

News story: New advice to help employers deal with domestic abuse and stigma

One in four women and one in six men suffer from domestic abuse in their lifetime and domestic abuse costs businesses £1.9 billion every year due to decreased productivity, time off work, lost wages and sick pay.

Business in the Community and PHE has published a domestic abuse toolkit that will help raise awareness of the issue with employers and provide guidance on how they can support those affected by it.

In the UK, nearly 2 million people experienced domestic abuse in the last year alone.

With one third of a working adult's life spent in work, employers are in a unique position to create a supportive workplace culture that encourages the identification of health and wellbeing needs and to help break the silence around this issue.

This toolkit, developed in consultation with employers, will help them spot the signs and symptoms of domestic abuse, which include:

- frequent absence, lateness or needing to leave work early
- reduced quality and quantity of work or missing deadlines
- changes in the way an employee communicates – a large number of personal calls or texts or a strong reaction to personal calls
- physical signs and symptoms such as unexplained or frequent bruises or other injuries

While the human cost is immeasurable, the cost to business of domestic abuse is estimated at almost £2 billion a year due to decreased productivity, time off work, lost wages and sick pay and so employers have both a duty of care and business reason to provide a safe and effective work environment for their staff.

The government has made progress in handling domestic abuse and violence across the public sector, with draft legislation due to be debated in the autumn to address prevention through to rehabilitation.

Secretary of State for Crime, Safeguarding and Vulnerability, Victoria Atkins, said:

Domestic abuse is an appalling crime that affects people in all professions.

Employers have a crucial role to play in helping staff who are victims of domestic abuse. That is why this toolkit is so valuable,

as it provides employers with simple steps they can take to raise awareness and support their colleagues.

Through initiatives like this as well as through government action including the Domestic Abuse Bill, we can transform society's response and properly tackle these awful crimes.

Rosanna O'Connor, PHE's Director for Domestic Abuse, said:

Domestic violence won't go away by itself – it needs everyone to help break the cycle of violence in our homes, workplaces and communities.

Fear of stigma and isolation stops people who experience domestic abuse from seeking help. This toolkit supports employers to help keep staff safe from abuse at work and create a working environment that makes it easy for people to take the first step and to talk about their experience.

Louise Aston, Business in the Community Wellbeing Director, commented:

Domestic abuse is in the foothills. Although it's gaining visibility with the government's new Domestic Abuse Bill, it doesn't feature as a topic for many employers yet. There was an average of less than one disclosure to employers over the previous 12 months, which suggests that employees don't feel supported to raise the issue.

There are parallels with where we were with mental health a decade ago, and mental health in terms of stigma and shame. I hope that this toolkit will fuel debate that domestic abuse touches all employers and that they have a duty of care and a legal responsibility ensure that the workplace is a safe and supportive to disclose.

The toolkit gives key actions for employers:

1. Acknowledge

Use this toolkit to help understand the issues, and acknowledge every employer's responsibility to address domestic abuse. Enable colleagues to openly discuss this topic, and provide a supportive workplace

2. Respond

Review your policies and processes to ensure you are providing a supportive workplace and can respond to disclosure.

3. Refer

Provide access to organisations who can help employees affected by the issue.

The Domestic Abuse [Toolkit](#) forms part of a suite of toolkits developed by Business in the Community, in association with PHE.