



Leader Tool

Foster a safe environment for victims of Domestic and Family Violence

We know that the current changed personal circumstances as a result of the pandemic is leading to an increase in Domestic & Family Violence. It may be impacting your people. More people are stressed, spending more time at home in situations where people are trying to cope with heightened levels of stress, anxiety, frustration. As a manager or leader in a workspace, when your people were there in person, it was easier to read some of the signs. Now that more of us are managing and connecting with teams and people via technology, this can be tougher to notice. 1 in 6 women are currently experiencing Domestic Violence. While it is predominantly towards women and children, it is reported in men and other family members. As organisational leaders, we have a role to play. We have a dual role: to support your people and also support your organisation to manage the very real risks to the mental and physical wellbeing of our employees.

The most significant way that your organisation can assist employees who may be experiencing Domestic Violence is to maintain their jobs and offer support. In the current environment where employees may not have the safety of coming into work, here are some strategies which are important:

Recognise the signs - learn to identify the signs and symptoms such as bruises; injuries explained as accidents; avoiding video; changes in mood, appearance and attitude; changes in work performance; mistakes; calling in sick; appearing anxious, especially if someone enters the room.

Respond – don't avoid or delay, ask questions such as are they ok? Listen and do not judge. Let them know you believe them. Reassure them it is not their fault, encourage them to talk or find alternate ways of communication. Acknowledge their feelings and do not tell them what to do.

Refer - have a list of resources such as **1800 RESPECT** (737 732), FACS. Encourage them to reach out to their EAP. Keep checking in and asking as things may change. Do not make support conditional on them leaving their partner or home.

Remember - their home is not safe. Assume the perpetrator can hear, see, and monitor all communication. Ask which channels they prefer. Ask if there is a better or worse time to make contact and if there is any way that you can help with other challenges such as meeting times or work deadlines.

Talk - ask them about a safety plan – who will they call, where can they go if they feel at risk. Gather important documents in case they need to leave quickly.

Plan - Look at what you can do in terms of paid or unpaid leave. We have helped many organisations developing a DV Plan which gives clear guidance and transparency. Often due to the longer-term impacts of domestic violence, victims require ongoing counselling support and the usual session allowance may need to be extended.

Keep in touch, follow up - do not ask them why they do not leave - it is difficult, especially if children are involved.

Respect – have a zero-tolerance for disrespectful behaviour in any form in the workplace. Continually aggressive or disrespectful behaviour may also be a warning sign that support is needed. Perpetrators are in our workplaces too and may need access to help.

We are here to support you so that you can better support your people. If you have any further questions or would like to discuss a specific concern contact our Manager Support Hotline or your Relationship Manager. As always, as your EAP we are here to support your people whatever the nature of their concerns, please contact **AccessEAP** on **1800 818 728**.

