



# FAQs ON DOMESTIC ABUSE

Think Business, Think Equality

## 1. What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is a pattern of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and/or violent behaviour, including sexual violence, by a partner or ex-partner. It affects women from all backgrounds irrespective of age, sexual orientation, race, education, culture and socioeconomic demographic.

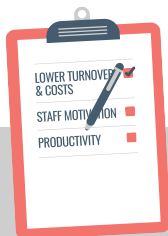
Often when people think of domestic abuse they think of physical violence, but domestic abuse is usually much more than that. It can include various types of abuse, including physical, emotional, psychological and economic abuse.

## 2. Who experiences domestic abuse?

The vast majority of the victim-survivors of domestic abuse are women and children. According to statistics from Police Scotland, in 82% of reported cases of domestic abuse the victim is female. While both men and women may experience incidents of domestic abuse, women are considerably more likely to suffer more serious injury and ongoing assaults than men, and more likely to fear for their lives.

## 3. Is domestic abuse that common?

It's an enduring social problem, with at least 1 in 4 women in Scotland experiencing domestic abuse in her lifetime. Around 60,000 incidents of domestic abuse are recorded each year by Police Scotland. There is still widespread stigma about domestic abuse, so most women who experience domestic abuse don't report it out of fear of not being believed or because they don't think anything will change even if they do report it. Victim-survivors may feel ashamed of what has happened and believe it is their fault.



## 4. If it's that bad, why don't women leave?

It can be extremely difficult to leave an abusive partner. Women are often at the greatest risk of harm and violence at the point of separation or after leaving their partner. They may fear what a partner will do if they leave, particularly if the partner has threatened to kill them or their children. Women may believe that staying is better for the children. Victim-survivors sometimes hope that their partner will change, remembering good times at the start of the relationship and hoping they will return.

Perpetrators use economic abuse to stop their partner from leaving. Women often have no access to money or other economic resources which can make it very difficult to leave. Women may fear the financial implications of leaving and stay much longer than they would have if they had financial independence.

Women from Black and minority ethnic communities, lesbian, bisexual and transgender women, disabled women, asylum seekers and women with insecure immigration status may face additional barriers to seeking support to leave - such as physical barriers, language, poverty and discrimination. Some women worry that support services may not be able to understand their specific experiences or meet their needs.

Domestic abuse often doesn't end when a woman has left. Perpetrators may continue to abuse, harass and stalk victim-survivors once the relationship is over.

## 5. Why is domestic abuse a workplace issue?

Historically domestic abuse was considered by some to only affect women at home, however it extends to all aspects of a woman's life, and the workplace is no exception. Domestic



abuse follows women to work and not only impacts on their wellbeing, but can also affect their colleagues and ultimately the company they work for. It can disrupt the smooth running of a business by causing reduced productivity, increased absenteeism and higher employee turnover.

The majority of women who experience domestic abuse are targeted at work. Perpetrators of domestic abuse often use workplace resources such as phones and emails to threaten, harass, or abuse their current or former partner. Perpetrators tactics such as sabotage, stalking and harassment at work affect women's ability to do their job, and to sustain employment.

Perpetrators use employment sabotage to restrict women's access to economic resources or their ability to improve their economic position. It can include preventing victim-survivors from working or accessing training and education. It can limit women's long-term employment prospects due to long periods of absence, and the inability to complete training qualifications which in turn reduce earning potential.

## 6. What can employers do?

If a staff member discloses an experience of domestic abuse, your priority should be to support them and ensure they are safe. This means speaking with them to identify their needs, and agree how the business can best support them. You should conduct a risk assessment to identify safety risks at work. You can take simple and practical steps to ensure your employee's safety. Learn more about section of [Domestic Abuse](http://www.thinkbusinessthinkequality.org.uk) on [www.thinkbusinessthinkequality.org.uk](http://www.thinkbusinessthinkequality.org.uk)



There are also simple steps that you can take to support the staff member, including adjusting their workload, or enabling them to work flexibly, for example, by changing their start and finish times. They may need to take time off to attend doctor's appointments, solicitor's appointments, appointments to change bank accounts, moving schools, moving to a new house or help with police investigations. You can also signpost to specialist support services, such as the local Women's Aid.

## 7. What can I do as a colleague?

If one of your colleagues is experiencing domestic abuse and has shared this with you, it can be hard to know what to do. You should be supportive, non-judgemental and listen to them. You can suggest that they disclose this to their line manager, especially if they are having a hard time managing at work. You can also suggest they access specialist support services such as the local Women's Aid.

If someone does disclose their experience to you, you should treat this with strict confidentiality and not tell other colleagues.

## 8. How would I know that a colleague is experiencing domestic abuse?

A victim-survivor of domestic abuse may not disclose their experience to anyone at work because of the stigmatisation of domestic abuse and fear of not being believed. However, there are signs that someone may be experiencing domestic abuse and knowing what they are can be helpful for providing support. Signs someone may be experiencing domestic abuse include:

- A change in productivity at work which could include changes in quality of work;
- Being persistently late without explanation, or needing to leave early;



- Having frequent or sporadic absences without explanation;
- Increased hours being worked, for example very early arrival at work or working late;
- Constantly checking their phone, or receiving repeated upsetting calls, texts or emails;
- A change in behaviour which could include feeling depressed, anxious, distracted or having problems with concentration;
- Exhibiting fearful behaviour such as being easily startled;
- Avoiding lunch breaks or socialising;
- Being secretive about their home life;
- A change in their physical state which could include a change in the way they dress such as excessive clothing in the summer, being unkempt or dishevelled;
- A change in the amount of make-up worn;
- Frequent and/or sudden unexpected medical problems;
- Having repeated injuries and/or explanation for injuries that do not fit the injuries they have;
- Fatigue;
- Sleeping or eating disorder; and
- Substance use or dependence.

This is not an exhaustive list of signs someone may be experiencing domestic abuse. Knowing the signs is helpful to understand why there might be a change in your colleague's behaviour and also help you support your colleague.



## 9. What if I know someone is experiencing domestic abuse at work but they haven't told anyone?

If you think a colleague is experiencing domestic abuse, you could try to start a conversation to be supportive. If you are a line manager and think one of your team may be affected by domestic abuse, starting a conversation will help you to identify what kind of support they need.

Shying away from the subject can perpetuate fear and stigma, which makes it harder for women to come forward. Often staff will not feel confident speaking up, so it's good practice to make the first move.

It's important to be supportive and non-judgemental. Questions you can ask include:

- How are you doing at the moment? Is there anything you would like to discuss?
- I've noticed that you're not yourself lately, is everything okay?
- Are there any problems or reasons that may be contributing to your frequent sickness absence and why you're missing deadlines?
- Is everything alright at home?
- What support do you think might help?

You can find out more information about domestic abuse in the workplace by taking the **DOMESTIC ABUSE** test at [www.thinkbusinessthinkequality.org.uk](http://www.thinkbusinessthinkequality.org.uk)



Close the Gap works in Scotland on women's labour market participation. We work with policymakers, employers and employees to influence and enable action that will address the causes of women's inequality at work.

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