



# HSE Policy on Domestic Violence for Public Health Service Employees

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## 1. Introduction

1.1 The Health Service Executive (HSE) and Section 38 organisations in the public health service<sup>1</sup> are committed to supporting employee health and wellbeing in a safe and secure working environment and to creating a workplace culture that does not tolerate domestic violence or the attitudes which underpin it. This policy covers the internal and external support available to employees who have been or are being subjected to domestic violence, or where the employee is supporting a relevant person. The policy incorporates relevant provisions of the *Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023*, which introduces domestic violence leave.

1.2 Employers recognise the increasing prevalence and impact of domestic violence in wider society and the negative impacts it can have on the morale, performance and working lives of staff who are directly affected, as well as on their colleagues. This policy affirms the employers' commitment to supporting staff and colleagues impacted by domestic violence by creating awareness and providing workplace supports, including statutory domestic violence leave.<sup>2</sup> This will be achieved by promoting a safe and inclusive work environment where those impacted by domestic violence feel comfortable speaking about the issue and can be directed towards appropriate supports.

1.3 The term 'domestic violence'<sup>3</sup> goes beyond actual physical violence. It can also involve the destruction of property; isolation from friends, family and other potential sources of support; threats to the person and others including children; stalking; and control over access to money, personal items, food, transportation, the telephone and mobile devices. It affects men and women and occurs in all social classes, all ethnic groups and among people of every educational background. It can be described as the use of physical or emotional force or the threat of physical

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this policy, the HSE and Section 38 organisations are referred to as 'employers'.

<sup>2</sup> HSE HR Circular 002/2024

<sup>3</sup> Source: Department of Justice [HERE](#).

force, including sexual violence in close adult relationships. See **Appendix 1** for further guidance on the types of domestic violence.

1.4 Domestic violence can profoundly affect the physical, emotional, social and financial wellbeing of individuals and families. It is perpetrated against a person by that person's spouse, intimate partner, ex-partner, other family members and/or another person at home. Domestic violence is a pattern of repeated abusive and controlling behaviours that occurs within an intimate or family relationship and may even continue after the relationship has ended.

1.5 The Domestic Violence Act 2018 recognises in law the impact that emotional abuse can have on those it is inflicted upon by the creation of the offence of Coercive Control. To learn more about Coercive Control [Click Here](#)

1.6 Domestic violence is often unreported and misunderstood. The Department of Justice website states that research suggests that in the region of 213,000 women and 88,000 men in Ireland have been severely abused by a partner at some point in their lives<sup>4</sup>. A survey published by Fórsa in 2022 found that just under a third of respondents (31%) indicated that they had personally experienced domestic abuse. It is important to note that men as well as women and persons in same-sex relationships can also be victims of violence in the home and in relationships.

1.7 Domestic violence is often a hidden problem and individuals can find it very difficult to disclose. There may be additional barriers to disclosure (such as race, LGBT+) which may make it harder for some employees to feel comfortable about disclosing they are experiencing domestic violence. Some employees might not think they are experiencing domestic violence and might not use this term to describe their personal experiences. However, they might refer to behaviour from their partner that is violent, emotionally abusive and controlling.

1.8 Any employee can experience domestic violence and the workplace may be the only safe space they have to seek the help they need. Supportive and

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<sup>4</sup> Source: Department of Justice <https://whatwouldyoudo.ie/>

empathetic managers and work colleagues can play a vital role in assisting an employee who is experiencing domestic violence in gaining confidence to seek support from the relevant professional services. A workplace culture which values and supports its employees irrespective of any personal characteristic can give employees the confidence to ask for support, and know the issue will be treated seriously and respectfully. See section 14 for details on confidentiality.

1.9 This policy was produced in consultation with the health service trade unions and associations.

## **2. Policy Statement**

2.1 Employers are committed to providing a safe and supportive workplace environment for public health service employees who are experiencing domestic violence. Employers recognise that the workplace can often be one of the few places that a person experiencing abuse can be separate from the perpetrator and therefore can be the place where people are able to ask for and access support.

2.2 This policy aims to ensure that employers have an effective framework of support in their workplaces which comprises the following key steps (the “3Rs”):

- **Recognise** the signs of domestic violence
- **Respond** appropriately to disclosures of domestic violence
- **Refer** an employee to the appropriate specialist services

2.3 The HSE National Social Inclusion Office provides further information and links to relevant documents on domestic, sexual and gender-based violence [here](#).

## **3. Purpose of the Policy**

3.1 The purpose of this policy is to:

- Raise awareness of the prevalence and impact of domestic violence and remove the stigma that can prevent individuals from seeking help.

- Promote a workplace culture that facilitates disclosures of domestic violence and abuse.
- Provide for a period of paid time away from work for an employee who has experienced, is experiencing or is at risk of experiencing domestic violence and abuse.
- Explain what domestic violence means.
- Highlight that domestic violence and abuse is a workplace issue that can adversely affect an employee's work performance, attendance and retention.
- Help employees to recognise whether they are being subjected to domestic violence and abuse and encourage them to seek help as soon as possible.
- Assure all employees that the workplace is a safe environment to access support.
- Assist employees in obtaining specialist supports as early as possible.
- Assure employees that disclosure of domestic violence and abuse will be managed in a sensitive manner.
- Assure employees that disclosure of domestic violence and abuse is confidential and will not ordinarily be shared with other members of staff without their permission.
- Support the retention, safety and wellbeing of employees who have or are being subjected to domestic violence and abuse.
- Promote a respectful and safe work environment that does not condone or excuse domestic violence.

For the sake of clarity, there is never any obligation on an employee to disclose that they are currently or have in the past been subjected to domestic violence or abuse.

#### **4. Recognise Domestic Violence as a Workplace Issue**

4.1 Employers have a duty of care for the safety, health and welfare of their staff and can create a safe and supportive workplace environment to assist employees who are experiencing domestic violence in their personal lives. Domestic violence can happen to anyone and may put limits on an employee's full and active participation at work. It can have a detrimental effect on an employee's wellbeing,

morale, work performance and career progression. It can lead to higher absenteeism, reduced productivity and quality of work and higher staff turnover.

4.2 If an employee is experiencing domestic violence, it can negatively affect the morale and motivation of other work colleagues who may be unaware of the underlying issues affecting an employee's work performance and/or attendance. In some cases work colleagues may be aware or suspect that an employee is being subjected to domestic violence but may not know how to help.

4.3 An employee who is experiencing domestic violence may be at greater risk of leaving their job (e.g. due to pressure from the perpetrator or health issues). However, a steady income is often key to an individual's financial independence and their opportunity to escape from an abusive relationship.

4.4 As well as the importance of retaining financial independence, the workplace can also be one of the few places that a person experiencing domestic violence can be separate from their perpetrator. It can therefore be the place where someone can ask for support and access information to enable them to take appropriate action.

4.5 An employee can also experience domestic violence while at work through threatening phone calls, text messages and emails.

4.6 All employees who experience domestic violence should be supported, regardless of gender or any other personal characteristics, and the type of alleged abuse. It is important not to make assumptions about what someone might be experiencing or the gender of the perpetrator.

## **5. Scope**

5.1 This policy applies to all public health service employees in the HSE and Section 38 organisations regardless of whether they are permanent or temporary, full-time or part-time.

5.2 All employees are entitled to avail of paid leave for domestic violence (see section 7). There is no minimum service required to qualify for statutory domestic violence leave. Such leave may be availed of by an employee directly experiencing domestic violence and abuse, or where an employee is supporting a 'relevant person' (see section 6). The domestic violence to which the supports relate includes experiences that are ongoing, as well as past experiences.

## 6. Glossary of terms and definitions

6.1 The legal term in Ireland is 'domestic violence'<sup>5</sup>. The terms domestic violence, domestic abuse or domestic violence and abuse are used interchangeably throughout this document to acknowledge that many victim-survivors identify more with the term 'domestic abuse' as it is less associated with abuse that is just physical in nature. These terms all refer to the same set of physical and non-physical abusive behaviours perpetrated by current/former intimate partners and family members (including emotional, physical, sexual and economic abuse and coercive control).

6.2 'Domestic violence' is defined as: violence, or threat of violence, including sexual violence and acts of coercive control committed against an employee or a relevant person by another person who-

- i. is the spouse or civil partner of the employee or relevant person,
- ii. is the cohabitant of the employee or relevant person,
- iii. is or was in an intimate relationship with the employee or relevant person, or
- iv. is a child of the employee or relevant person who is of full age and is not, in relation to the employee or relevant person, a dependent person.

A 'relevant person' is someone who is being supported by the employee and is one of the following-

- a) the spouse or civil partner of the employee,
- b) the cohabitant of the employee,
- c) a person with whom the employee is in an intimate relationship,
- d) a child of the employee who has not attained full age, or

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<sup>5</sup> This definition is set out in Part 2 of the *Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023*.

e) a person who, in relation to the employee, is a dependent person.

A 'dependent person' mean any child of the person, or in respect of whom the person is in *loco parentis*, who is not of full age, or, if the child has attained full age, is suffering from a mental or physical disability to such an extent that it is not reasonably possible for him or her to live independently of the employee or relevant person.

6.3 "Coercive Control" is defined in Section 39 of the Domestic Violence Act 2018. It provides that a person commits an offence where he or she knowingly and persistently engages in behaviour that

(a) is controlling or coercive

(b) has a serious effect on a relevant person,

(c) a reasonable person would consider likely to have a serious effect on a relevant person.

The Act also says that the requirement of a 'serious effect' means behaviour that causes the person to

(a) Fear that violence will be used against him or her  
or

(b) Serious alarm or distress that has a substantial adverse impact on his or her usual day-to-day activities.

To learn more about Coercive Control [Click Here](#)

6.4 "Spouse" is defined in Section 2 of the Domestic Violence Act 2018 and includes a person who was a party to a marriage that has been dissolved, being a dissolution that is recognised as valid in the State.

6.5 "LGBT" stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender/transsexual people. However, it is recognised that those four letters do not necessarily include all those whose sexuality is not heterosexual, or whose gender identity is not based on a traditional gender binary. The '+' symbol (LGBT+) is therefore used to include

people whose identities do not fit typical binary notions of male and female, or who decide to identify themselves using other categories to describe their gender identity or their own understanding of their sexuality. Please refer to the Council of Europe website [here](#).

6.6 The term 'victim-survivor' refers to anyone who has been subjected to domestic abuse and is used to reflect the fact that some people prefer the term 'victim' while others prefer 'survivor'. Some prefer neither term and individuals' preferences should always be respected in direct conversation.

## **7. Paid Domestic Violence Leave**

7.1 The Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023 provides that an employee is entitled to avail of domestic violence leave with pay if they or a relevant person has experienced in the past, or is currently experiencing, domestic violence.

7.2 The purpose of domestic violence leave is to enable the employee to do any of the following:

- i. seek medical attention;
- ii. obtain services from a victim services organisation;
- iii. obtain psychological or other professional counselling;
- iv. relocate their place of residence temporarily or permanently;
- v. obtain an order under the Domestic Violence Act 2018;
- vi. seek advice or assistance from a legal practitioner;
- vii. seek assistance from the Garda Síochána;
- viii. seek or obtain any other relevant services.

There is no minimum service period required in order to qualify for this leave.

7.3 While advance notice of the intention to avail of domestic violence leave is preferable, in certain circumstances, this may not be possible. Given the nature of domestic violence and the urgency with which a situation may arise, an employee is

not required to give prior notice of their intention to avail of domestic violence leave. When an employee takes domestic violence leave, they should notify their manager as soon as reasonably practicable.

7.4 While confidentiality and discretion around the sensitive issue of domestic violence is very important, a manager make seek more information in order to ensure that the employee can avail of their entitlement to domestic violence leave. In such circumstances, which should be the exception rather than the rule, managers should also be mindful of the difficult time that the employee is going through, and be careful not to unnecessarily or unwittingly add to the distress.

7.5 Domestic violence leave consists of one or more days on which, but for the leave, the employee would be working. An employee may be granted up to a maximum of **5 days' paid leave** in any period of 12 consecutive months<sup>6</sup>.

7.6 A day on which an employee is absent from work on domestic violence leave for part only of the period during which he or she is required to work on that day will be counted as one day of domestic violence leave.

7.7 If an employee has exhausted their entitlement to paid domestic violence leave, they may request other types of leave (paid or unpaid) and should engage with their line manager (or another appropriate manager). This may include annual leave, parental leave (if applicable) and unpaid leave.

## **8. How Employers will provide support**

### *8.1 Victims and survivors of domestic violence and abuse*

This policy is first and foremost for victims and survivors of domestic violence and abuse. You may not recognise or see yourself as a victim or survivor or yet realise that your circumstances could be considered as one of domestic violence or abuse. This policy may be the first step in recognising this and will encourage you to seek guidance and support. You are encouraged to read and be assured by the

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<sup>6</sup> HSE HR Circular

processes outlined in this policy, particularly regarding confidentiality and workplace supports.

The Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), if available<sup>7</sup>, may be a good first step to seeking guidance (see section 18.2). You will never be forced to share any information that you do not want to, but if and when you do, there is a safe and supportive space in which to do so.

## 8.2 “Recognise, Respond, Refer”

All managers, colleagues and HR Departments play a vital role in signposting the way to appropriate supports. This role is facilitated through the framework of ‘Recognise, Respond and Refer’. The aim of this approach is to guide managers, HR Departments and/or colleagues on how to recognise and respond to domestic violence and abuse in a workplace context and to refer colleagues to appropriate supports, such as specialist domestic violence and abuse services. This will assist a victim or survivor in accessing information, counselling, legal support or accommodation options. Further details of this approach are outlined in sections 11, 12 and 13.

## 8.3 Role of the Manager

Managers interact with their teams on a regular basis and are often in a prime position to notice changes in performance, attendance and behaviour. These changes may not always be indicators of domestic violence and abuse. However, becoming familiar with this policy and the ‘Recognise, Respond, Refer’ approach allows managers to become more attuned to the issue and gauge when to start a conversation with a view to providing supports. The role of a manager includes:

- Becoming familiar with this policy document and any supporting guidelines, keeping the policy to hand so it is accessible when required.
- Having an open mind when there are changes in performance and attendance, for example, having particular regard to the signs outlined in Appendix 3.

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<sup>7</sup> Section 38 employers should outline the services available to their employees.

- Starting a conversation in a sensitive and non-judgemental manner at an appropriate place and time. Further details on having a conversation are outlined in Appendix 4 and in the ‘Strengthening Understanding and Awareness’ information resource.
- Ensure that lines of communication are kept open with staff in a remote or hybrid working environment.
- Be familiar with the supports that are available, such as domestic violence leave, temporary change of work patterns or adjustments of workload and additional workplace security measures.
- Consider and approve applications for domestic violence leave as soon as practicable, having regard to confidentiality.
- Seek advice from the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) if additional information on specialist services or guidance on having a sensitive conversation is required.
- Keep information on domestic violence disclosures confidential; have a designated and locked place in which to store information.
- Where agreed with the staff member, take note of the safety measures that have been put in place. Make sure this note is accessible in the event of the staff member or their colleague(s) being put at risk in the workplace. See Appendix 5 for a sample workplace safety plan guide.

#### *8.4 Role of Colleagues*

Employees spend a considerable amount of time in the workplace and can develop friendships and positive relationships with their work colleagues. As a consequence, a victim of domestic violence or abuse may feel comfortable confiding in someone they trust in the workplace. A trusted colleague may also be in a position to recognise some of the signs of domestic violence and abuse set out in Appendix 3.

The manager therefore should be mindful that there may be circumstances where an employee is not comfortable making a disclosure to them and may share a confidence about domestic violence or abuse with a colleague who they trust. Where an employee confides in another colleague, that colleague should be supportive, non-judgmental and treat information in confidence. They may wish to bring this policy to the attention of the employee and signpost them towards appropriate

internal and external supports as outlined. All employees need to be mindful that they should be fully respectful of the need for confidentiality and should not pass on information to others – this includes managers, HR or other colleagues - without the consent of the person themselves (except in very limited cases as outlined in section 14 – ‘confidentiality’). Where someone confides in you as a trusted colleague, you should signpost your colleague towards appropriate internal and external supports as outlined.

### *8.5 The role of Human Resources*

The Human Resource Department (HR) plays an important role in ensuring that there is an open and inclusive workplace culture that supports staff who are impacted by domestic violence in the workplace. HR can not only direct staff members towards appropriate supports where required; they also play a key role in creating organisational awareness and facilitating training. HR also has a role in reminding managers and colleagues to maintain clear boundaries and not assume the role of counsellor or problem solver. HR should clearly signal the correct pathways to access information so that staff members can avail of appropriate supports and guidance when required.

### *8.6 The role of a named Contact Person*

Each HSE area/division/unit and Section 38 employer may arrange for a number of trained employees to act as contact persons on a voluntary basis. The contact details of these managers should be maintained by local HR/Employee Relations Departments and circulated to relevant staff. Employees who act in this role should undergo additional training<sup>8</sup> and be familiar with this policy and the documented pathways to support available to victims. Any employee who acts in this role should understand the importance of confidentiality, be aware of the requirement to maintain clear boundaries and not assume the role of counsellor or problem solver. The location and number of named contact persons can be tailored to the structure and size of an organisation/area/division/unit.

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<sup>8</sup> Women’s Aid provide specialist training <https://www.womensaid.ie/get-training/>

## 9. Other Workplace Supports

9.1 In addition to paid domestic violence leave, employees are encouraged to avail of the organisation's Employee Assistance Programme (see Section 16). Employees may request other supports from their line manager including, but not limited to, the following:

- Flexible working arrangements: employees may request an adjustment to their working hours or work location (temporary or permanent). Such requests will be considered by the employee's manager on a case-by-case basis having regard to the individual's personal circumstances and service needs.
- Change of work contact details: employees may request a change of work phone number and/or work email address if required.

Line managers should give due consideration to any such requests and take appropriate action as soon as is reasonably practicable.

9.2 A list of domestic abuse specialist organisations is available at **Appendix 2** of this Policy. This information should be provided to employees disclosing domestic violence or abuse. Where appropriate, the employee will be supported to access a safe physical space and/or method of communication from which to contact these services.

## 10. Training and Awareness

10.1 Employers will facilitate staff attending available training to help them develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours required to respond sensitively to staff who may have experienced or are experiencing domestic violence and abuse. Training will aim to familiarise staff with the competencies to employ the already mentioned Recognise, Respond and Refer framework of support.

10.2 There is no expectation, nor is it appropriate, that a staff member, colleague, manager, named contact person or HR representative adopt the role of counsellor or adviser on matters that are more appropriate to professionals or expert support networks. However, all staff members have a role to play in fostering a workplace that does not tolerate domestic violence and abuse or the attitudes which underpin it. We must also be mindful that, as colleagues and managers, we may be the ones to first suspect or become aware that a staff member has or is experiencing domestic violence and can be prepared by familiarising ourselves with this policy and undertaking available training and awareness sessions.

10.3 Training may comprise, but is not limited to the following.

***Creating awareness***

- Online seminars, lunch-and-learn presentations, inclusion in mental health and wellbeing events, staff newsletters, inclusion in local inductions.

***E-learning modules***

- The DSGBV Training Module 1 – Awareness is now live on HSELand. This eLearning module is aimed at all HSE staff and staff from funded services and it features information about DSGBV in all its forms, its prevalence and impacts on specific communities, as well as provide information about the national policy context and relevant legislation. See link below:

HSE Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence (DSGBV) Training Module 1 - Awareness

***In-person training***

- Training courses for managers, HRs and named contact persons who may require additional guidance on proactively recognising the impacts of domestic violence and abuse and who may be required to manage disclosures. Women's Aid provides specialist

training and details are available [here](#).

10.4 The HSE Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence (DSGBV) *Training Module 1 – Awareness* is now live on HSE LanD. This eLearning module is aimed at all HSE staff and staff from funded services and it features information about DSGBV in all its forms, its prevalence and impacts on specific communities, as well as provide information about the national policy context and relevant legislation. You can access the module here – [HSE Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence \(DSGBV\) Training Module 1 - Awareness](#). You can also find it by using the “search a module” tool with the key word “DSGBV”. Modules 2, 3 and 4 will focus on recognising, responding and referring victims of DSGBV respectively.

10.5 Further general information and guidance is available in *‘Strengthening Understanding & Awareness An information resource for the Public Health Service to accompany the ‘HSE Policy on Domestic Violence for Public Health Service Employees’*.

## **11. Recognise the signs of domestic violence**

11.1 Employers respect employees’ rights to privacy. However each employer is committed to the welfare of its employees and seeks to support and assist any employee who is experiencing problems related to domestic violence.

11.2 It is recognised that a person subject to domestic violence will usually be reluctant to disclose their experience. Whilst it is for the individual to recognise that they are a victim of domestic violence, some of the possible signs that may indicate to their manager or work colleagues that it is an issue include:

- Showing physical injuries or wearing unusual clothing as if to hide an injury (e.g., sunglasses indoors or extra make-up).
- Employee appears to be reluctant to go home.
- Poor punctuality and/or attendance pattern
- Deteriorating work performance
- Sudden changes in behaviour and/or changes in the quality of work performance for unexplained reasons

- A high level of contact during working hours, e.g., texts, telephone calls, e-mails, from the perpetrator.
- Noticeable fear when in the presence of the perpetrator.
- Changes in a blended working environment. Signs to be aware of include consistently on mute or off video; is interrupted frequently; does not participate fully in calls or meetings; the quality of work produced has decreased.

It is essential to understand that any of the above may arise from a range of circumstances of which domestic violence may be one so it is important not to make assumptions. **Appendix 3** provides further guidance on warning signs for when a person may be experiencing domestic violence.

11.3 If the employee discloses that they are experiencing personal issues other than domestic violence, this provides an opportunity to identify appropriate workplace supports.

11.4 Domestic violence is often a hidden problem that individuals may find very difficult to disclose. Individuals may also not recognise they are in an abusive relationship, especially if the abuse is not physical. If a manager or work colleague suspects that an employee is experiencing domestic violence, they should facilitate a conversation by asking open and empathetic questions to give the person the opportunity to disclose, such as:

How are you doing at the moment?

Is everything alright at home?

Are there any issues you'd like to discuss with me?

I have noticed recently that you are not yourself. Is anything the matter?

See Appendix 4 for further guidance on how to open the conversation.

11.5 Often employees will be reluctant to raise the subject, so a manager or work colleague making the first move to begin a conversation can be key in giving employees the confidence to disclose.

## 12. Respond appropriately to disclosure

12.1 Where there are concerns, but a manager or colleague is unsure about whether an employee is impacted by domestic violence, they can:

- Consider asking open questions in a private setting to allow the employee to disclose their experience if they wish to do so.
- Where a disclosure is made, provide or support access to available support as appropriate (see Appendix 2).

12.2 If an employee discloses to their manager and/or another work colleague that they are experiencing domestic violence, it is important to bear in mind that the person should be treated as an individual as everyone's situation will be different.

Further guidance is set out in Appendix 4. The following is a summary of

- Show empathy and compassion when responding to an employee's disclosure of experiencing domestic violence e.g. "That must have been very frightening for you".
- Emphasise the unacceptability of violence e.g. "You do not deserve to be treated like this".
- Validate the decision to disclose e.g. "It must have been difficult to talk about this".
- Don't make assumptions about what someone is experiencing or what they need. This includes not assuming the gender of someone's partner.
- Reassure the employee that the organisation understands how domestic violence may affect their work performance and outline the paid domestic violence leave provisions and other practical workplace supports e.g. temporary adjustment to working hours where appropriate.
- Respect an employee's boundaries.
- Acknowledge the right of the individual to make their own decision on the course of action they wish to take.
- Recognise that not every person experiencing domestic violence will want to exit an abusive relationship and the steps they take to address their situation may be a gradual process.

- Be aware that the most dangerous time for a victim of domestic violence is when they are on the verge of leaving the perpetrator and for 6 months afterwards. Recognise that it is neither helpful nor appropriate to suggest that a person experiencing domestic violence should leave their partner /spouse.
- Identify measures that may be required to ensure the employee's safety in the workplace. A sample workplace safety plan guide is attached at Appendix 5.
- Be cognisant of the fact that domestic violence may have a detrimental impact on an employee's work performance and take this into consideration when reviewing an employee's performance.

12.3 Working from home as part of a blended working arrangement can increase the intensity of domestic violence that an employee is subjected to, as perpetrators may have more opportunities to engage in abusive behaviour. Managers in particular should stay attuned to the wellbeing of employees when they work remotely, keeping in regular contact with employees. An employee who is subjected to domestic violence may not have any respite from the abuse and be unable to access a safe space except when they attend the work premises. Managers who suspect that an employee is being subjected to abuse should not attempt to open up the conversation by any method of communication while that employee is working from home in case they are being monitored by the abuser. An in-person meeting in the workplace should be organised instead.

### **13. Refer to the appropriate support**

13.1 It is important for all managers and work colleagues to be clear about their role and set boundaries. Managers and work colleagues should not adopt the role of counsellor or try to 'solve' the issue, but rather they should signpost employees who disclose domestic violence to specialist help and support services. See Appendix 2 of this Policy. An employee who makes a disclosure should be referred to this policy and informed of the entitlement to avail of paid leave.

13.2 Where possible public health service employers will offer safe and private spaces on the work premises for the employee to contact support services as needed. Upon request, a manager or other appropriate member of staff may make a

referral on an employee's behalf as the individual may find it difficult to make a number of disclosures to different agencies on a given day.

13.3 In addition to the statutory entitlement to avail of paid leave, managers should also consider what appropriate actions may be taken and engage with the employee. In responding to a disclosure and in considering the risks and impacts of domestic violence, it is important to understand and plan for the safety needs of the employee in or around the workplace. It should be agreed with the employee that a note of planned safety measures should be documented and stored confidentially in the event that it needs to be referred to at any stage. Workplace safety measures can include, but are not limited to:

- Temporary adjustment in working hours and/or times of attendance.
- Change in work location.
- Maintain confidentiality around the employee's work location and roster.
- Change of contact details (work phone number, email).
- Temporary change in specific work duties e.g. to avoid potential contact with the perpetrator.
- Improving or reviewing security measures on the work premises or other work locations and discussing how the employee can take appropriate steps to protect their own safety when travelling to or from work.
- Maintaining records of any acts of domestic violence that are carried out in the workplace. An employer may put in place appropriate measures to maintain records of the perpetrator subjecting an employee to inappropriate behaviour while at work and make these records available to an employee if required for the purpose of legal proceedings. This may include keeping a record of emails, texts, phone calls or CCTV footage.
- Consideration of existing barring, safety or protection orders applying to the employee.
- Understanding that any threats that warrant it, such as threats to physically harm or kill, should be reported to An Garda Síochána and relevant management in consultation with the employee. See section 14.7 for further guidance on confidentiality.

- With the employee's consent, the manager may link in with a specialist domestic violence and abuse service to develop a safety plan that will be treated as confidential and shared on a need-to-know basis. Only aspects of the safety plan related to work will be shared.

13.4 Depending on the proposed measures, a manager may discuss with the employee whether it would be appropriate to inform other staff members of the situation, on a strictly need-to-know basis, and agree a response if the perpetrator seeks to contact other work colleagues.

13.5 Any such measures (temporary or permanent) should be considered on a case-by-case basis having regard to the individual's personal circumstances and service needs.

13.6 Managers should follow up with the employee as appropriate and in a sensitive manner to keep up to date on their situation and identify any additional workplace supports they may require.

## **14. Confidentiality**

14.1 Employers recognise and respect the right to privacy for all staff and the need for confidentiality. Employers acknowledge their duty of care in respect of staff safety in the workplace and at what point to disclose potential safety risks.

14.2 It is important at the outset for employees to know that conversations around domestic violence will always be held in a private and confidential space. Managers and staff should also keep this at the forefront of their minds when engaging in any conversations around domestic violence.

14.3 All information regarding domestic violence will be kept confidential and shared only with employees who have a legitimate need to know about it and with the express knowledge of the employee concerned. For example, information may be shared with colleagues so that they can document necessary safety measures. Only information necessary to carrying out these tasks will be shared.

14.4 These records will be stored securely, kept strictly confidential, and retained only for as long as necessary in line with the organisation's Data Protection Policy<sup>9</sup> and GDPR obligations. No details of disclosed violence or abuse experienced outside the workplace, unless directly impacting work, should be included.

14.5 Sharing information with others does not have to equate to a breach of confidentiality; managers should consider how they can share information to achieve a specific outcome without releasing personally identifiable information about the employee or informing others of their disclosure of domestic violence.

14.6 Employees to whom a disclosure is made are required to uphold confidentiality. Improper disclosure of information is a serious matter and may be subject to disciplinary action.

14.7 It is recognised that concerns around confidentiality being breached may prevent an employee from disclosing in the workplace. In circumstances where confidentiality cannot be maintained (e.g. statutory obligations regarding children as set out in the [HSE Child Protection and Welfare Policy](#) or vulnerable adults as set out in the [HSE Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Policy](#) or where there is a requirement to act directly to protect the safety of employees), the employee will be informed of the reasons why and that the information will be shared on a need-to-know basis only. Care will be taken to ensure that the sharing of information does not put the employee at greater risk. Where necessary, advice will be sought from specialist support organisations with responsibility for child protection and welfare, protection of vulnerable adults and the Gardaí where appropriate. Further details on support organisations are available in Appendix 1.

## **15. Maintaining Records**

15.1 Employers may retain confidentially records which relate to:

- Details of agreed safety measures (if any)

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<sup>9</sup> The HSE Data Protection Policy is available [here](#).

- Details of abuse occurring in or near the workplace or using workplace equipment.

*This list is illustrative and not exhaustive.*

15.2 When an employee discloses domestic violence they may choose to share some detail about the forms of abuse to which they have been subjected. The information they share may relate specifically to the workplace but may also extend to experiences that have not directly impacted work. Should the affected employee decide at some point to seek protection from the Gardaí or the courts, they will need a record of what has been done to them to prove their experience and help establish that it is a pattern of abuse. Records of the abuse they have experienced in relation to work could be helpful in such cases.

15.3 Examples of useful records include:

- Copies of emails, phone records, voicemails, etc. received on work communication channels.
- Evidence of abuse over the internet, digital technology, and social media platforms.
- Records of interaction with services such as support services or occupational health services.
- Witnesses: For example, colleagues may be able to give evidence about the affected employee being monitored or stalked and the impact it has had on them.
- Notes of threats made by the perpetrator to coworkers.
- A personal diary with dates, incidents, and any statements made to the Gardaí.

15.4 Details of the abuse shared by the employee should only be recorded at their request and only as it relates to the workplace. No details of disclosed abuse experienced outside the workplace, unless directly impacting work, should be included. If records are retained, they must be kept confidential and stored securely.

## **16. Disciplinary Issues**

16.1 Public health service employers will not tolerate disrespectful behaviour in the workplace and this includes any act of domestic violence. The high prevalence of domestic violence makes it likely that, just as an organisation may have victim-

survivors of domestic abuse within its workforce, it may also include perpetrators of violence, abuse and coercive control. Aside from their impact on employee victim-survivors and their work colleagues, employees who perpetrate domestic abuse may use work property, time or equipment to do so, with consequent impacts on their own attendance, performance and safety at work. There are two main circumstances in which concerns around an employee's conduct with respect to domestic abuse should be considered:

- An employee perpetrates domestic abuse against an individual who is not employed in/for the same organisation, or
- Both an employee disclosing domestic violence and an employee who is alleged to have perpetrated the abuse work together in/for the same organisation.

16.2 Employers will hold alleged perpetrators accountable for incidents of domestic violence and abuse committed in the workplace, during work hours or through work equipment regardless of whether the person targeted by the abuse is employed in the same organisation or not. In such cases, disciplinary procedures may be invoked with potential sanctions up to and including dismissal. All employees should also be aware of their obligations under the Department of Health Code of Conduct [here](#).

16.3 In circumstances where both parties are employed by the same employer, an employee who wishes to refer a complaint of sexual harassment or harassment during the course of their work may invoke the *Dignity at Work Policy for Public Health Service Employees*.

16.4 All employees are expected to demonstrate behaviour that does not support domestic violence and are prohibited from engaging in disrespectful and discriminatory behaviour during the course of their work such as offensive jokes, aggressive or demeaning comments or other inappropriate behaviour that undermines a person's dignity and creates a hostile working environment.

16.5 Employees who knowingly facilitate abuse, for example, by providing the alleged perpetrator with access to equipment or information on the employee such as contact details, location or rostering arrangements, will also be subject to the disciplinary process.

16.6 Any employee who is subject to a disciplinary process has a right to a fair process in accordance with the provisions of the organisation's Disciplinary Procedure.

## **17. Employees who are perpetrators of domestic violence**

17.1 Employers recognise that it may be appropriate to support an employee who is seeking help to address behaviour that may constitute domestic violence and signpost them to appropriate specialist services. An employee may avail of internal specialist supports where available such as an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) and may be given contact details for external specialist organisations for perpetrators of domestic violence. Any direction towards supports does not preclude disciplinary action being taken where this is appropriate or warranted.

## **18. Workplace Health and Wellbeing Supports**

18.1 Employees should be informed of the specific supports that can be accessed internally within their organisation or other arrangements that may apply. Employees should also be advised that they can contact their relevant trade union/staff association for advice and support.

*Each Section 38 employer will inform their employees of the services that are available within their organisation and how these can be accessed.*

In the case of HSE employees the following services are available:

### **18.2 HSE Employee Assistance Programme**

The HSE Employee Assistance Programme provides a confidential counselling support and referral service for all staff with personal or work-related issues. The service is provided by trained and experienced counsellors who are professionally qualified and bound by the codes of conduct of the professional bodies to which they belong. Contact details for the HSE EAP service is available online.

Employees do not need to contact HR or their line manager to use the service. Employees can phone or email the EAP contact for their area to arrange a consultation with a counsellor. This is known as self-referral. A manager can make a referral for an employee, with the employee's agreement, if they have concerns for the employee's wellbeing.

<https://healthservice.hse.ie/staff/benefits-services/benefits/counselling.html>

### 18.3 HSE Occupational Health Services

Occupational Health Services aim to promote and maintain the physical, mental and social wellbeing of employees. Occupational Health (OH) provides a confidential independent advisory service. The emphasis of the service is on the protection of employees from the possible adverse effects of work related activity and on health promotion.

Employees or managers seeking support or advice can access further information from:

<https://healthservice.hse.ie/staff/benefits-services/occupational-health/>

18.4 Although employers have a key role to play in supporting employees subjected to domestic violence and abuse, a safe and effective response does not stop there. Affected employees will benefit from being referred to external specialist domestic violence support services in the community which are experienced in responding to the complexities of domestic abuse and can offer the sustained support that the workplace response cannot provide. Specialist domestic violence services are also equipped to coordinate their response with key community partners, such as the Gardaí, ensuring a more effective response especially in high-

risk situations. See **Appendix 2** for a list of specialist domestic abuse and violence services.

## **19. Roles and Responsibilities**

### *19.1 HSE CEO*

The HSE CEO has responsibility for:

- Ensuring that governance arrangements are in place in order that legislative and organisational obligations are met in relation to the HSE Domestic Violence Leave Policy. The HSE CEO may delegate accountability for coordinating and monitoring implementation of this Policy and any associated procedures to senior managers such as the HSE National Directors, Assistant National Directors, Hospital Group Chief Executive Officers, Chief Officers Community Health Organisations.

### *19.2 HSE National Directors (NDs), Chief Officers (COs) of Community Healthcare Organisations (CHOs), Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of Hospital Groups (HGs) and Section 38 Intellectual Disability/Social Care Agencies*

HSE National Directors, Chief Officers of the CHOs and Chief Executive Officers of the Hospital Groups and Section 38 Intellectual Disability/Social Care Agencies are responsible for:

- Overseeing the development, provision and communication of resources and supports locally to assist the implementation of this policy, in conjunction with appropriate personnel. This includes the identification and resourcing of appropriate personnel and ensuring training and instruction to staff.
- Endorsing and supporting local implementation of the policy.

### *19.3 HR*

Promote the effective implementation of the Policy in the workplace through awareness sessions and access to training supports.

Act as an alternative point of contact for employees who are experiencing domestic abuse and would prefer to disclose to someone outside of their department/work area. HR personnel should not adopt the role of counsellor or try to 'solve' the issue, but rather they should signpost employees who disclose domestic violence to specialist help and support services. See Appendix 2 of this Policy.

#### *19.4 Line Managers*

Line managers at all levels are responsible for the following:

- Promote awareness of the Policy among their team through induction and team meetings.
- Arrange for employees to undergo training provided by the employer.
- Be attuned to changes in performance, attendance and behaviour having regard to the signs outlined in section 10 and gauge when to start a conversation in a sensitive and non-judgmental manner at an appropriate place and time. Be supportive of any employee who discloses that they are experiencing domestic violence and respond in a sympathetic, non-judgmental and confidential manner. Maintain clear boundaries and do not assume the role of counsellor or problem solver.
- Ensure that employees are aware of the entitlement to avail of paid domestic violence leave and signpost them towards appropriate supports internally and externally.
- Identify appropriate supports which may include temporary change of work patterns, temporary change in work location and additional workplace security measures. Where agreed with the employee, take note of the safety measures that have been put in place. Make sure that this note is accessible in the event of the employee or their colleague(s) being put at risk in the workplace.
- Ensure that lines of communication are kept open with employees who work remotely as part of a blended working arrangement.
- Keep a record of paid domestic violence leave.

### 19.5 *Employees*

- Foster a workplace that does not tolerate domestic violence or the attitudes which underpin it.
- Be familiar with the Domestic Violence Policy and have an awareness of domestic violence and its impact
- Understand that work colleagues may be affected by domestic violence and the potential warning signs (see Appendix 3)
- Be supportive of any colleague who discloses that they are experiencing domestic violence and respond in a sympathetic, non-judgmental and confidential manner. Maintain clear boundaries and do not assume the role of counsellor or problem solver.
- Inform an employee who is impacted by domestic violence of the paid leave provisions and signpost to the relevant supports available internally and externally.
- Do not divulge personal details of other employees such as addresses, telephone numbers or work rosters.

## **20. Implementation Plan**

20.1 This policy will be made available to all employees via distribution of a HR Circular to senior managers.

20.2 This policy will be made available to all employees via the HSE's internet site ([www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie))

20.3 A global broadcast will be sent to all HSE employees notifying them of the release of this document. Section 38 organisations will develop a communications plan relating to their own services.

20.4 This policy will be communicated to new employees as part of their induction process.

20.5 This policy will be reinforced on a periodic basis through team meetings and one-to-one engagements with employees.

20.6 This policy will be incorporated into training programmes for line managers.

## **21. Monitoring**

21.1 Each public health service employer is responsible for putting appropriate arrangements in place for monitoring compliance with the provisions in this policy.

21.2 The National Director of Human Resources is responsible for the revision and updating of this policy document. The policy will be reviewed 12 months after the date it comes into operation in consultation with the health service unions/staff associations at national level and every 3 years thereafter.

21.3 Contact details for further information:

National Employee Relations Services

Human Resources Division

Health Service Executive

63-64 Adelaide Road

Dublin 2 D02 FR50

Telephone: 01-6626966 Email: [info.t@hse.ie](mailto:info.t@hse.ie)

## Appendix 1 What is domestic violence?

Domestic violence and abuse occurs when a person tries to gain and maintain power and control over their current or former partner, or in some cases a family member, by using a pattern of intimidation, isolation, manipulation, coercion and assaults. Domestic abuse takes many forms. It can be physical, emotional, sexual, and economic, including coercive control. Abuse rarely takes one form; perpetrators of abuse use different tactics as part of a larger pattern of controlling and abusive behaviour. Importantly, physical abuse does not always have to be a factor in abusive relationships.

<b>Emotional abuse</b>	Emotional or psychological abuse refers to behaviours designed to isolate and undermine the victim-survivor in order to control them. It can include non-physical behaviours like threats, insults, humiliation, intimidation, isolation, stalking, and gaslighting.  Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Yelling, shouting or name calling</li><li>• Abusive texts, emails, and calls</li><li>• Threatening to harm the victim-survivor or themselves</li><li>• Monitoring the victim-survivor through the use of technology, e.g. checking phone log and messages, using social media to monitor movements, installing hidden cameras</li></ul>
<b>Economic abuse</b>	Economic abuse is when the abusive person restricts, exploits and sabotages the victim-survivor's access

	<p>to money and other resources, such as food, clothing, transportation and a place to live.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forbidding or preventing the victim-survivor from being in education or employment</li> <li>• Taking the victim-survivor's pay</li> <li>• Controlling use of property such as cars, mobile phones or laptops</li> <li>• Refusing to contribute to the cost of the household or childcare</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sexual abuse</b></p>	<p>Sexual abuse is when an abuser forces, pressures, or coerces the victim-survivor to do something sexually that they don't want to do. It is harder for people who are being abused to negotiate a free and equal sexual relationship with a partner, so the likelihood of sexual coercion is high.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Telling the victim-survivor they owe the abuser sex or oral sex</li> <li>• Unwanted kissing, touching or other sexual activity</li> <li>• Refusing to use a condom or restricting access to contraception</li> <li>• Taking, sharing or threatening to share sexually explicit images or videos without consent (also known as</li> </ul>

	'image-based sexual abuse')
<b>Physical abuse</b>	<p>Physical abuse is perhaps the most recognisable form of abuse. It doesn't always leave visible marks or scars but it can get much worse over time. It can result in physical injury and in some cases it can be life threatening. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slapping, shoving, scratching, punching, biting, strangling, choking, kicking, or burning</li> <li>• Pulling the victim-survivor's hair or grabbing their face</li> <li>• Throwing things at the victim-survivor or near them</li> <li>• Physically preventing the victim-survivor from leaving somewhere</li> </ul>
<b>Coercive control</b>	<p>Coercive control is a persistent pattern of controlling, coercive and threatening behaviour including all or some of the forms of domestic abuse. It tends to escalate over time, entrapping the victim-survivor in the relationship and making it feel impossible or dangerous to leave. Coercive control is a crime in Ireland.</p>
<b>Digital or online abuse</b>	<p>Digital or online abuse is the use of technologies such as texting and social networking to bully, harass, stalk or intimidate a partner. In most cases, this type of abuse is emotional and/or verbal and is perpetuated</p>

	<p>online.</p> <p>Examples include:</p> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sending negative, insulting or even threatening emails, Facebook messages, tweets</li> <li>• online “put downs” on status updates</li> <li>• sending unwanted and/or explicit pictures</li> <li>• stealing or insisting on being given online passwords</li> <li>• constantly checking of mobile phones for pictures, texts and calls</li> <li>• unkind comments/tags on Instagram or Tumblr etc.</li> </ul>
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Domestic violence can have a lasting impact on all aspects of a victim-survivor’s life: Physical, psychological, emotional, sexual & reproductive, social, and economic.

<p>Examples of impacts of domestic violence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of freedom and autonomy</li> <li>• Living in fear/’walking on eggshells’</li> <li>• Isolation</li> <li>• Difficulty retaining employment</li> <li>• Poverty</li> <li>• Homelessness</li> <li>• Physical disabilities</li> <li>• Unwanted pregnancy</li> <li>• Depression and anxiety</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Chronic pain</li><li>• Death</li></ul>
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**Source:** Women's Aid website [here](#).

## Appendix 2 Specialist Domestic Violence and Abuse Services

### Women's Aid

Women's Aid operates the 24hr National Freephone Helpline for victims-survivors of domestic violence. Support can also be accessed through the Instant Messaging Support Service, available on the relevant websites.

**1800 341 900**

[www.womensaid.ie](http://www.womensaid.ie)

[www.toointoyou.ie](http://www.toointoyou.ie)

### Men's Development Network

Men's Development Network operates the Male Advice Line, the national Freephone Helpline offering confidential advice and support to male victims-survivors of domestic abuse.

**1800 816 588**

[www.mensnetwork.ie](http://www.mensnetwork.ie)

### Men's Aid

National Confidential Helpline:  
01 554 3811 (Mon – Fri, 9.00am to 5.00pm)

**Email:** [hello@mensaid.ie](mailto:hello@mensaid.ie)

[www.mensaid.ie](http://www.mensaid.ie)

### LGBT Ireland

LGBT Ireland is a national organisation, which provides support, training and advocacy to LGBT+ people.

National LGBT Helpline:

**1890 929 539**

[www.lgbt.ie](http://www.lgbt.ie)

### HSE Sexual Assault Treatment Units

Information on care options if you have been raped or sexually assaulted.

<https://www2.hse.ie/services/satu/>

**Nasc Ireland**

Provides supports specifically for migrants and ethnic minorities.

<https://nascireland.org/>

**Elder abuse:** Information line  
Monday to Saturday, 8am to 8pm

HSE Information Line  
1850 24 1850  
[www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie)

**BeLonG To**

LGBTI+ youth support organisation for young people aged between 14–23 years

Tel: 01 670 6223  
Email: [info@belongto.org](mailto:info@belongto.org)  
[www.belongto.org](http://www.belongto.org)

**MOVE Ireland****(Men Overcoming Violence)**

Provides Domestic Violence Perpetrators Intervention Programmes for men where they are challenged to take responsibility for their abuse and to change their attitudes and behaviour and develop respectful, non-abusive relationships.

[www.moveireland.ie](http://www.moveireland.ie)

**TENI (Transgender Equality Network Ireland)**

Gender Identity Family Support Line

01 9073707  
[www.teni.ie](http://www.teni.ie)

**Tusla**

The State Child and Family Agency  
Operates under the Child and Family Act

[www.tusla.ie](http://www.tusla.ie)

2013

- Reporting Concerns – Child protection and welfare services
- Domestic and Gender Based Violence Services
- Family Resource Centres

**SAFE Ireland**

[www.safeireland.ie](http://www.safeireland.ie)

Programme for creating safety for women and children with a focus on research, public policy and awareness and provision of training.

- Contacts for National Services
- Advice for Employers

**Dublin Rape Crisis Centre**

24-hour helpline: 1800 77 8888

Webchat support service (Mon – Fri, 10.00am to 5.00pm (excl. bank holidays).  
Counselling & therapy services

[www.drcc.ie](http://www.drcc.ie)

**The Courts Service of Ireland**

[www.courts.ie](http://www.courts.ie)

**Citizens Information**

[www.citizensinformation.ie](http://www.citizensinformation.ie)

**Legal Aid Board**

[www.legalaidboard.ie](http://www.legalaidboard.ie)

**An Garda Síochána**

112 or 999

[www.garda.ie](http://www.garda.ie)

## Appendix 3 – Spotting the signs of domestic violence

Recognising the signs of domestic violence can be an important element of supporting an employee who is being subjected to domestic violence. The signs may vary from one person to the next and may not be at all apparent. There will usually be more than one sign occurring that creates concern about that employee. If something doesn't feel right, it probably isn't – while it should not be assumed that it is domestic violence, it could be. Examples of some common indicators are grouped into the categories below.

Managers or work colleagues should never assume that any of these factors mean the existence of abuse and should take the approach of enabling disclosure rather than diagnosing or presuming abuse. Also, the absence of such signs should not be assumed to mean the absence of abuse.

<b>Work attendance, productivity and/or participation</b>	<b>Social behaviour</b>	<b>Escalating signs of abuse</b>
<p>Frequent unexplained absence from work or an increase in sick leave.</p> <p>Unexplained changes to start times or being late for meetings, online or in person.</p> <p>Does not participate in calls or online meetings, or is on mute/video off for prolonged periods.</p> <p>Work hours:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spending an unusual</li> </ul>	<p>Becoming isolated from colleagues – not joining colleagues at break times, not joining in work social events</p> <p>Secrecy about home life and relationships.</p> <p>Isolation from family and friends.</p>	<p>Changes in behaviour – becoming quiet, anxious, frightened, aggressive, distracted or depressed.</p> <p>Physical changes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visible bruising or injuries with unlikely explanations</li> <li>• Changes in clothing, such as wearing long sleeves to hide injuries</li> <li>• Changes in appearance, e.g., in the use and pattern of make-up</li> <li>• Tiredness and irritability</li> </ul>

<p>number of hours at work for no obvious reason</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wanting to change working hours for no obvious reason</li> <li>• Fear about not leaving work on time</li> </ul> <p>Performance targets and deadlines are missed, and mistakes are made.</p> <p>Work quality is affected by frequent texts, emails, calls or visits/interruptions to work by the employee's partner. Signs of distress when these occur.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Substance use/misuse</li> <li>• Partner or ex-partner stalking an employee in or around the workplace or on social media</li> <li>• Partner or ex-partner exerting unusual amount of control or demands over work schedule.</li> </ul>
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Adapted from the Women's Aid website [here](#).

Follow your instincts. If you've noticed these warning signs and expect that someone you know is being abused, don't wait for them to approach you. Look for a private moment where you can express concern and let them know you're there to support them.

Here are some ideas for beginning this conversation:

### 1. Express concern

Tell your friend/colleague that you've been concerned for them or that you're worried. This is a non-judgmental approach that might make them feel comfortable about opening up. If they deny that anything is wrong, don't push, simply communicate that you'll be there for them if they ever want to talk.

## **2. Assure them that the violence is not their fault**

This can be such an important thing for a victim of violence to hear. Some useful things to say might be, “No one deserves to be treated this way,” “You are not to blame,” or simply, “What’s happening is not your fault.”

## **3. Support, but don’t advise**

This can be so hard to do, especially if the victim is someone close to you. But remember that you cannot make someone leave a relationship if they are not ready to do so. Also be aware that leaving an abusive relationship is the most dangerous time for a victim. The victim is best placed to assess the danger for themselves. Give them options and offer to help and support them along the way, but pressuring a victim to leave a relationship who does not want to may only isolate them further by making them feel like they can’t confide in you. Remember that abusive behaviour is a pattern of getting power and control over someone else. Validating a victim’s choices and encouraging them to make their own decisions can help to break the cycle of power and control.

## **4. Give resources**

There are plenty of services in Ireland who can offer help and support to the person you are concerned about (see Appendix 2).

## **5. Keep it confidential**

Assure the victim that anything that has been said will stay between the two of you. Breaking a victim’s trust after they have opened up to you may only isolate them further, and could even put them in danger.

Source: Department of Justice website <https://whatwouldyoudo.ie/>

## Appendix 4 How to open the conversation

How to open the conversation respectfully and sensitively	
Be prepared	<p>Plan ahead and arrange a one-to-one meeting in person in a private space where you cannot be overheard, as you would any meeting relating to sensitive information. If an employee is remote or hybrid working, a useful tactic is to ask them to attend a meeting at the work site. Familiarise yourself with the policy and the support options it offers ahead of the conversation.</p>
Open the conversation	<p>Start a conversation in a way that gives space to the employee to disclose their experience if they wish to do so.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use open body language and be mindful of personal space so the staff member doesn't feel threatened.</li> <li>• Demonstrate concern for the employee's wellbeing by asking how they are, explaining that you are concerned, and noting any of the indicators you have observed.</li> <li>• Use indirect, non-threatening questions or statements which signal to the employee that you have noticed something and are willing to have a conversation about it. Let them know you're there to help and support.</li> </ul> <p>Example questions and statements to open the conversation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You don't have to share anything with me that you would prefer not to but I am here to support you if and when you are ready.</li> <li>• I have noticed that you seem distracted and tired lately. Is there something</li> </ul>

	<p>troubling you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How are you? If you need a chat or support, I am here for you.</li> </ul>
Prioritise confidentiality	Reassure the employee that the conversation is confidential but be transparent about any limitations to that confidentiality.

<b>Responding to a disclosure</b>	
<b>DO</b>	<b>DON'T</b>
Listen without judgment	Ask probing questions about the abuse
Communicate belief	Express doubt, judgment or shock
Validate the decision to disclose	Make comments or ask questions that undermine what the employee is experiencing, such as, 'Why do you put up with that?'
Emphasise confidentiality, including any limits to it	Give advice or tell them what to do
Offer relevant practical support	Pressure them to take a specific action
Advise of next steps in the process	Make strong negative personal statements or exclamations about their abuser
Plan how you will communicate about this moving forward. Some employees will welcome frequent check-ins while others may prefer to come to you themselves when needed.	

Here are some helpful verbal responses that can be used to respond to the initial disclosure. They serve to affirm and validate the employee's experience, shift the blame away from them, and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Thank you for sharing this with me."</li> <li>• "What you are describing sounds like abuse." • "The abuse is not your fault."</li> <li>• "You have a right to live a life free of</li> </ul>
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communicate hope.	<p>violence, abuse, and fear.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “You have options and we can help you find support.”</li> </ul>
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**Professional Boundaries**

	<p>It is understandable that employers may have concerns about where their duty of care to an employee impacted by domestic violence begins and ends. <b>As with any wellbeing issue, it starts by being alert to concerns about an employee and starting a conversation to offer support.</b> The support offered extends to any of the provisions outlined in the workplace domestic violence policy. Should the affected employee require a level of support that the organisational policy does not offer, the employer should ensure the employee has access to the information they need to seek out a domestic violence support service, which may be better equipped to give them the sustained and specialist support they may need. It is not the role of anyone in the workplace to deal with the abuse itself. The workplace response should instead focus on addressing the impacts of domestic abuse on work, supporting the affected employee insofar as the policy affords, and signposting them to specialist services.</p>
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Adapted from the Women’s Aid website: <https://www.womensaid.ie/get-help/support-services/>

## Appendix 5: Workplace safety plan guide

This sample workplace safety plan guide gives an overview of different areas of potential consideration when supporting an employee subjected to domestic violence to be safe at work. It offers examples of actions that employers can take to meet this objective. The support options listed are optional and not exhaustive. The specific actions that can be implemented will depend on individual organisations and the resources available to them.

<b>Instructions for use</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schedule a private, in-person meeting with the impacted employee in a safe location.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain the objective of the workplace safety plan: To determine what the employer can do to help the employee be safe at work.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reassure the affected employee that the contents of the workplace safety plan will be based on their own needs and wishes.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss each area of consideration in the table below, asking the employee to identify any relevant concerns they have around their safety as a result of the abuse.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outline any actions the workplace can take to support the affected employee for each concern raised, being sure to explain any limits to confidentiality that may result from certain actions being adopted.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Record any actions the impacted employee agrees to include in the workplace safety plan. • Store the workplace safety plan securely.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement the actions on the workplace safety plan.</li> </ul>

<b>Area of consideration</b>	<b>Examples of potential support options</b>
Travelling to/from work	Establish safety measures around employee's journey to/from work.  Examples:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Provide parking space, well-lit and close to main entrance</li> <li>•Monitor parking space by camera</li> <li>•Escort to/from means of transport</li> <li>•Provide alternative means of transport to travel to/from work</li> </ul>
<p>Safety on and off site</p>	<p>Establish safety measures to support employee while working on or off site.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide locked entries/exits</li> <li>• Install personal or fixed alarms / panic buttons</li> <li>• Maintain confidentiality around the employee (shifts, location, and contact details)</li> <li>• Remind staff of safe workplace access procedures and how to respond if they encounter strangers in the workplace</li> <li>• Ensure employee does not work alone, especially when working in a public facing role</li> <li>• Relocate employee to a safer area of the work site or a new work site</li> <li>• Set up additional check-in procedures with co-workers/manager when employee is working off site</li> <li>• Consideration of existing Protection, Safety or Barring Orders protecting the employee</li> </ul>
<p>Working from home</p>	<p>Establish safety measures for employees working from home fully or partially.</p>

	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify a 'safe word' or gesture an employee can use to indicate help is needed and agree a response to this</li> <li>• Establish regular in-person meetings for unmonitored contact with the employee</li> <li>• Provide an alternative work location</li> </ul>
Workplace communication	<p>Establish safety measures around workplace communications to prevent or lessen the impacts of abuse, harassment, or stalking.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change employee's contact information (phone, email, etc.)</li> <li>• Screen and track phone calls/voicemail</li> <li>• Check work equipment for spyware, tracking devices, etc.</li> <li>• Update emergency contact number if currently set to perpetrator (without alerting them of the change)</li> </ul>
Flexible working arrangements	<p>Establish flexible working arrangements that support the employee's safety while at work and when navigating their way to safety</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change/vary start/finish times and/or</li> </ul>

	<p>shift pattern</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relocate to different work site</li> <li>• Domestic violence leave / Special leave</li> </ul>
Financial/economic needs	<p>Establish ways of supporting the employee to retain/regain financial independence.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reroute some or all of the employee's pay to a different account</li> <li>• Support employee to engage with financial institution(s) regarding economic abuse</li> <li>• Assist with short term accommodation and relocation options</li> <li>• Provide family rooms for employees attending work with children</li> </ul>
Performance and behaviour	<p>Establish whether the employee requires employment protection measures if their work performance and behaviour are impacted by the abuse.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Temporary protection from dismissal and other disciplinary actions</li> <li>• Reduced workload</li> <li>• Reassignment to less demanding work responsibilities</li> </ul>

Employee absence	<p>Establish how to respond to the employee being unexpectedly absent from work.</p> <p><b>Examples:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop response system if employee unexpectedly does not show up for work</li> <li>• Ask for permission to check in with employee while on domestic violence leave (includes establishing frequency and method)</li> </ul>
Perpetrator presence/contact	<p>Establish a process for safely responding to the perpetrator's presence or contact attempts.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop response system if perpetrator shows up at work or contacts workplace</li> <li>• Review workplace security measures and procedures</li> <li>• Provide perpetrator's photo, car make/model/license plate number, etc. to security/front of house employees</li> </ul>
Specialist support	<p>Connect employee to specialist support services for sustained and expert support.</p> <p><b>Examples:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer information to access additional,</li> </ul>

	<p>specialist support (see ‘Referrals’ section of domestic violence policy)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide safe location and device to contact specialist support services</li> </ul>
Ongoing workplace support	<p>Determine employee’s preferred approach to ongoing workplace support following a disclosure.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish preferred frequency/approach to follow-up conversations about the issue</li> <li>• Schedule review of workplace safety plan</li> </ul>
Sharing information	<p>Depending on the outcome of each section of the workplace safety plan, information about the employee’s disclosure may need to be shared with others.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine which employees information may need to be shared with to implement workplace safety plan and request consent to do so</li> <li>• Establish a secondary contact for the safety plan in case the primary contact is unavailable</li> </ul>



Source: Women’s Aid website [here](#).