to receive training on domestic abuse awareness and be mindful of their biases and assumptions. Creating a workplace culture sensitive to diversity and treating all cases of domestic violence with equal seriousness is crucial for providing effective support to all employees.Top of Form

# **Recognising Signs of Domestic Abuse:**

* **Behaviour Changes:**

Be attentive to unexplained changes in an employee's behaviour, performance, attendance, or demeanour.

* **Physical Signs:**

Look for signs of distress, such as bruises, injuries, or changes in appearance.

* **Emotional Signs:**

Know signs of anxiety, depression, withdrawal, or mood swings.

* **Isolation:**

Take note if an employee seems isolated or avoids social interactions.

* **Frequent Calls or Messages:**

Notice if an employee receives regular and disruptive calls, messages, or visits.

# **Initial Steps:**

* **Private Conversation:**

If you suspect an employee is experiencing domestic abuse, schedule a private conversation in a safe and confidential setting.

* **Active Listening:**

Allow employees to share their concerns without judgment. Listen empathetically and reassure them that their well-being is a priority.

* **Offer Support:**

Inform the employee about the company's domestic abuse policy and the available support resources.

# **Support and Accommodations**

* **Flexible Working Arrangements:**

Discuss the possibility of flexible working arrangements to accommodate the employee's needs.

* **Time Off:**

Understand if the employee needs time off to address their situation. Ensure they are aware of their leave options.

* **Confidentiality:**

Emphasise the confidentiality of the information shared and the company's steps to protect their privacy.

* **Other Support:**

It's really important to give victims space and the flexibility to use their work time to plan to get away or to get help from lawyers and support people. Sometimes, their workplace can be a safe place to take a break from the abuse. Allowing them to use work time for private calls, meetings, or finding out about legal help helps them take important steps to get out of the abusive situation.

Also, if their personal phone has been taken by the abuser, giving them a work phone can be a lifeline. This way, they can communicate with others and get help when they need it most.

Should our employee be planning an escape, we will assist as far as possible to maintain the employee's safety during a high-risk event. This could include:

* + authorising unpaid or paid leave, ensuring all personal and financial details are altered with immediate effect,
  + a payroll loan may be considered, and we will make every effort to ensure that post-escape the employee is safe at work.

These workplace changes show that the company cares about its employees' well-being. They also help victims break out of the isolation that often comes with domestic violence and give them hope and a way to rebuild their lives.

# **Referring to HR:**

* **Encourage Reporting:**

Encourage the employee to report the situation to HR but respect their decision if they choose not to.

* **Report to HR:**

If the employee consents, or if you believe there is an immediate danger, report the situation to HR for appropriate action.

* **HR's Role:**

HR will handle the situation sensitively, providing information about support services, legal protections, and additional resources.

**Continued Support:**

* **Check-Ins:**

Regularly check in with the employee to show your ongoing support and ensure they feel safe at work.

* **Reasonable Adjustments:**

Make reasonable adjustments to ensure the employee's safety and well-being.

**Maintaining Confidentiality:**

* **Limit Sharing:**

Share information only on a need-to-know basis with HR and senior management, respecting the employee's privacy.

* **Legal Obligations:**

Inform the employee about legal obligations requiring reporting while emphasising their control over the process.

**Educating the Team:**

* **Promote Awareness:**

Encourage awareness about domestic abuse through team discussions, training sessions, and informational resources.

* **Stigma Reduction:**

Help reduce stigma by fostering an environment where employees feel comfortable seeking help and sharing their concerns.

**Review and Update**

Stay updated on the company's domestic abuse policy and any changes. Be prepared to adapt your approach to provide the best support for affected employees.

By following this guide, you can contribute to creating a sensitive, supportive, and safe workplace for all employees, especially those experiencing domestic abuse.