

# **Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council**

## **Employee Domestic Abuse Procedure**

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## 1. Introduction

This procedure should be read alongside the Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council Employees Domestic Abuse Policy. It offers practical guidance for council employees on how to respond to domestic abuse.

Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council is committed to providing a safe and supportive working environment for all employees. We promote a culture that prioritises the safety and wellbeing of victim/survivors, and places responsibility firmly on the perpetrator.

### What is Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse can be a single incident or a pattern of behaviour used to exert power and control over another person, often creating fear. It occurs within close relationships, such as with a partner, ex-partner, or family member. It can include:

- physical or sexual abuse.
- violent or threatening behaviour.
- controlling or coercive behaviour.
- economic abuse
- psychological, emotional or other abuse.
- stalking and harassment

### Domestic Abuse is a Workplace Issue

Given the widespread nature of domestic abuse, it is possible that some employees may experience it during their time with the council. The workplace can often serve as a place of safety for victim/survivors. However, risks may arise—particularly if someone has recently left an abusive relationship. According to the Equality and Human Rights Commission 75% of women experiencing domestic abuse in the UK are targeted at their place of work. It is all our responsibility to ensure that we are supporting survivors of domestic abuse.

## 2. Indicators of Domestic Abuse

There are many indicators that someone is experiencing domestic abuse, it is important to look out for these signs in staff and to instigate a conversation if you have concerns.

- Changes in employees working pattern, including increased sick leave, lateness and unauthorised time off.
- Reduced quality of work.
- Change in phone/email usage, receiving a high volume of personal calls, not answering calls, negative reaction to receiving calls, texts or emails.
- Spending more time at work than usual.
- Frequent visits to work from employee's partner/family member.
- Change in personality, employee becoming withdrawn, anxious, distracted etc.

- Concerned about leaving work on time.
- Visible injuries such as bruises, cuts or marks with no explanation.
- Change in dress which is ill suited to the weather to cover up injuries.
- Change in how much/whether make-up is worn.
- Indicators of substance misuse.

### Additional Barriers

It is difficult for victim/survivors to make disclosures of domestic abuse. Some groups may also experience more challenges and barriers to accessing support.

- Members of the LGBTQ+ community- May not be 'out' in the workplace, fears that the perpetrator will 'out' them to colleagues.
- People with disabilities- May fear repercussions in the workplace.
- People from the Global Majority- Experience institutional racism and discrimination and may have a lack of trust in services.
- Elderly people- Can be more isolated and dependent on the perpetrator.

### Remote Working (Working from Home)

TMBC is committed to providing flexible working opportunities for staff, however remote working can also mean that it is more difficult to identify indicators of domestic abuse. Remote working for employees experiencing DA can also be dangerous and lead to increased abuse.

Where an employee discloses that they are experiencing domestic abuse, there will always be an option to work from a Council office if working remotely is not safe. The Council recognises its duty to ensure all staff have a safe working environment and will work sensitively with staff to identify appropriate arrangements, respecting confidentiality at all times.

## 3. Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council Commitment

If you are employed by Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council, here is what to expect if you want to make a disclosure of domestic abuse.

- A non-judgemental approach- Whether you make a disclosure to a trusted colleague, Line Manager or DA Champion, your disclosure will be believed.
- Survivor-Led- TMBC response will be led by you and your needs. This can include workplace adjustments, referrals to specialist services or just someone to listen to your experiences.
- Confidentiality- If you chose to make a disclosure of domestic abuse, information will be kept confidential, unless you tell us that you are at risk of death or serious harm. In this situation we will have to break confidentiality to safeguard you.

#### 4. Procedure for Staff

**Step 1-** A colleague makes a disclosure to you of domestic abuse.

**Step 2** - Listen to them, validate their experiences and believe them.

**Step 3-** Are they in immediate danger?

- If yes, contact 999 and inform your Line Manager.

**Step 4-** Ask survivor if they would like support from a domestic abuse service.

- If yes, signpost them to services outlined in DA Staff Policy or EAP.
- Encourage them to speak with the DA Champion (see Appendix 1) or DA Co-ordinator who can provide more information.
- If no, respect survivor's decision and ensure they know where to find support for the future.

**Step 5-** Ask the survivor whether they feel comfortable informing HR/Line Manager.

- If yes, offer to attend with them if you are considered a safe person.
- If no, respect the survivor's decision.

**Step 6-** Hearing details of domestic abuse can be upsetting. Access support for yourself via the Employee Assistance Programme.

#### 5. Procedure for Line Managers

**Step 1-** An employee wants to make a disclosure of domestic abuse, or you notice indicators of domestic abuse in a staff member.

**Step 2-** Responding to a disclosure

- Find a safe, comfortable room to talk. Ensure that it is confidential. Do not initiate the conversation over a call as you will not know if the perpetrator is present.
- Always believe the victim/survivor, do not ask for proof of domestic abuse and emphasise that it is not the employee's fault.
- Avoid any language that blames the victim/survivor. Always ensure that the perpetrator is held accountable in conversations
- Discuss confidentiality, let them know that you will uphold confidentiality unless there is a safeguarding concern.
- Ensure that the conversation is led by the staff member, it is important to go at their pace and not to pressure them into making decisions.
- Avoid being reactive to details of domestic abuse, as this could prevent the employee from discussing their experiences.

- Make a simple record of the conversation.

**Step 3-** Are they in immediate danger or high-risk

- If yes, call 999 and inform relevant safeguarding leads.
- Consider making a MARAC referral via this link [MARAC Referral](#)

**Step 4-** Offer support to the survivor, keeping their safety and needs central to the process.

Safe contact

- Arrange a safe emergency contact with the employee who can be contacted if employee does not come to work.
- Maintain contact with the employee during absence.
- Discuss changing route to and from work.
- Consider changing employee's office location.
- Change employee's working hours/start and finish time.
- Provide security to and from car/bus or train station.

Safety at work

- Change locks and security codes to enter the workplace.
- Consider a desk alarm or personal alarm for the employee.
- If appropriate, employee to provide image of the perpetrator to reception staff to prevent them entering the building and to notify police.
- Ensure employees do not do any lone work.
- All incidents of abuse or violence that occur in the workplace to be recorded.
- Awareness raising in the workplace, accessible literature on DA support services.
- Robust systems for employees working in the community. Including checking in and out, sharing location.

Safe communication

- Consider changing employee's work email addresses and phone number.
- Ensure that employee's personal information is secure.
- If appropriate, issue instructions for all staff to not give any information on employee's contact details or location.
- Change duties if employee is in a customer facing role and could have contact with perpetrator.

Managing workload

- Consider flexible working or changes to working patterns.
- Adjust workload by reassigning tasks or extending deadlines.

- Providing flexi time, lieu time or paid time off for employee to attend appointments related to domestic abuse such as with DA specialist, solicitor or doctor.

#### Specialist support

- Signpost employee to local domestic abuse services who can complete a risk assessment.
- Consider signposting to specialist domestic abuse services if appropriate.
- Signpost to DA Champion (see Appendix 1) or DA Co-ordinator for more information.
- Ensure employee can access Employee Assistance Programme.
- Make accommodations for IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Advisor) to meet with employee in confidential room in office if necessary.

**Step 5-** If appropriate and with the consent of the survivor, inform HR about the situation.

- Ensure information is kept confidential and does not appear on staff records.

**Step 6-** Hearing details of domestic abuse can be upsetting. Access support for yourself via Employee Assistance Programme.

**Step 7-** Schedule a follow-up meeting with the survivor to check-in with them and discuss escalation in risk or changes to wellbeing.

### The Domestic Abuse Champions Network

The DA Champions Network is a group of TMBC employees who have received specialist domestic abuse training and are a point of contact for other staff members who would like support, information or advice about domestic abuse. DA Champions will also contribute to awareness raising in their team and ensure that there is a whole-council approach to responding to domestic abuse. Information about the network and which employees are champions can be found on the staff intranet.

## 6. Managing Perpetrators

There may be instances where an employee has been identified as a perpetrator of domestic abuse either through self-disclosure or potential warning signs. These could include:

- Negative, derogatory comments made by employee towards partner/family.
- Expressing anger and blaming partner/family.
- Constant messaging or calling partner/family.

- Injuries caused by victim/survivor in self-defensive, for example scratches on hands.

In line with TMBC's attitude to domestic abuse, it is important to have open conversations with perpetrators.

- Engaging with perpetrators does not condone their behaviour, it is important to inform them that their behaviour will not be tolerated.
- Inform the perpetrator that violence and abuse committed either in or outside of the workplace can lead to disciplinary action or dismissal.
- Consider whether redeployment is necessary if perpetrator works with vulnerable adults or children.
- Help the perpetrator to understand the cost of their behaviour, physical and emotional impact on victim/survivor, prison, loss of job, loss of relationship, loss of contact with children.
- Provide perpetrator with information on support services and perpetrator programmes.
- Line Managers should keep a confidential record of the discussion.

Alongside addressing the behaviour of the perpetrator, it is important that the safety of the victim/survivor is always considered. Confidentiality cannot be assured for the perpetrator due to the potential for police investigation or legal proceedings.

### Employee perpetrator and employee victim/survivor

There may be instances where an employee is perpetrating domestic abuse towards another employee. In this situation, it is important that the perpetrator's work pattern is altered rather than the victim/survivor. Requiring the survivor to alter their routine can compound the trauma, create a sense of punishment, and perpetuate a culture where victims are marginalised rather than supported.

However, it is important that each case is considered individually, it may not be safe to change the perpetrator's routine if they have access to the victim/survivor outside of the workplace as this could cause an increase in abuse.

Line managers of both the perpetrator and victim/survivor should be prioritising the victim/survivor's safety at work.

## 7. Information Sharing and Recording

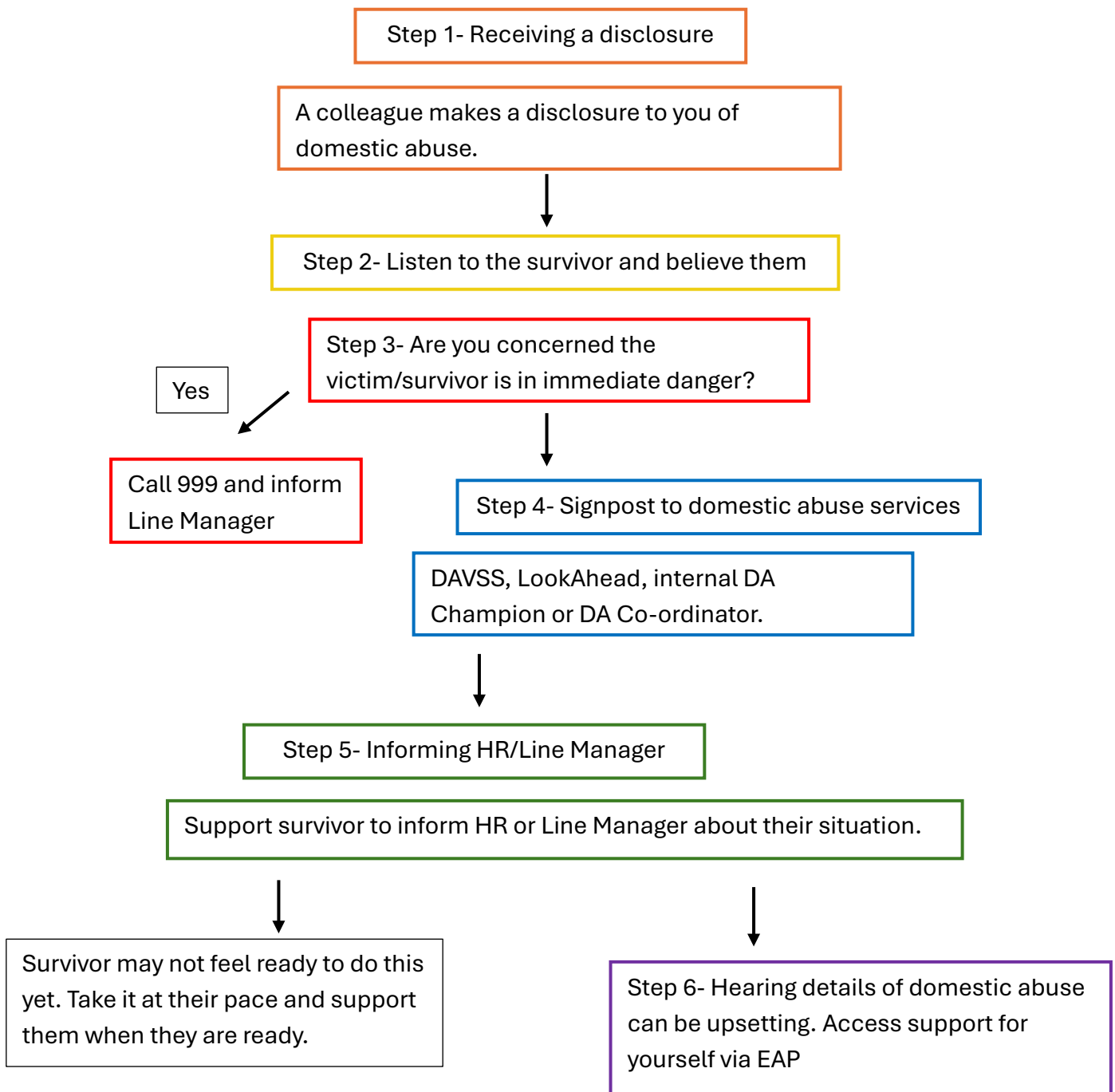
If an employee discloses domestic abuse this information should be kept confidential, information should only be shared with external agencies if the employee consents. In cases where there is a safeguarding concern, information can be shared with other agencies to safeguard the employee.

Breaching confidentiality can have serious consequences for the employee. Not only can it affect their work, but it can also put them at risk of further abuse and harm.

Information should be recorded accurately with a non-judgemental language. It should outline any actions taken by TMBC to support and safeguard the employee. These records should be kept outside of employee records and should be stored securely to ensure they remain confidential.



## 8. Flowchart Procedure for Staff



## 9. Flowchart for Line Managers

