



Domestic and Family Violence

How can your workplace respond?

What is Domestic and Family Violence?

Domestic and family violence is a broad and serious issue of abuse. People across all communities, socioeconomic status, races, cultures, ages, genders and sexual identities can be affected.

Abuse and threat of abuse can take many forms including (but not limited to) physical violence, sexual assault and abuse, emotional/psychological abuse, stalking, financial abuse, spiritual and cultural abuse, abuse of pets, property damage and serious neglect of a dependent.

Statistics from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare show that domestic and family violence is a common and complex issue in Australia, reporting that:

- 1 in 6 women have experienced physical or sexual violence by a current or previous partner since the age of 15
- 1 in 16 men have experienced physical or sexual violence by a current or previous partner since the age of 15

- 1 in 6 girls and 1 in 9 boys have experienced physical and/or sexual abuse before the age of 15
- 1 woman is killed every 9 days and 1 man is killed every 29 days by a partner

The Australian Institute of Family Studies reports that:

- Up to 14% of older Australians experience elder abuse, however, data is not extensive, and the incidence could be higher and growing.

Why is domestic and family violence a workplace issue?

Domestic and family violence (DFV) costs employers across Australia at least \$175 million annually.

It is estimated that eighty percent of adult DFV victims are working people and a large percentage of perpetrators are employees.

It is particularly important that an individual experiencing DFV can maintain their

employment. DFV often leads to financial stress, homelessness, isolation, and vulnerability – stable employment is essential in combatting these issues.

There are a number of implications for the workplace including:

- Serious safety and wellbeing concerns for the employee
- The workplace may be one of few safe havens for the employee
- Risks of violence in the workplace
- Employee illness or absenteeism
- Possible legal liabilities
- Employee turnover and reduced productivity

The Australian Fair Work Act provides for workplace entitlements and support for workers experiencing domestic violence:

- Under the National Employment Standards, an employee is entitled to 5 days of unpaid family and domestic violence leave each year. Employees can take the leave if they need to deal with issues and it is not practical to do so outside of work hours. For example, this might include issues relating to safety, police matters or attending court.
- An employer can ask for reasonable evidence of the need to take the leave and has a responsibility to take reasonable steps to maintain the confidentiality of the employee.
- Employees experiencing domestic violence or who are caring for a household member or immediate family member, have a right to request flexible working arrangements. This may include a change to hours, duties or location of work.



- Paid or unpaid personal/carer's leave may also be taken for circumstances related to domestic and family violence

Signs of DFV can become evident in the workplace. If an employee is experiencing DFV, managers or colleagues may see some behavioural changes. Be on the lookout for:

- *excessive absence or lateness, unusual/frequent breaks*
- *presenting at work with unexplained injury or bruising*
- *work productivity changes/reduction, errors, lack of concentration, distraction*
- *wearing concealing clothing even if the weather is warm*
- *appearing anxious or depressed*
- *social disconnect or withdrawing from colleagues*
- *avoiding work social occasions or work-related travel*
- *receiving excessive personal calls, texts or visits.*

What can workplaces do about domestic and family violence?

Workplaces play an important role and are a key area of influence in helping address domestic and family violence in the community.

Following are 6 key actions that employers and workplaces can undertake to help address domestic and family violence:

1

Develop and communicate your organisation's domestic violence stance and policy

For an effective organisational response to domestic violence, senior leadership visibility is essential. At the outset, senior leader sponsorship and genuine involvement in your domestic violence response will be imperative to send a strong and genuine message of action and support.

Documenting and communicating your organisation's domestic violence policy is an essential and proactive step in your management response. By developing a comprehensive policy, communicating this to your employees and making it readily available you are sending a clear message that you support employees in a domestic violence situation.

Employees will be clear on your organisation's stance, their legal entitlements, and the support you offer. It is important that the document is clear with sufficient detail so that employees can independently and privately access the policy and the help available.

Your policy can include the following points:

- ✓ The definition of domestic violence
- ✓ A statement of your organisation's stance on the issue

- ✓ Who is responsible for the policy and who to contact internally for assistance
- ✓ The details of legal entitlements in line with Fair Work Australia
- ✓ The details of other benefits your organisation offers and clear instruction about how they can be accessed
- ✓ Actions or procedures already undertaken and in place eg: security measures, training
- ✓ Help options available – clear detail so an employee can easily access the options independently and privately

2

Introduce training and promote awareness of the issue

Understanding and awareness are fundamental to providing an effective workplace response by increasing skills and confidence to address the issue. This will also assist to reduce stigma and encourage help seeking behaviour. It is important that all employees are trained in understanding domestic violence and managers are particularly trained in how they can take a leading role. Try the following:

- ✓ Ensure all employees understand your policy and where to find it. Be clear about how your organisation can support employees and who to approach if they need help.
- ✓ Include DFV in your induction program for all new employees and run refresher sessions each year
- ✓ Introduce skills training for managers so they know how to recognise the issues and how to respond. If your budget allows, engage an external specialist to train your managers.

- ✓ Raise awareness and keep the message alive by displaying resources in easily accessible places such as common areas in the workplace, your intranet and in regular employee communication – such as newsletters, online community forums or blogs.
- ✓ Engage with external DFV organisations to secure educational information. For example, pamphlets and posters for display in the workplace, or invite local speakers from community DFV organisations to your workplace to provide education.
- ✓ Get your workplace involved in community events that support DFV awareness. There are many events regularly run each year – find one that suits your workplace and schedule it in your wellbeing program calendar.

✓ Share Luemo resources regarding

- ➔ [Domestic Violence](#)
- ➔ [Understanding Mental Illness](#)
- ➔ [Staying Well and Coping Strategies](#)
- ➔ [Reaching Out for Help](#)
- ➔ [Implementing Events and Activities](#)

3 Start a conversation, listen, believe, do not judge

If you notice concerning behaviour displayed by an employee or colleague, start a compassionate conversation with the person.

Try the following:

- ✓ Tell them what you have observed and ask them if they are OK. For example, “I have noticed that you have been getting a lot of calls to your mobile and you seem upset by it – is everything OK?”.



- ✓ If an employee approaches you with domestic violence concerns, have the conversation immediately – do not delay. If required, move the conversation to a private place.
- ✓ Listen mindfully and quietly, refrain from giving your opinion, judging the situation, or providing a solution.
- ✓ If you have approached the person and they do not want to talk with you or they deny there is any problem, reiterate that you are concerned and that you will check on them again. Follow up.
- ✓ It is important that you believe the person and not question their motivation or perspective. You may be the only person that they talk to and if they feel they are not believed they may never reach out for help again.
- ✓ Ask them what help they think they need. If there is a domestic violence protection order in place, ask for the details so that you can check the implications for the workplace. You may need to engage independent legal advice to assist to deal with the situation.

➔ [Read Luemo Coping in Difficult Times – Supporting others and self-care strategies](#)

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Offer practical workplace support

Consider the employer and employee legal rights and offer compassionate support. You could consider some of the following:

- ✓ Ask your employee what support they may need and make suggestions about what modifications could be made by the workplace
- ✓ Change or reduce work hours so that the employee can take a break and attend to personal matters at convenient times
- ✓ Change the employee tasks to help reduce the stress of work responsibilities if needed; move the employee to a different location if possible and helpful
- ✓ Remind the employee about their workplace and leave entitlements
- ✓ Give the employee time off during their workday to attend to legal matters, counselling, family caring and organising personal matters



It is very important that you help your employee maintain their employment so that they have the freedoms to take care of themselves and any dependents. Lack of employment may further reduce their freedom.

5

Show your employee where they can get professional help

There is help for DFV available and it is wise to have professional help options pre researched and included in your DFV workplace response policy. Discuss the help options with your employee and be prepared to help them reach out – for example, they may appreciate your help to make a phone call or book an appointment. Some help options available:

- ✓ General Practitioners (GPs) can not only help with physical injury, but also the psychological affects domestic violence and referral to specialist services.
- ✓ If your workplace provides counselling, encourage the employee to utilise the service.
- ✓ Help your employee to connect with a specialist counsellor or psychologist through private means.
- ✓ Contact community or government-based organisations such as DV Connect, Legal Aid and local domestic violence services.
- ✓ Contact the Police Service for information regarding issues such as protection orders and in the case of an emergency situation

➔ [Read Luemo Reaching Out For Help](#)

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Consider security for victims, colleagues, and the workplace generally

Victims of domestic violence report that abuse often continues when they are at work and violence can escalate dramatically if the victim leaves the abuser. Sometimes physical violence starts after a victim has left the abuser. Violence during work could include abuse via telephone or electronically, stalking as the victim travels or by the abuser entering the workplace or surrounds. Consider the following:

Have an individual safety plan in place:

- ✔ Move the employee to a different location or away from public view
- ✔ Change or reduce contact with the public or customer visits where they may feel vulnerable to approaches by their abuser
- ✔ Change their telephone number or divert external calls to someone else or voicemail so that they are recorded. Abusive phone calls are the most common way abuse continues at work.
- ✔ Improve their personal security by considering their car parking needs, public transport needs, entry and exit from business premises.

Consider the overall security of the work premises:

- ✔ Physical security measures such as locked or card access through doors, personal alarms, sign in procedures, video surveillance, security patrols, intruder warning procedures
- ✔ Ensure all employees are proactively trained on workplace security protocols. This should include training and reminders to not reveal sensitive information about other employees such as their whereabouts, workhours or contact details

- ✔ Ensure the workplace has procedures to uphold a domestic violence protection order. For example, if a protected person has a protection order that includes the workplace ensure that security personnel have a photo of the abuser and understand the conditions of the protection order. Ensure your entry and identification procedures are up to date and training is refreshed
- ✔ Consult with a professional if you are unsure about security procedures or protection order obligations and practices

What if an employee is a perpetrator of domestic and family violence?

If an employee is suspected, accused of, or found to be a perpetrator of domestic and family violence, actions should be undertaken. Domestic violence is against the law and there are serious penalties and personal implications for perpetrators. It is not appropriate to ignore the perpetrator behaviour or their need for support to address the issue and their obligations. Consider the following:

- ✔ Talk to the employee
- ✔ Ask what help they think they might need
- ✔ Consider seeking professional legal advice for your workplace
- ✔ Ask for details of any protection orders that may have implications for the workplace
- ✔ Consider workplace security arrangements
- ✔ Make reasonable workplace adjustments and grant leave entitlements as appropriate

*** Facts and statistics in this document are from Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Australian Institute of Family Studies and Fair Work Ombudsman*

*** We also recommend employers read the Fair Work Ombudsman Family and Domestic Violence Employer Guide for further information.*