

# Domestic abuse in the workplace: what are your responsibilities?

**Sarah Buxton** discusses the importance of employee wellbeing when dealing with domestic abuse.

I talk a lot about the importance of employee well-being and always emphasise how nuanced and multifaceted it can be. It's a broad-brush term encapsulating happiness, physical and mental health, and comfort. Many of its associated issues cross the boundaries between personal and professional lives.

All the best dental practices – along with their owners or managers – will know that the support they provide to their employees must often extend beyond issues relating directly to work. Why? Because well-being at work is affected by problems that start at home, which are impossible to leave behind first thing on a Monday.

This fact is especially true of the topic I'm focusing on today: domestic abuse. This term doesn't just refer to physical violence; it can be emotional, financial, or psychological too. Any consistent coercive, threatening, or violent behaviour is domestic abuse, and no matter what form it takes, it can be an extremely traumatising experience for the individual involved.

You might think of this as an issue entirely removed from the workplace - after all, it happens at home. Abuse is a sensitive and personal issue, but it's also one which often has an unavoidable impact on work-life. In fact, it costs businesses £1.9 billion a year due to low productivity, absenteeism,

lost wages, and sick pay.

For an abuser, power often comes from the ability to isolate and control – by keeping someone away from those who may begin to suspect that something is amiss and intervene.

If an employee is experiencing domestic abuse, their workplace may be one of the only places they can get distance from their abuser – this is why practice owners and managers have the power to end the cycle of abuse once and for all. But how should you go about this, and what are your responsibilities?

Firstly, it's your duty as an employer to educate yourself and your team about the tell-tale signs of abuse. The employee in question might not be able to explicitly ask for help because they feel unsafe or due to the stage they're at within the cycle of abuse – so you should know how to pick up on the signals.

What does it look like if an employee is experiencing emotional, financial, or physical abuse? How might their behaviour change? Are there any physical signs? Which patterns should you look out for, and how should you approach them if you suspect they're experiencing abuse?

To know how to answer these questions, you should implement thorough training from a reputable provider, such as Women's Aid or Refuge. This advice will equip you and your team with the skills to notice the early indicators of abuse and take appropriate action – because the more educated your staff are, the less likely crucial warning signs will go unnoticed.

But your responsibilities don't stop there. All practices that are committed to employee wellbeing will have a comprehensive domestic abuse policy in place to outline factors such as:



- Your definition of domestic abuse
- How you will go about identifying the issue within your practice
- The process you will follow if an employee discloses their abuse to you
- The duty of other colleagues to report suspected abuse
- Your employees' right to confidentiality
- The scope of the support you will provide to those experiencing abuse
- How you will keep employees safe at work



**Sarah Buxton** is a director and employment solicitor at FTA Law.



- The training you provide around domestic abuse

- Your approach to employees who are perpetrators of domestic abuse

And any other additional information that you feel is relevant to your practice or as advised by a qualified training provider.

Crucially, *all* of your employees should be aware of this workplace policy. If they know support is there, they may be more inclined to come forward and speak out about their own abuse, which could end

the cycle. What's more, familiarity with this policy will help employees to feel confident coming forward to report suspected cases of abuse.

As with many well-being issues involving heightened emotions and complex relationships, domestic abuse is a topic you should approach delicately. You must have robust, well-thought-out policies to protect your employees and practice.

I highly recommend seeking advice if you're unsure about how to approach a

situation where you suspect or know that an employee is experiencing domestic abuse.

As a leading Employment and HR lawyer, I can help you to take the best course of action in these scenarios, hone your domestic abuse policies, and implement adequate training to ensure your employees are protected.

For more information please email [sarah.buxton@fta-law.com](mailto:sarah.buxton@fta-law.com)