



*Championing better  
work and working lives*

**Government consultation on Violence Against Women and Girls**

**Submission to the Home Office**

**Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)**

**February 2021**



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## **Background**

The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. The not-for-profit organisation champions better work and working lives and has been setting the benchmark for excellence in people and organisation development for more than 100 years. It has 155,000 members across the world, provides thought leadership through independent research on the world of work, and offers professional training and accreditation for those working in HR and learning and development.

Our membership base is wide, with 60% of our members working in private sector services and manufacturing, 33% working in the public sector and 7% in the not-for-profit sector. In addition, 76% of the FTSE 100 companies have CIPD members at director level.

Public policy at the CIPD draws on our extensive research and thought leadership, practical advice and guidance, along with the experience and expertise of our diverse membership, to inform and shape debate, government policy and legislation for the benefit of employees and employers, to improve best practice in the workplace, to promote high standards of work and to represent the interests of our members at the highest level.

## **Short summary of our guidance on domestic abuse**

In September 2020, the CIPD and the EHRC launched a piece of [guidance](#), which followed a surge in calls from individuals to domestic abuse helplines during the lockdown. Our joint guidance focused on how employers, line managers and the workplace can support employees who have experienced domestic abuse.

The new guide sets out key recommendations for employers, including developing a policy or framework, creating open cultures where individuals feel safe to disclose issues of domestic abuse, and offering flexibility for people to attend counselling, legal and finance appointments or access support from professional organisations.

Domestic abuse has an impact at work. Research shows that a high proportion of those suffering from domestic abuse are targeted at work. Domestic abuse can negatively affect workplace colleagues as well as the person experiencing the abuse. However, importantly the workplace can often be one of the few places that a person who is experiencing domestic abuse can be separated from their abuser, and therefore can be the place where people are able to ask for and access support.

A CIPD survey of UK employees' suggests that just under a quarter (24%) of people are aware of their employer having a policy or support in place on domestic abuse. We recommend employers have a clear policy in place on supporting employees experiencing domestic abuse, but also have an effective framework of support. Most importantly, though, employees need to be aware of the policy and how to access support if they need it. We propose what such a framework of employer support could look like, comprising of four steps, within each step we detail points to consider and suggest supportive actions:

- Recognise the problem.
- Respond appropriately to disclosure.
- Provide support.
- Refer to the appropriate help.

Employers need to think about how to support can be maintained as we all work in different ways, employers also need to take an empathetic, non-judgemental approach and flexibility (for example in working hours or concerning work tasks) are two key areas employers should focus on.

It's not for employers to 'solve' the problem, but to enable their employees to access professional support, whether that be legal advice, financial advice, housing support, counselling or arranging childcare. Having supportive employer can make an unparalleled difference to them and their family.

In our guidance, we have outlined our key recommendations for employers below:

- Develop a domestic abuse policy and create an effective framework around domestic abuse support.
- Where organisation has a recognised trade union, policies should be reviewed and agreed with union representatives.

- Employers have a duty of care for the health, safety and wellbeing of their staff and are in a strong position to create a safe and supportive workplace environment.
- Think about the safety/security measures that may be required.
- Treat everyone as an individual as everyone's situation will be different. It's important not to make assumptions about what someone is experiencing or what they need, or the gender of the perpetrator.
- Create open work cultures that help break the silence around the important issue and ensure people know the organisation will support people experiencing domestic abuse to seek help.
- Offer flexibility to enable people to attend counselling, legal and finance appointments, get support from professional organisations and make arrangements, for example concerning childcare and housing.
- Outline people's different roles and responsibilities when it comes to supporting employees experiencing domestic abuse. For example:
  - o **HR** should take central responsibility for developing a policy and procedures on domestic abuse and facilitating awareness- raising training.
  - o **Line managers** should receive appropriate training on how to effectively support someone experiencing domestic abuse. They need to be clear on the practical steps outlined in this guidance to encourage and appropriately respond to the disclosure or abuse and signpost people to professional support. They also have an obligation to prioritise confidentiality wherever possible.
  - o Supportive and empathetic **employees** and **co-workers** can assist an affected colleague in gaining confidence to seek support.
- Make it clear that abusive behaviour is the responsibility of the perpetrator and misconduct inside and outside of work is viewed seriously- and can lead to disciplinary action.
- Signpost to supportive services, charities and organisations and outline the types of support that someone might need, such as: legal support, housing support, support with childcare, support in dealing with financial abuse, specialist counselling.

As a result of the pandemic, escape routes such as going into the office, or having time apart from an abuser may be dramatically curtailed. Employers, therefore need to further consider the support they can offer to anyone experiencing domestic abuse.

Please do not hesitate to contact us in regards to our [guidance](#) and our response to this [consultation](#).