



COVID-19 DOMESTIC ABUSE TOOLKIT FOR EMPLOYERS

For the first time, the majority of employees will be working from home, and many more will be working from home for longer periods. Many employees will also have the added responsibility of looking after their children while schools remain shut. It is likely that communities and neighbourhoods will feel different as further social distancing measures are implemented to control the spread of COVID-19.

This will prove unsettling to some and disruptive both to the employees and their families, creating new tensions as professional and personal lives collide.

Some people will have avoided working from home in the past as their domestic circumstances are at odds with this way of working. This can have a huge impact on personal and wider wellbeing.

Reasons for this may include:

- Inadequate accommodation for working from home (lack of internet, cramped space, lack of

appropriate furniture, shared accommodation with others)

- Personal mental health and wellbeing issues that raise duty of care considerations for people working alone
- Different domestic backgrounds
- Abusive relationships from which work has been an escape

In many cases, the individual may have been able to keep these issues private but will now need support to disclose and manage them effectively.

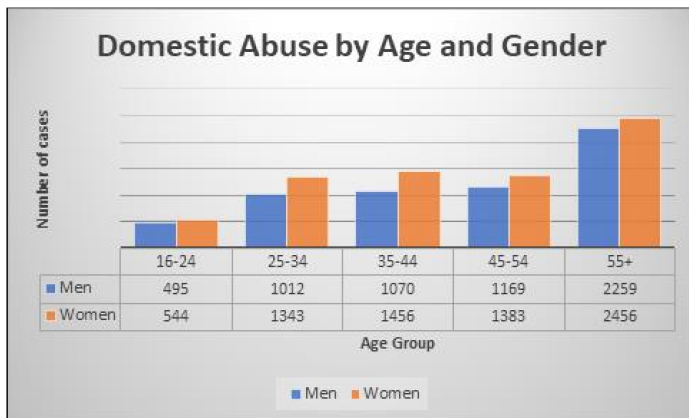
What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is more than just physical violence. It can also include, but is not limited to:

- coercive control and manipulation by psychological means of someone into doubting their own sanity
- economic abuse
- online abuse
- verbal abuse
- emotional abuse
- sexual abuse

Domestic abuse can happen to anyone, in any walk of life, of any gender.

Domestic abuse by age / gender chart



Data source: Domestic abuse prevalence and victim characteristics. ONS 25 November 2019 using data for the year ending March 2019. Please note that the ONS data does not include people aged 75+.

Domestic abuse through the race lens

- Domestic abuse affects women from all ethnic groups, and there is no evidence to suggest that women from some ethnic or cultural communities are any more at risk than others. However, the form the abuse takes may vary; in some communities, for example, domestic abuse may be perpetrated by extended family members, or it may include forced marriage, or female genital mutilation (FGM).
- Whatever their experiences, women from Black, Asian or minority ethnic communities are likely to face additional barriers to receiving the help that they need.

- Eliminating violence against women and girls is one of the targets under the Sustainable Development Goals. Findings show that some groups of women are more likely to experience partner abuse than others.
- Women who identified with mixed / multiple ethnicities were more likely to have experienced partner abuse in the last 12 months (10.1%) than any other ethnic group.

Home working, social distancing and self-isolation

Recent measures announced by the government to tackle coronavirus (COVID-19) have seen people's day-to-day lives drastically altered. Home working, social distancing and self-isolation can cause anxiety for those who are experiencing or feel at risk of domestic abuse. Domestic abuse is a crime and unacceptable in any situation, no matter what stress you are under.

Domestic abuse often involves the perpetrator isolating the victim from family and friends. Feelings of isolation can only increase with home working, social distancing and self-isolation.

All employers should remind employees to stay in touch and understand that the mental health effects of domestic abuse can be exacerbated.

Furloughed workers may come under significant financial pressure, including financial abuse. Emotional support needs to be provided to the workforce.

The most vulnerable need to be safeguarded and supported now more than ever.

Domestic abuse increases in UK

Fears are growing in the UK that the stay-at-home coronavirus guidelines may leave domestic abuse victims feeling especially isolated, very vulnerable and exposed. Home is not always the safe haven that it should be.

The [National Domestic Abuse](#) helpline has seen a 25% increase in calls and online requests for help since the 23 March 2020 lockdown, and visits to the National Domestic Abuse helpline website for information were 150% higher than during the last week in February 2020. More than 25 organisations helping domestic violence victims have reported an increase in their caseload since the start of the UK's coronavirus epidemic.

An audit of 119 organisations by the domestic abuse charity [SafeLives](#) found, however, that even as pressure on frontline services increased, most were being forced to reduce vital services. The groups were surveyed during the last week of March 2020, with 26 of them able to confirm increased caseloads owing to Covid-19. Three-quarters said they had had to reduce service delivery to victims.

A separate study highlights the plight of domestic-violence survivors. SafeLives interviewed 66 survivors, and women were asked to score themselves from zero to ten, with ten denoting "safe". More than half offered a score of five or less, with three saying they felt "not safe at all".

Domestic abuse victims are still allowed to leave home to seek help at refuges

Domestic abuse victims are still allowed to leave home to seek help at refuges despite rules to stop coronavirus spreading. The home secretary, Priti Patel, has said the government would protect victims, saying it has given £1.6bn to local councils to help those in need and was working with charities.

Anyone who is at risk of, or experiencing, domestic abuse, is still able to leave and seek refuge. Refuges remain open, and the police will provide support to all individuals who are being abused - whether physically, emotionally, or otherwise.

The Home Secretary has also pledged to crack down on domestic abusers, and the government recently pledged £15 million to tackle domestic abuse crimes.

It comes after police warned the new rules made victims more vulnerable. Health concerns and job losses may also add pressure, causing some people to experience abuse for the first time.

Employer actions supporting employees at risk or experiencing domestic abuse

While levels of abuse may be rising, visibility within employment settings may be undermined because of the shift to remote working. Employers should prioritise staying in contact with staff during this time. They should also ensure activities that support colleague relationships beyond engagement on particular projects continue, for example, manager 121s and check-ins at the beginnings of team meetings.

Download Business in the Community's / Public Health England's Domestic Abuse Toolkit, sponsored by the Insurance Charities, with support from the Employers' Initiative on Domestic Abuse, for further information. We have included a quick, actionable snapshot from the toolkit below:

1. Acknowledge: Use this toolkit to help understand the issues and acknowledge every employer's responsibility to support victims of domestic abuse. Promote the information that the government is allowing domestic abuse victims to leave home to seek help at refuges.

2. Respond: If a manager suspects that an employee is experiencing domestic abuse, they should try to have a conversation to discuss the issue, identify and refer to appropriate support.

Here are some examples of questions and prompts that could be used to open a conversation:

- 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?
- If there's anything you'd like to talk to me about at any time? I'm always here to support you.

- Is everything all right at home?
- You don't have to tell me anything, but please know that I would like to support you if and when you feel you need it.
- What support do you think might help? What would you like to happen? How?

3. Refer: Inform all your employees that help is available. Signpost employees to organisations who can help employees affected by the issue. A full list of supportive organisations and links is included in the toolkit and below.

Support available

If you feel you are at risk of abuse, worried you may commit domestic abuse, or are worried about a colleague or friend, support and help are available.

If you suspect that your neighbours or those in your community are victims of domestic abuse, we encourage you to report it to the police.

Call 999 If you are in immediate danger, call 999 and ask for the police - the police will continue to respond to emergency calls.

Below we have a list of supportive organisations and services across the UK that can provide incredible support and advice to those experiencing abuse. All names are hyperlinked and will take you directly to their website.

Northern Ireland

- For Children's Social Work at the [Health and Social Care \(HSC\) Trust](#) in the area in which the child lives:
 - Belfast HSC Trust 028 9050 7000
 - SE HSC Trust 0300 1000 300
 - Northern HSC Trust 0300 1234 333
 - Southern HSC Trust 0800 7838745
 - Western HSC Trust 028 7131 4090

- [Nexus](#): 24 hour Domestic and Sexual Abuse helpline. Please call 0808 802 1414.
- [PSNI](#): Call 101 for non-emergency, but if you need immediate help or advice, go to PSNI Online, or in an emergency where urgent help is needed, or you feel threatened call 999.
- [The Rowan: Sexual Assault Referral Centre](#) for Northern Ireland. 0800 389 4424 (for both genders and all ages who have been sexually abused, assaulted or raped).
- [Victim Support NI](#): An independent charity supporting people affected by crime. We offer a free and confidential service, whether a crime has been reported and regardless of how long ago the event took place. Please call (028) 9024 3133.
- [Women's Aid NI](#): 24 Hour Domestic and Sexual Abuse Helpline. Available to anyone who has concerns about domestic or sexual abuse, now or in the past. It is open to all women and men affected by domestic and sexual violence. Please phone 0808 802 1414
- [Men's Advisory Project \(MAP\)](#): Provides counselling services for men experiencing domestic abuse. Support and counselling services are also available to men who have previously left a violent or abusive relationship and who are still experiencing the effects. Please call (028) 9024 1929 – open 9am-5pm Monday-Friday to arrange counselling.
- [NI Social Services](#): Can provide practical assistance and guidance to those suffering abuse.

In addition, your GP can offer help and support. Many people experiencing abuse believe that their GP can be trusted with disclosure and can offer practical support.

For more workplace support, please contact stephanie.reid@bitcni.org.uk, or visit www.bitcni.org.uk