

Domestic Abuse Policy for Schools

Advice and Guidance for managers and colleagues within schools

Human Resources



milton keynes council



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1.0 Introduction

This school is committed to respond sensitively and effectively to employees who are impacted by domestic abuse. We will do what we can to support employees and play our part as an organisation in helping to end this unacceptable practice.

One in four women and one in six men suffer from domestic abuse in their lifetime but there is on average less than one disclosure of domestic abuse to employers in a 12-month period. This suggests that not enough employees feel supported to raise the problem.

We intend to do something to change that. Our aim is to ensure that all employees within MKC schools are encouraged to speak out on this matter and feel confident about raising issues they may become aware of. This policy is designed to help provide some guidance for employees impacted by domestic abuse and for managers and other colleagues supporting them through the difficulties and challenges they are facing.

As part of our commitment it is our intention to:

- Train managers how to best support employees experiencing domestic abuse
- Ensure that all employees have access to the domestic abuse in the workplace toolkit (see Section 9.0)
- Every employee will have access to our workplace policy, and we will actively take steps to ensure it is adhered to
- Commit to reviewing and monitoring this policy on a regular basis
- Display domestic abuse national and local support/advice within the school
- Follow the GMB Union's 'Work to Stop Domestic Abuse' Charter as signed up to by Milton Keynes Council.

We do not condone domestic abuse and use of any of our equipment or facilities to undertake such an act will be regarded as gross misconduct and may lead to dismissal. Incidents of domestic abuse outside of work may also be treated as gross misconduct as such actions are likely to bring the school into disrepute.

We also have a duty to comply with health and safety laws which are designed to ensure that workers have the right to work in a safe environment where risks to health and wellbeing are considered and dealt with effectively.

There are four key areas of health and safety legislation in the workplace relevant to domestic abuse:

- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992
- Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995
- Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations 1996

2.0 Defining Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse is a crime, and regardless of where it occurs it is against the law.

Domestic abuse is defined as any incident of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of their gender or sexuality. Domestic abuse covers a range of types of abuse, including, but not limited to, psychological, physical, sexual, financial, emotional, verbal and economic abuse.

It also includes so called 'Honour Based Violence', Female Genital Mutilation, Coercive Control and Forced Marriage.

Serious Crime Act 2015 controlling and coercive behaviour became criminal offence. Controlling behaviour is behaviour that makes people subordinate or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, taking control of their resources and depriving them of their independence. Coercive behaviour includes acts of assault, threat, humiliation or intimidation that are used to harm, punish or frighten another person.

3.0 Who is affected?

Abusive relationships cross all social boundaries – ANYONE can be affected. Men and women of all ages, sexualities, ethnic backgrounds and religions can be affected by abusive relationships.

4.0 How might an individual recognise that they are in an abusive relationship?

It is commonplace to have disagreements or arguments with those close to us (family members, partners, etc.) from time to time. However, should this begin to form a consistent pattern then it can be an indication of domestic abuse.

Every situation is unique, however, there are common factors that link the experience of an abusive relationship.

The following list developed by Women's Aid can help you to recognise if you, or someone you know, are in an abusive relationship. This can be sustained abuse in one factor, or a range of factors. Common factors include but are not limited to:

Destructive criticism and verbal abuse:

- Shouting; mocking; accusing; name calling; verbally threatening.

Pressure tactics:

- Sulking; threatening to withhold money; disconnecting the phone and internet; taking away or destroying your mobile, tablet or laptop; taking the car away; taking the children away; threatening

to report you to the police, social services or the mental health team unless you comply with their demands; threatening or attempting self-harm and suicide; withholding or pressuring you to use drugs or other substances; lying to your friends and family about you; telling you that you have no choice in any decisions.

Disrespect:

- Persistently putting you down in front of other people; not listening or responding when you talk; interrupting your telephone calls; taking money from your purse/wallet without asking; refusing to help with childcare or housework.

Breaking trust:

- Lying to you; withholding information from you; being jealous; having other relationships; breaking promises and shared agreements.

Isolation:

- Monitoring or blocking your phone calls, e-mails and social media accounts; telling you where you can and cannot go; preventing you from seeing friends and relatives; shutting you in the house.

Harassment:

- Following you; checking up on you; not allowing you any privacy (for example, opening your mail, going through your laptop, tablet or mobile), repeatedly checking to see who has phoned you; embarrassing you in public; accompanying you everywhere you go.

Threats:

- Making angry gestures; using physical size to intimidate; shouting you down; destroying your possessions; breaking things; punching walls; wielding a knife or a gun; threatening to kill or harm you, threatening to kill or harm your children; threatening to kill or harm family pets; threats of suicide.

Sexual violence:

- Using force, threats or intimidation to make you perform sexual acts; having sex with you when you don't want it; forcing you to look at pornographic material; constant pressure and harassment into having sex; forcing you to have sex with other people; any degrading treatment related to your sexuality or to whether you are gay, lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual.

Physical violence:

- Punching; slapping; hitting; biting; pinching; kicking; pulling hair out; pushing; shoving; burning; strangling, pinning you down, holding you by the neck, restraining you.

Denial:

- Saying the abuse doesn't happen; saying you caused the abuse; saying you wind them up; saying they can't control their anger; being publicly gentle and patient; crying and begging for forgiveness; saying it will never happen again.

5.0 Spotting the signs

It is rare that an employee will simply divulge that they are the victim of domestic abuse and the signs can show themselves in many different ways. Although physical violence is a visible sign of domestic abuse, the abuse may not be physical. It is therefore vital that all of us be aware of possible signs that may point to a problem of this nature. All managers and colleagues need to be alert to those around them and feel confident about raising issues in a sensitive manner if they become concerned for a colleague.

The more supportive an atmosphere that exists within the team / service the more likely it is that an individual will feel comfortable disclosing an issue of domestic abuse.

It is crucially important, in the ever-increasing trend of employees working from home, that managers keep the lines of communication open to ensure that they can pick up on any signs that abuse may be occurring. Working from home could be masking the issue and make awareness of it all the more difficult to detect.

As outlined by Public Health England, an employee experiencing domestic abuse could display the following:

- A change in working pattern - such as absences or frequent lateness,
- Missing deadlines or a reduction in the quality/quantity of work in general,
- A large number of personal calls/texts, avoiding calls or a strong reaction to calls/texts/emails
- Spending an increased number of hours at work for no reason
- Frequent visits to work by the employee's partner, which may indicate coercive control
- Conduct out of character with previous behaviour
- Changes in behaviour: for example, becoming very quiet, anxious, frightened, tearful, aggressive, distracted, or depressed
- Being isolated from colleagues
- Obsession with leaving work on time
- Worried about leaving children at home
- Visible bruising or single or repeated injury with unlikely explanations
- Change in the pattern or amount of makeup used
- Change in the manner of dress: for example, clothes that do not suit the climate which may be used to hide injuries
- Partner or ex-partner stalking employee in or around the workplace or on social media
- Partner or ex-partner exerting unusual amount of control or demands over work schedule
- Isolation from family/friends

Of course, although someone may display a variety of the signs above it does not automatically mean they are the victim of domestic abuse, so care needs to be taken in raising the matter with them. Initially, a general discussion on how they are is a sensible approach and guidance on how to open such conversations is available at Appendix 1. The important thing is to have the conversation, even if that is just to confirm that the signs are pointing to something other than domestic abuse. Care needs to be taken to ensure that the employee is alone and not being monitored if the conversation is taking place by phone or over teams. Where there is any suspicion at all that someone may be being monitored then a face to face meeting should be organised instead.

Each individual suffering abuse will require support in a way that suits their particular needs. A 'one size fits all' approach is not appropriate in these circumstances. Therefore, managers are not expected to be experts but are required to know how to respond and how to signpost an employee to the support available.

It is important that if a manager suspects there may be something wrong that they feel able to open up a conversation and not to wait until the employee raises the issue. The employee may never raise the issue or may do so only when things have escalated to a dangerous level.

6.0 What do I do if I feel I need help?

It is highly likely that the most difficult aspect of this will be having the confidence to tell someone about it. You are not alone; the abuse is not your fault and we will support and assist you in whatever way we can when you choose to talk to someone about it.

We will provide a sensitive and confidential response to anyone approaching us for assistance in cases of domestic abuse. For cases which meet the threshold of a Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC), or if we have safeguarding concerns, we have a legal duty to share information with relevant agencies.

If you feel comfortable doing so, speak to your line manager and explain the issue you are facing. Let your manager know what support you feel you need and what we can do to help you feel safe. Your manager is best placed to know what flexibility / change is possible within the team and how to put any safeguarding arrangements in place to help you deal with the issue you are facing.

Of course you are not obliged to speak to your manager if you don't feel able to, however, regardless of who you initially tell your manager will need to know in order to make the appropriate safeguarding arrangements to ensure you get the help you need.

If you feel you would like to speak to someone else initially there are other options available such as:

- Trade Union Representative (if you are a member of the union)
- Employee Assistance Programme, Education Support (08000 562 561) or <https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/node/43>

Regardless of who you choose to speak to you will be treated with respect, concern and understanding. You will not be judged or be told what to do, you will simply be listened to, guided and supported to take the steps you need to make yourself safe.

In addition, we are committed to ensuring that if you have or are experiencing domestic abuse you will not be discriminated against, directly or indirectly, because of it – e.g. in receiving training, career progression or in redundancy situations.

As part of our commitment to support employees in this situation, especially where there is a need to leave an abusive relationship / home environment, we have up to 5 days paid leave available to take. We also have various policies in place that can help provide flexibility and assistance in managing your situation. We would encourage you to talk to you manager about what you feel would help you in this situation.

There are some examples of workplace support measures that could be put in place to help you manage your situation and these are available at Appendix 2.

7.0 Support for managers

As stated previously while, as a manager, you are there to support the employee and offer them signposting, it is not your role to 'solve' the problem. Issues such as these are complex and will only be successfully addressed by appropriate professional intervention. As a manager you must not feel that it is your responsibility to take the weight of the employee's difficulties on your shoulders.

It can be extremely distressing listening to revelations from an employee and feeling unable to make the situation right. This can cause you stress and impact on your own mental health. In addition, the desire to help could cloud your judgement and make you take decisions that place your personal safety at risk.

We do not want to see either of those things happen and as a manager you need to ensure that you find avenues of support (while maintaining confidentiality) to help you, while you in turn, provide support to your employee. Remember that the Education Support EAP service is available for managers to get some advice when dealing with difficult employee issues -and can be accessed 24/7 by calling 08000 562 561.

Please make use of the support available as it is crucially important that you look after your own wellbeing as you will not be of benefit to your team member if the situation takes a toll on your own mental health.

8.0 What to do if you suspect an MKC employee is a perpetrator of violence

Employees should be aware that domestic violence is a serious matter which can lead to criminal convictions.

Section 3 of the Code of Conduct states ***"We expect you to engender public trust and confidence in the Council and not to bring the organisation into disrepute. This includes action outside of work that is relevant to your job role or that may undermine public confidence in you to carry out your role"***.

Conduct outside of work, whether or not it leads to a criminal conviction, can lead to disciplinary action against an employee because of its employment implications and because it undermines the confidence the school / Council has in the employee and can potentially impact on the school / Council's reputation. There should be an investigation of the facts as far as possible, a view taken and consideration whether the conduct is sufficiently serious to warrant instituting the disciplinary procedures.

In addition, such conduct may make remaining in certain roles inappropriate and justify consideration for dismissal. For example, if a perpetrator of domestic violence was employed to provide services to vulnerable women and children, a conviction for domestic violence could make it untenable for them to retain their post.

Similarly, proven harassment and intimidation of a school employee by their partner or ex-partner who also works for either the school or Milton Keynes Council will be very viewed seriously and may lead to disciplinary action being taken. This includes improper use of email to receive or transmit material that is designed to or is likely to cause inconvenience or distress, or to create, receive or transmit any defamatory material.

If any of the circumstances detailed above are brought to a manager's attention, advice should be sought from their HR Advisor immediately.

9.0 Further Guidance

Business in the Community (BITC) and Public Health England (PHE) have produced an extensive Domestic Abuse Toolkit which expands on many of the elements raised within this document. It can be accessed at the following link: <https://www.bitc.org.uk/toolkit/domestic-abuse-toolkit/>

10.0 Additional support

There is a comprehensive range of further support available to individuals encountering domestic abuse, some of which are listed below:

- Women's aid have a comprehensive guide for survivors including resources for men, LGBTQ+ and other specific needs and keeping safe: <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/covid-19-coronavirus-safety-and-support-resources/> - includes national helplines and online resources
- Locally (assuming employees live in Milton Keynes) they can access MK ACT on 0344 375 4307 and www.MKACT.com
- Other resources available are on our own website here <https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/housing/need-somewhere-to-live/domestic-abuse-and-domestic-violence>
- National Domestic Violence Helpline - 0808 200 247 <http://www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk/>
- Men's Advice Line - 0808 801 0327 www.mensadvice.org.uk
- Karma Nirvana (victims of honour crimes) - 0800 5999247 <http://www.karmanirvana.org.uk/>
- Galop (LGBT support) - 0300 999 5428 <http://www.galop.org.uk/>

There is also a phonenumber available for those individuals who are responsible for causing domestic abuse to others:

- The Respect Phonenumber – 0808 802 4040 www.respectphonenumber.org.uk (For domestic violence perpetrators)

11.0 Training Resources

The following training materials are available to help you raise your awareness of this issue and provide you with the skills and confidence to address the issue.

[One in Five on Vimeo](#) which is about 15mins and a true story portrayed by Coronation Street and Emmerdale actors and the owner of the video is happy for it to be shared far and wide.

[Walking on Eggshells](#) is a 16-minute video. Mumsnet, Women's Aid and Surrey Police have joined together to help raise awareness of the dangers of coercive control.

[Biederman's Chart of Coercion](#) is a 3 minute video explaining the eight tactics used by abusers.

Appendix 1

Opening the Conversation (from the BITC/PHE Domestic Abuse Toolkit)

The aim of starting a conversation if you are concerned an employee is suffering from abuse, is to be supportive to employees rather than to encourage disclosure.

Many people dealing with domestic abuse will never feel comfortable disclosing it to their employer as they may not even be ready to admit it to themselves.

If a manager suspects that an employee is experiencing domestic abuse, they should facilitate a conversation to discuss the issue on a general level and identify and implement appropriate support.

Begin by asking indirect questions, to establish an empathetic relationship with the employee. Be patient, offering support to encourage disclosure.

Below are some examples of questions and prompts that could be used:

- How are you doing at the moment?
- Your wellbeing is important to me and I've noticed that you seem distracted/ upset at the moment - are you ok?
- Is everything all right at home?
- You don't have to tell me anything, but please know that I would like to ensure you are directed to where support can be provided if and when you feel ready
- What support do you think might help? What would you like to happen? How?

The role of a manager is not to deal with the abuse itself but to make it clear where support can be obtained

Disclosure

If an employee discloses that they are experiencing domestic abuse, it can be challenging for the manager/colleague too.

An employee may step forward to raise concerns about a colleague who they suspect is experiencing domestic abuse.

Reassure them that the information they have shared will be treated in the strictest confidence.

Consider what steps might be necessary to ensure they remain safe in the workplace; in case a perpetrator suspects they may have reported the abuse.

Suggest that you go somewhere quiet and comfortable, away from the office/desk if possible.

Acknowledge the courage of the employee and how difficult it must be to talk.

Confirm the confidentiality of the disclosure. As a guide for managers, any information should only be disclosed to anyone else (with the exception of their manager) if it is absolutely necessary in providing awareness and support and with the prior agreement of the person who has disclosed.

Exceptions to that are if the manager believes there is an imminent threat to life, harm of children or vulnerable adults, or threat against the employer. At that point, an employer should contact the police and follow their advice on next steps.

Have an open posture. Reach towards them but be sensitive that they may feel threatened by invasion of personal space.

Be prepared for them to be upset and tearful. Do not be judgemental.

Avoid language that indicates blame or fault (“Why don’t you leave?” / “How can you let this happen?” / “Why haven’t you told anyone before?”).

Allow plenty of time and space for them to speak.

Managers may also contact the EAP Service confidentially at any time in order to receive support themselves or seek management advice.

It is important to remember that the impact of domestic abuse can be long term. Employers should be aware that court processes can take several years, and that abuse may continue long after the relationship has ended

Appendix 2

Examples of practical workplace support for people who are experiencing domestic abuse (from the BITC/PHE Domestic Abuse Toolkit)

Agree with your Manager what to tell colleagues and how they should respond if the abusive partner/ ex-partner / family member telephones or visits the workplace.

Consider if an individual can change work patterns or workload and allow flexible or more flexible working or special leave if applicable to facilitate any practical arrangements.

Consider how flexi leave, annual leave, unpaid leave or agile working arrangements can facilitate any practical arrangements. Examples include:

- Attending court
- Meeting or calling a solicitor
- Viewing properties
- Meeting teachers at school
- Talking to their bank or getting advice from domestic abuse organisations.

Consider flexible working arrangements to enable individuals (or their children) to attend health appointments resulting from the abuse, such as seeing a counsellor. This may be needed for some time after the abuse has stopped.

If the abuser has an employees' work email and telephone details, consider diverting their phone calls and emails to help shield them from their abuser.

Notify reception and security staff if the abuser is known to come to the workplace and provide a copy of any existing orders against the abuser and a photograph of the abuser to reception and security staff.

Check that employees have arrangements for getting safely to and from home and consider accompanying them to and from their car if suitable.

Check with the employee that the personal information held on ERP, such as temporary or new addresses, bank details are up to date including the employee's next of kin information and/or an up to date emergency contact number for a trusted friend or family member.

Where practical, consider offering a temporary or permanent change of workplace, working times/ patterns through the completion and consideration of a flexible working request

Where practical, consider changes in specific duties where they could be at risk of abuse, such as not expecting the employee to answer telephones or sit on reception.

If appropriate move the employee out of public view, ensuring that they are not visible from reception points or ground floor windows.

Complete and regularly review a risk assessment with the employee to ensure any arrangements in place remain appropriate to both the employer and employee or require changing.

Ensure that the employee does not work alone or in an isolated area.

Keep a record of any incidents of abuse in the workplace, including persistent telephone calls, emails or visits to the employee. Help in building evidence in future

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Human Resources

Civic

1 Saxon Gate East
Central Milton Keynes
MK9 3EJ

T 01908 253851

E Declan.leith@milton-keynes.gov.uk