



**Western Health  
and Social Care Trust**

**Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse  
Workplace Policy  
October 2024**

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<b>Links to other policies, procedures, guidelines or protocols:</b>	Attendance at Work Policy & Procedures Flexible Working Policies Health and Safety at Work (NI) Order 1978 Management of Health and Safety at Work (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (NI) 1997 and the Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations (NI) 1996 Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021 Domestic Abuse (Safe Leave) Bill 2022 Human Rights Act 1998 Northern Ireland Act 1998		

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION / PURPOSE OF POLICY**

### **1.1 Background**

This is a locally revised version of a Regional Policy and based on guidelines produced by the Department of Health and the Department of Justice for Employers on Developing a Workplace Policy for Domestic and Sexual Abuse. The guidance was produced in conjunction with key stakeholders including the HSC Trusts, Trade Unions, Women's Aid Federation NI, Victim Support, Nexus and Northern Ireland Congress for Racial Equality. Guidance has also been taken from other Trust policies developed by Employers and Trade Unions.

The scope of the policy has been broadened to include sexual abuse and violence and to incorporate local legislative changes such as the recognition of coercive control as a criminal offence.

The policy outlines the Trust's commitment to providing a harmonious and supportive working environment for staff affected by, or who are at risk of, domestic and sexual violence and/or abuse. It aims to raise awareness of the serious impact that domestic and sexual abuse/violence can have on victims and their families; whilst recognising the significant impact it can have on an individual's ability to function effectively at work.

Unfortunately, one of the factors which makes it difficult to address domestic and sexual violence and abuse is its 'hidden nature'. Therefore the purpose of this policy is to aid the Trust in their role in supporting and helping employees who are experiencing Domestic & Sexual Violence and Abuse as well as addressing the prevalence of Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse in society.

The purpose of this policy is to support members of staff who experience domestic and sexual violence or abuse. It should also be read in the context of the Zero Tolerance Policy. This policy applies to all staff.

### **1.2 Purpose**

The overarching aim of this Policy is to ensure that victims/survivors of Domestic and Sexual violence and abuse who raise the issue in the workplace will be treated promptly, sensitively and with regard to personal safety and confidentiality.

Domestic and sexual violence and abuse is a serious problem in Northern Ireland and occurs right across our society. It can affect anyone regardless of seniority, gender, religion, sexual orientation, age, race, ethnicity or disability. On average, a domestic abuse incident is reported, every 16 minutes each day in NI. (*Source: Developing a*

*Workplace Policy on Domestic and Sexual Abuse (Revised October 2022) published by DoJ & DoH)*

The purpose of this policy is to raise awareness of the serious impact that domestic and sexual violence and abuse can have on an individual and their family. It aims to provide a framework within which staff have a safe space to seek information and support; and managers and colleagues have access to the tools to effectively respond. In accordance with this policy, staff will be protected against victimisation or any other detrimental treatment related to their act of disclosure.

### **1.3 Objectives**

- To provide information and raise awareness about domestic and sexual violence and abuse for Trust staff and managers to create a safe and supportive workplace for all.
- To offer practical and other support to employees in addressing problems arising from domestic violence or abuse, sympathetically and in confidence; to maximise the safety of employees, and to deal effectively with perpetrators of domestic violence or abuse among the workforce, as appropriate.
- The policy also aims to exercise social responsibility by re-affirming an individual's human right to live free from violence, abuse and threats, and to provide a safe and supportive environment for all employees who experience domestic and/or sexual violence/abuse.

## **2.0 SCOPE OF THE POLICY**

This policy applies to all Western Trust employees.

## **3.0 KEY POLICY PRINCIPLES**

### **3.1 Definitions**

The NI Government's Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy (2023 – 2030) defines domestic violence or abuse as:

*“Threatening, controlling, coercive behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, virtual, physical, verbal, sexual, financial or emotional) inflicted on anyone (irrespective of age, ethnicity, religion, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation or any form of disability) by a current or former intimate partner or family member”*

The NI Government's Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy (2023 – 2030) defines sexual violence and abuse as:

*“Any behaviour ( physical, psychological, verbal, virtual/online) perceived to be of a sexual nature, which is controlling, coercive, exploitative, harmful or unwanted that is inflicted on anyone (irrespective of age, ethnicity, religion gender, gender identity, sexual orientation or any form of disability).”*

### **3.2 Key Policy Statement**

In line with available statistics, it can be said with some degree of certainty that at any moment in time, a number of Trust staff are experiencing some form of domestic and sexual violence and abuse. In 2021/22 the 24 hr Domestic and Sexual Abuse Helpline in Northern Ireland received 11,568 calls, 11,418 web chat messages and 318 e-mails and yet it is known that the majority of incidents go under-reported and many victims remain silent. *(Source: Developing a Workplace Policy on Domestic and Sexual Abuse (Revised October 2022) published by DoJ & DoH)*

Home and work issues cannot always be neatly separated. Abusive and violent behaviour does not only take place in the home. It can frequently cross over into the workplace, where victims experience stalking, threats, harassment and worse. Equally, work can be a lifeline to independence and survival for victims of domestic abuse as they are ordinarily able to leave their home to go elsewhere, whilst also maintaining a level of income independent from the perpetrator.

Domestic and sexual violence and abuse is regarded by the Trust and Trade Unions as a serious and widespread problem that has a significant impact upon victims. It is socially harmful and disruptive; it can impact on the safety and welfare of staff; it can impinge on an individual's work performance; and can ultimately affect service provision. The Trust and Trade Unions are committed not only to responding sensitively and effectively to those needing help and support, but also to co-operating with criminal justice bodies in taking action against the perpetrators of domestic violence or abuse.

The Trust and Trade Unions will take all reasonable steps to deal with domestic and sexual violence or abuse through the creation of a safe and supportive environment within the workplace. The Trust and Trade Unions undertake to provide information to all employees about domestic and sexual violence or abuse and to signpost to the support available to address it. It does so with a commitment to treating concerns sympathetically, sensitively and confidentially. The Trust will undertake not to discriminate against those who have been subjected to domestic violence or abuse in terms of their existing employment or career development.

Although both men and women can be affected by domestic violence or abuse, women still make up the largest proportion of domestic and sexual violence or abuse victims. It is also important to highlight that Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex and Asexual individuals (LGBTQIA+) can also be victims. Domestic and sexual abuse can also take place in teenage relationships as well as in more mature relationships.

The procedures that are set out here are broadly applicable to both men and women, regardless of the source of domestic abuse. It should also be noted that it is not necessary to be living in the same house as a perpetrator to be a victim of domestic and sexual violence or abuse: non-co-habiting partners and, in particular, ex-partners can also be victims or perpetrators.

It is known that women are at greatest risk of homicide at the point of separation from a violent partner and when she is pregnant. Consequently, a woman experiencing domestic violence or abuse may be particularly vulnerable whilst at work; for example, if she leaves a violent partner, the workplace is one place where she can be readily located and harmed. Clearly, there may be an increased risk if the perpetrator of violence/abuse works within the same workplace as the victim.

The Department of Health Strategy document 'Developing a Workplace Policy on Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse - Guidance for Employers', provides advice on how employers across the public, private, voluntary and community sectors, can develop increased awareness and more effective responses to domestic violence and abuse for the benefit of all staff. The Trust and Trade Unions endorse the strategy and its action plan. It recognises that domestic and sexual violence or abuse is not purely a private matter between two individuals but that the impact is much wider in terms of society and the workplace. The Trust and Trade Unions are aware that domestic violence or abuse can result in deterioration in performance, increased absenteeism or poor timekeeping, and can have a longer-term impact on individuals in terms of career development and job security.

## **4.0 TYPES OF DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND ABUSE**

### **4.1 Domestic Violence and Abuse**

Domestic violence or abuse is generally recognised as a pattern of behaviour, which is characterised by the exercise of coercive control and the misuse of power by one person over another within an intimate or family relationship. It is a fundamental breach of an individual's human rights. It is usually frequent and persistent and is used to harm, 'punish' or frighten the individual.

It's been established that power and control are at the core of domestic abuse. It takes many forms of violent and controlling behaviour such as physical assault, sexual abuse, rape, threats and intimidation and harassment. It is not limited to physical and sexual violence however, and in many cases, there is also emotional abuse which can include the undermining of self-confidence; controlling behaviour such as isolation from friends, family and support networks; humiliating and controlling behaviour financial abuse by controlling access to money, personal items, transportation and the telephone; belittling and constant unreasonable criticism; threats; and stalking (physical and digital); virtual and online abuse.

It is acknowledged that domestic violence and abuse can also manifest itself through the actions of immediate and extended family members through the perpetuation of unlawful and harmful activities and practices such as:

- Forced marriage;
- 'honour' based violence and crimes; and
- female genital mutilation

### Statistical incidence of domestic abuse/violence

- PSNI recorded **33,229** domestic abuse incidents in between 1<sup>st</sup> October 2022 to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023, an **increase of 0.4%** on the previous 12 months.
- A domestic abuse incident is reported, on average, **every 16 minutes** each day in NI.
- **1 in 4 women** and **1 in 7 men** have experienced domestic abuse.
- On average, there are **8 domestic homicides** in NI each year.
- Domestic violence often **starts or escalates during pregnancy**.

While often associated with being in a marriage or in an intimate partnership, including same sex or teenage relationships; domestic violence or abuse can also happen between parents and children, siblings, grandparents or other family members. It can also include violence inflicted on, or witnessed by children and young people, which can have a long-term life changing impact.

## 4.2 Sexual Violence and Abuse

Sexual violence and abuse is an aggressive act that frequently aims to express power and dominance over the victim. It can take many forms, involving both contact and non-contact activity and it can include taking advantage of an individual's incapacity to give informed consent.

The NI Government’s Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy (2023-2030) defines sexual violence and abuse as:

***“any behaviour (physical, psychological, verbal, virtual/online) perceived to be of a sexual nature which is controlling, coercive, exploitative, harmful, or unwanted that is inflicted on anyone (irrespective of age, ethnicity, religion, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation or any form of disability)”***

It is also important to recognise that sexual abuse may overlap with sexual harassment (unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature). Sexual harassment occurs where a job applicant or employee is subjected to unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature and where that conduct has the purpose, or the effect, of violating their dignity, or of creating for them an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. Sexual harassment also occurs where a person is treated less favourably than others for having rejected, or submitted to, unwanted conduct of the kind just described. Further information regarding sexual harassment can be found within the Trust’s Conflict, Bullying and Harassment Policy which is linked [here](#)

Sexual violence and abuse is very often perpetrated by someone, whom the victim knows or trusts, but it can also be perpetrated by a stranger.

### Statistical evidence of sexual violence

- Sexual abuse is a crime.
- It can happen to anyone and it is **never** the fault of the victim.
- **1 in 7** adults have experienced some form of sexual abuse.
- **936** sexual offences were recorded by PSNI during the period from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2022 – 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023.
- It can have a profound effect on physical and mental health.
- **21,425** counselling sessions were offered by Nexus NI in 2021/22 and **17,935** were delivered.

### 4.3 Coercive control

Coercive Control is an intentional pattern of behavior (often used alongside other forms of abuse) which can include threats, excessive regulation, intimidation, humiliation and enforced isolation. It is designed to punish, dominate, exploit, exhaust; create fear, confusion and increase dependency in a person (and often their children). Over time it can lead to a complete loss of self. This is now recognised as illegal in the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021.

#### **4.4 Technological or digital abuse**

Technological or digital abuse can provide a perpetrator with even more ways to threaten and control virtually through email, text messages, telephone messages, online, social media, etc. The perpetrator may for example, send abusive texts or emails, demand access to the victim's passwords.

#### **4.5 Economic Abuse**

Economic abuse is one of the most prevalent forms of domestic violence and abuse, which could range from:

- Damaging job security and career prospects.
- Controlling working hours or ability to participate in work-related activities.
- Causing the victim to be late for work or insisting on driving them to and from work.
- Destroying work clothes.
- Isolating the victim from colleagues.
- Demanding that earnings be paid into a specific bank account or diverting monies paid into a joint account.
- Destroying the victim's confidence so that they feel unable to work.
- Causing injuries that result in sickness absence

Perpetrators will tend to use more than one form of abuse to control and intimidate the other person.

#### **5.0 WHY IS THIS A WORKPLACE ISSUE?**

Home and work issues cannot always be separated and domestic and sexual violence or abuse can impact greatly on the working life of someone who is being abused. A person can continue to experience the violence and abuse in the workplace through, for example, abusive or threatening phone calls or emails and individuals can be particularly vulnerable going to or from their place of work. All of this can affect their performance, attendance, timekeeping, career prospects and job security.

A survey conducted by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions in 2014 into the impact of domestic violence on the workplace collated 1,734 responses from individuals within Northern Ireland. Of those who had experienced domestic violence, over 40% reported an impact on their ability to get to work and nearly two thirds of respondents who had experienced difficulty in getting to work, reported that this was due to physical injury or restraint. Nearly a quarter of those who had experienced difficulty in getting to work due to domestic violence said that this was due to car keys or money for public

transport being hidden or stolen by their abuser or refusal or failure to look after children to facilitate attendance at work.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, more than 80 per cent of respondents who had experienced domestic violence reported that the violence had affected their work performance due to being distracted, tired or unwell. Living in a physically abusive relationship is traumatic and stressful and is likely to have a significant psychological impact on those experiencing the abuse. Such traumatic experiences are likely to negatively affect work performance. As a Trust, in order to manage these impacts sympathetically and with a reasonable and supportive approach, all staff should have an awareness of how to effectively respond to disclosures made by a member of your team or work colleague.

Several respondents to the survey reported that they had lost their job as a result of the domestic violence. In cases where a manager is unaware of or unsympathetic to the reasons for persistent lateness, unexplained absences or poor performance, the employee can find themselves subject to performance management processes such as disciplinary. Losing a job and an independent source of income is a disastrous outcome for anyone experiencing domestic violence.

Of the responses gathered in the ICTU survey, those who disclosed their abuse at work, 54% reported that 'Nothing really changed' following their disclosure. Staff who have found the courage to seek help and support, should be treated with compassion and empathy and provided with a safe space, information and signposted to experts who can provide practical help. This policy aims to provide a framework in which Trust managers and staff feel equipped to do this.

Supporting employees who are experiencing domestic violence is crucial. Without a job and a source of income, those experiencing the abuse are less likely to find a way of escaping the abusive relationship. The emotional support of their manager, colleagues or TU Rep can provide an important life line to an employee trapped in an abusive relationship and without that link, those individuals can become more isolated and therefore more vulnerable.

Domestic and sexual violence and abuse can also impact work colleagues of the victim as they too could experience threatening or intimidating behaviour from the perpetrator and more particular issues can arise where both the perpetrator and the victim work in the same workplace or location.

<sup>1</sup> By having a Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Workplace Policy in place it is possible to create a safe and supportive working environment.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ictuni.org/publications/ictu-domestic-violence-survey-results/>

## 6.0 ROLES/RESPONSIBILITIES

### 6.1 The Trust

Domestic and sexual violence and abuse is a sensitive issue and those experiencing it are often reluctant to discuss it with managers or colleagues. The impact from experiencing domestic and sexual violence and abuse is complex. It is important to be aware of some of the challenges that may inhibit them from recognising their experience as abusive and/or seeking support. It is particularly important to recognise, acknowledge and understand how multicultural beliefs and values may influence disclosure and subsequent communication.

In developing this policy, the Trust endeavours to raise awareness in the workplace about domestic and sexual violence or abuse and promote practices that harness a safe and confidential environment where employees can access support. This will be realised through the following:

- Designate and train appropriate members of staff to act as “Support Officers”.
- Provide or facilitate training for key staff members, particularly managers and staff from Human Resources in relation to this new policy and its procedures. The training will cover indicators of domestic violence or abuse and appropriate responses to disclosure, including information about the duty of care to pass on information to relevant agencies where a child or an adult at risk of harm are considered to be at risk.
- Ensure that any staff member who reports an incident of domestic and or sexual violence/abuse is given a thoughtful, non-judgemental and knowledgeable response. Any discussion must take place in private and remain confidential, as far as possible.
- Discuss all available support options and provide information about, and contact details of, organisations and agencies that are experienced in dealing with domestic violence or abuse.
- The Trust will consider the need to make any reasonable adjustments in terms of application of the policy and any support given if the person needing support has any form of disability.
- Provide access to information regarding specialist support resources online and via physical resources within Departments where necessary.

In addition, the Trust will consider the following actions where applicable:

- Compassionate consideration of mitigating circumstances in relation to sickness absence.

- The negotiation of flexible working hours for the employee to visit organisations and agencies that are experienced in dealing with domestic and sexual violence/abuse, or to seek legal aid, medical assistance, or find alternative accommodation, if and when necessary.
- It is recognised that staff who have been subject to domestic or sexual abuse may require time to deal with a number of difficult and challenging matters. These may include, but are not limited to:
  - Handling legal issues e.g. obtaining a restraining order, preparing for a court appearance, attending a hearing or trial.
  - Organising to relocate somewhere safer i.e. a refuge or moving in with a family member or friend.
  - Receiving medical care for injuries sustained as a result of domestic abuse, sexual assault, or other related issues.
  - Attending counselling or seeking advice from social services or a solicitor.
  - Obtaining welfare support;

In these circumstances, the employee may avail of a period of Safe Leave of up to 10 days paid leave in each leave year. Each period of Safe Leave is normally limited to a maximum of three days.

Safe leave can also be taken in conjunction with other types of family-related leave as outlined in the Special Leave Policy. Please note, the terms and conditions of Safe Leave may be subject to change as and when the regulations for the Domestic Abuse (Safe Leave) Bill 2022 are introduced.

- The negotiation of amended working arrangements on a short-term or long-term basis, as necessary (for example, moving an individual away from reception or from working in a ground-floor office visible from the street).
- The negotiation of changes to payment of salary, if requested (including a salary advance, if needed, for example, to acquire alternative accommodation). Contact the HR Business Partner aligned with your Directorate to discuss in the first instance.
- Mutually agree additional practical safety measures, as needed, with the employee e.g. Checking the staff member has arrangements for safely getting to and from home and if appropriate, encourage the use of a personal alarm.
- As part of safety planning and in partnership with the individual, ensure they do not work alone or in isolated areas.

- Keeping a record of any incidents of abuse in the workplace, including persistent telephone calls, emails etc.
- The facility to move across the Health and Social Care family of organisations within Northern Ireland without loss of working rights or conditions. Contact the HR Business Partner aligned with your Directorate to discuss in the first instance.
- It should also be noted that staff are encouraged to contact their Trade Union Representative for advice and support.

## 6.2 The Role of Line Managers

While this policy applies to all employees, it is line managers, in consultation with staff in Human Resources and the Trade Unions, who will play a key role in implementing it in practice. **Their role is not to deal with the abuse itself but to make a managerial commitment to assist the member of staff and outline what help is available to them. Managers should also be aware that some employees may feel more vulnerable because of their ethnic background, religion, age, sexual orientation or disability, for example.**

The following guidelines are intended to clarify the role of the line manager:

- Where domestic or sexual violence/abuse is suspected (i.e. reported by a colleague or the manager has become aware of potential signs) or known (i.e. reported directly by the victim), managers can contact a DV Staff Support Volunteer (referred to as a Support Officer within this document), for advice before any discussion with the staff member takes place, if it is possible to do so. In seeking this advice, the manager should not disclose any personal/identifiable information in regards to the employee without their prior consent. If the individual is in any immediate danger, the manager should dial 999.
- Respond sensitively and with compassion to any disclosures made in regards to domestic and sexual violence or abuse.
- Ensure an inclusive approach in acknowledging and understanding how multi-cultural values and beliefs can influence an individual's willingness or perceived ability to access help and support.
- It is important that an employee who is experiencing domestic and sexual violence and abuse accesses professional specialist support as soon as possible. Where appropriate, managers should support employees who make a disclosure by signposting them to professional support services and report to the PSNI if appropriate.
- Assess and take appropriate measures to ensure a safe working environment in line with Health and Safety regulations. Consider a method of communication

if the employee is absent from work to ensure that the employee's line manager is aware that they are safe.

- Consider and facilitate 'Safe Leave' if necessary in line with 6.1 above.
- Where it is alleged that a member of staff is perpetrating abuse during work time or using work resources, the manager will discuss this as a matter of urgency with the HR Business Partner aligned with your Directorate.
- Managers will review the security of personal information held on members of staff.
- With the knowledge of the person experiencing the abuse, managers will consider diverting telephone calls and emails if such harassment is a cause for concern.
- Managers will ensure that a safe and secure form of communication is maintained with an employee during any periods of absence.
- Managers will keep a confidential record of any discussions and of any action taken. This will be kept securely with the knowledge and consent of the staff member concerned, who will be able to access it. Line managers will respect the right of staff to make their own decision on the appropriate course of action at every stage.

Confidentiality breaches with regards to domestic and sexual violence and abuse could carry serious risks for the employee affected. Whilst employees experiencing domestic abuse normally have the right to complete confidentially, in circumstances of child protection or the protection of adults at risk of harm, the child/adult protection services may need to be involved. In addition, where there is serious concern regarding potential, serious harm to an individual, or where a potential crime has been disclosed, there may be a legal requirement to share information with appropriate statutory organisations and the PSNI.

- The Trust wishes to ensure that all actions arising from disclosure of domestic and sexual violence and abuse are employee led and will endeavour to support employees but cannot guarantee complete confidentiality in cases where a crime or risk of significant harm has been disclosed.
- Managers may also be in a position to make an employee aware of the Domestic Violence and Abuse Disclosure Scheme (DVADS). This scheme enables a person (aged 16 or older) to make enquiries to the police where they are concerned that their partner, or the partner of someone that they know (such as a friend or family member), has a history of violence, abusive or controlling and coercive offending. Further details on this scheme are available in Appendix 2.
- Other existing provisions (including occupational health, counselling Service etc.) will also be available to staff as a means of help and support.

## **6.2.1 How to recognise Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse**

Possible signs include:

- Arriving late, leaving early or high levels of absence from work without explanation;
- Uncharacteristic depression, fatigue, anxiety, distraction or problems with Concentration;
- Changes in the quality of work performance for no apparent reason;
- Receipt of repeated upsetting calls or emails;
- Obsession with time or needing regular time off for appointments;
- Inappropriate or excessive layers of clothing;
- Repeated injuries, or unexplained bruising or explanations that do not match the Injuries displayed;
- Increased hours being worked for no apparent reason.

This is not an exhaustive checklist. Some victims may display no signs of violence or abuse. Everyone's reaction is different and changes in behaviour may be evident or they can be difficult to identify. It is also important to remember that whilst there are similarities in responses, domestic and sexual abuse will affect women, men and LGBTQIA+ people in different ways and victims may need specialised support.

In any circumstances where a manager has concerns in regards to an employee, they are reminded to adopt a holistic and compassionate approach to facilitating a conversation to better understand what support is required. This principle should apply whether or not it transpires that the behaviour changes are associated with domestic and sexual violence and abuse.

## **6.2.2 What to do if someone discloses domestic and sexual violence or abuse**

- Give the person space and time to talk
- Call them by their name
- Speak slowly and clearly
- Consider if an interpreter or an advocate may be required;
- Listen carefully. Allow the person to tell you how they feel without judgement
- Keep calm and reassure the person as you listen
- Be kind. Try to understand how they are feeling
- Seek to empower people to make informed choices about their lives, and do not try to make decisions on their behalf;

- Do not try to talk over the person – wait for a ‘natural’ break before speaking and pause, using silence, before you speak to slow down the pace of the conversation
- Respect confidentiality, and recognise the real dangers which may be created if this is breached;
- Ensure that the safety of the person (and of any dependent children) is the paramount consideration;

Example:

*“I am concerned about you and would like to link you with services that can give you more help than I can. Would you like me to give you some information about getting the support that you need?”*

Further information can be accessed in this leaflet.



WHSCT How to Support.pdf

There are a number of ways you can support a victim by offering them a safe space to confide in you or tell them you have concerns about their well-being but most importantly listen and believe them. Trust what they say.

Opening up may be a very emotional and traumatic time for the individual. They may blame themselves. It is important you support them and reassure them that it is not their fault.

Encourage them to get support from the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Helpline and remind them there is a way out. Reassure them they are doing the right thing and support them to ensure they are not alone. It may be helpful to signpost them to practical information regarding safety planning which has been published online by Women’s Aid which can be found [here](#).

Never put yourself in danger by, for example, offering to talk to the abuser. In the event of a colleague being in immediate danger, call 999.

It can be extremely challenging providing support for someone who is a victim of domestic abuse. Make sure you get support for yourself after dealing with a call of this nature, from your line manager or one of the support officers (whilst being mindful of the need for complete confidentiality.)

### **6.3 All Trust Staff**

Other employees can assist and support co-workers in gaining confidence to tackle and report domestic and sexual violence and abuse.

Co-workers and colleagues may recognise that a fellow employee is in an abusive situation in their private lives. Employees should, in the first instance, speak to their colleague (with whom they have concerns) before raising these concerns further. If they receive permission/consent from their colleague, they may then raise their concerns with Line manager / Human resources.

However, if an employee has serious concerns that their colleague is in danger, it is important that they report this to the Line manager / Human resources (as a matter of urgency) and follow the organisations Adult safeguarding policy and Child safeguarding policy, if applicable, who will then determine if any action is necessary.

Colleagues may also be in a position to make a fellow employee aware of the Domestic Violence and Abuse Disclosure Scheme (DVADS). Further details on this scheme are available in Appendix 2.

All employees should be aware of the importance of not divulging the personal details of other employees, such as addresses, telephone numbers or shift patterns. Employees should also be mindful of the risks of using social media platforms and how information can be shared unintentionally in regards to their colleagues.

#### **6.4 Perpetrators who are Trust employees**

- It is often possible for perpetrators of domestic and sexual violence and abuse to use workplace resources such as phones, email and other means, to threaten, harass or abuse an individual. They may also involve other colleagues, who may or may not be aware of their motives in assisting them.
- Such abuse requires an effective response from the Trust as an employer because it could be damaging and potentially dangerous for those being abused, as well as possibly bringing the Trust into disrepute. Please note the circumstances of the case including the involvement of workplace resources and staff may be investigated by the police when a crime is reported.
- With regard to perpetrators of domestic and/or sexual violence/abuse, the Trust will undertake to do the following in line with the Trust's disciplinary procedure:
  - Consider disciplinary action against any staff member who incurs, during their period of employment, a criminal conviction relating to domestic or sexual violence/abuse.
  - Consider disciplinary action against any staff member who uses the time, property or the resources of the Trust to abuse a partner or family member.

- Require a staff member who has a Non-Molestation Order or Occupation Order in place against them, to declare this to the Trust. If their job involves working or coming into contact with children or adults at risk of harm, a change of role may be considered.
- Take action, as appropriate, to minimise the potential for a perpetrator to use their position or resources to find out the whereabouts, or other details, of their partner or ex-partner.
- Provide information about perpetrator re-education programmes

## **6.5 Role of Human Resources and Trade Unions**

The Trust will facilitate access to appropriate support and information and has designated certain staff members to be Support Officers who will be the first point of contact for employees experiencing domestic and or sexual violence/abuse. They will continue to receive training in responding to disclosures of domestic and or sexual abuse or violence; information about relevant agencies that offer support, and information on current legislation, reports, publications and events related to domestic and or sexual violence/abuse.

Support officers are trained to sign post and support staff/managers that contact the Support Telephone number. Support Officers will meet quarterly (to be kept under review as necessary).

Information on the Support Service is provided on the Trust Intranet. Support Officers will be drawn from a range of areas, but will include staff from Human Resources, and Trade Union representatives.

The Trust will also ensure Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Support training is available to all staff and managers.

Human Resources staff will endeavour to provide guidance and information to line managers and employees as required.

## **7.0 THE LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

Having in place an effective workplace policy can enable the Trust to comply with health and safety legislation as below:

- The **Health and Safety at Work (NI) Order 1978** under which the Trust as an employer has a duty of care to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety at work of their staff.
- The **Management of Health and Safety at Work (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006** which requires employers to assess the risks of violence to staff and make arrangements for their health and safety by effective planning, organisation and control.
- The **Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (NI) 1997** and the **Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations (NI) 1996**, are also relevant to violence at work.

This workplace policy supports the Trust to comply with our duty under the **Human Rights Act 1998**, to protect the human rights of individuals and ensure they are not being violated. Domestic and sexual violence and abuse constitutes a clear violation of a person's human rights and failure to address this issue in the workplace could be regarded as an infringement of the Human Rights Act.

Section 75 of the **Northern Ireland Act 1998** also requires the Trust, in carrying out their functions, to have due regard for the need to promote equality of opportunity and good relations.

In addition to the above legal obligations, the Trust as an employer, has an ethical and moral duty to protect and support employees experiencing domestic and sexual violence and abuse. For the victims, the workplace should be a place of safety, a place for help and support.

## **8.0 IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICY**

### **8.1 Dissemination**

This is applicable to all staff and managers. The awareness programme will be an ongoing one.

### **8.2 Resources**

Include conversation guide and checklist for managers  
List of organisations who provide support.

### **8.3 Exceptions**

There are no exceptions to this policy. The Trust recognise that domestic and sexual violence/abuse occurs regardless of social class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability, religion or age. The policy applies to all employees.

## **9.0 MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THE POLICY**

Employers and Trade Unions will undertake to monitor the implementation of this policy and review it on an annual basis and review formally through the Policy Committee on a 5 yearly basis.

## **10.0 CONSULTATION PROCESS**

This policy has been issued for consultation with TU colleagues and Human Resources Senior Management Team. The policy is based on the recently published guidance on Developing a Workplace Policy on Domestic and/or Sexual Abuse and/or Violence and colleagues within the BHSCT.

## **11.0 EVIDENCE BASE / REFERENCES**

- Guidance on Developing a Workplace Policy on Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse, produced by the Department of Health and Department of Justice in partnership.
- PSNI Statistical incidence of domestic abuse/violence
- Nexus NI
- Irish Congress of Trade Unions
- 'Workplace Policy on Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse' template/sample which was developed through the Western Domestic & Sexual Violence Partnership – January 2021.

## **12.0 APPENDICES / RESOURCES**

There are a number of organisations who can offer professional and practical support. See Appendix 1 for information regarding the Trust's DV Staff Support Service. See Appendix 2 for local and regional support organisations.

## **13.0 EQUALITY STATEMENT**

The Trust has legal responsibilities in terms of equality (Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998), disability discrimination and human rights to undertake a screening exercise to ascertain if this policy/proposal has potential impact and if it should be subject to a full impact assessment. This process is the responsibility of the policy or service lead - the template and guidance are available on the WHSCT Trust Intranet. Colleagues in Equality and Planning can provide assistance or support. The outcome of the Equality screening for this policy is:

**Major impact**

**Minor impact**

**No impact**

Minor impact – application of this policy and support is closely monitored by the Trust support officers.

## **SIGNATORIES**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Director**

### **WHSCT DV Support Service for Staff**

- Western Trust recognises the importance of valuing staff. The Trust is also mindful of the impact that domestic abuse has on individuals in terms of their health and well-being and in turn the negative effect on their performance or concentration at work. The Trust strives through the provision of this service to offer support to individuals - both on an emotional and practical level to make their workplace a safe and sustainable place to which they can come.

#### **What does the Service Offer?**

- This confidential service offers support and information about domestic and sexual violence and abuse for all Trust Staff, irrespective of seniority, gender, sexual orientation, age, race, religion, ethnicity or disability.
- The main purpose of the service is to provide information and to signpost staff with regards to the provisions available within the Trust and specialist agencies who have experience and expertise in the area of domestic and sexual violence and/or abuse.

#### **Who provides the service?**

- Designated volunteer support officers from across the Directorates and Trade Unions have been trained to offer informed lay support and information and signpost to external specialist agencies.

#### **What support is available?**

Support offered includes:

- A **9-5 Monday to Friday**, easily accessible **support and signposting service** which **aims to ensure staff can access specialist Domestic Violence agencies**. It is intended that this support is short term and is not a substitute for specialist DV Agencies
- Emotional support and practical information.
- Liaison and assistance to staff members to personally assist them in informing line management.
- A confidential, non- judgmental support and link service to other agencies who have professional expertise and experience.
- The same standard of support throughout the staff member's contact with the service.

- Information and support is offered over the phone, by E-mail or by arranging a meeting with one of the support officers, at an agreed time and place. Further meetings can be arranged if needed.
- Depending on the nature of the disclosure, the designated support officer may be required to make a referral to the Trust's Safeguarding Teams. Support Officers will discuss this at the beginning of any telephone call/meeting to ensure employees understand the circumstances where an onward referral is necessary and when it is not. Support Officers will endeavour to explain these thresholds prior to the employee disclosing any details regarding their own situation.

**The support officer will offer emotional support through:**

- Listening to the staff member
- Providing space and time to talk.
- Discussing what the staff member wants to do - if anything.
- Giving time to reflect, consider options and choose the way forward.
- Re-affirm the right to live free from abuse in any form.
- Treat staff with respect, sensitivity, courtesy and understanding throughout their contact with the service.

**Offer practical information through:**

- Exploring concerns and enabling staff to identify the options open to them.
- Providing information on the different types of support available, including useful contact numbers.
- Informing staff about how much support the Trust can provide.

**What Support Officers are not?**

- Support officers are not in this voluntary role as counsellors, social workers, medics or occupational health practitioners. The Trust is in the fortunate position of having experts in these fields and so support officers do not need to duplicate or replicate the valuable work that they do.
- Support Officers are not there to “rescue” or save a staff member – they will not be available out of hours but can provide the Domestic and Sexual Violence 24 hour helpline number. This is a Freephone number and anyone affected by domestic and or sexual violence can call – 0808 802 1414.

## **How to access the service**

- If you would like to talk to someone, please contact **02882 833 333** or email [DVstaffsupport@westerntrust.hscni.net](mailto:DVstaffsupport@westerntrust.hscni.net) to request a confidential call/meeting.

## **You can also access the service and other support through:**

- Your Line manager
- Occupational Health Services
- Trade Union representatives

## **Inspire Counselling Services can be contacted on 0808 800 0002**

Inspire employs a dedicated team of qualified and experienced counsellors and psychologists to staff the 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days per year.

- Staff can call the Inspire at any time, day or night to speak directly with a counsellor for support and advice on any matter, whether work-related or personal
- Avail of immediate counselling support
- Arrange face to face counselling or structured telephone counselling
- Cancel or rearrange appointments
- Managers/Supervisors can also contact the Inspire line for advice / support in handling sensitive staff issues or to make direct referrals

## 15.0 APPENDIX 2. LOCAL & REGIONAL SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS

### Accessing Professional Support

Key Contacts for access to help and support are listed below. This list has been designed to make access quick and easy for those who need help or support. Most of these websites have an immediate exit button if you need it, as well as help on how to clear your web browsing history if you are concerned that your device is being monitored.

You can access instructions on how to clear your browsing history below. To 'scan' any of the QR codes below, open the camera app on your mobile phone and view the QR code through your camera screen. The web address should then appear for quick access to the website.

Scan this QR code to access instructions on how to clear your web browsing history if necessary.



### **Anyone in immediate danger should contact 999.**

Silent Solution is an initiative which enables someone to access police help through 999 in situations where you are unable to speak. Further information can be accessed here:



Silent\_solution\_gui  
de.pdf

## The Domestic and Sexual Abuse Helpline

24/7 support and advice for women and men affected by Domestic and Sexual Abuse across Northern Ireland.

**Call** 0808 802 1414

**Text** 'support' to 07797 805 839

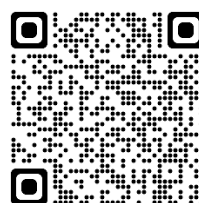
**Email:** 24hrsupport@dvhelpline.org



Direct Website Access via the QR code below:



Web Chat Service available 24/7 via the QR Code below

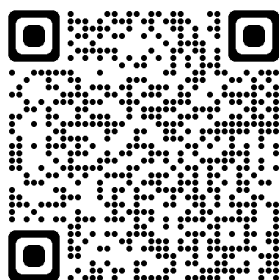


### [The Rowan Sexual Assault Referral Centre](#)

24/7 support and services for anyone who has been sexually abused, assaulted or raped

**Call:** 0800 389 4424

Direct Website access via the QR below:



**Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland**

**Call: 02890 249041**

Direct Website access via the QR code below:



Web chat available (Mon – Fri 9-5pm as at Dec 24) via the QR code below:



**Foyle Woman's Aid**

**Call : 02871416800**

**Text support to 07797 805 839**

**Email: [24hrsupport@dvhelpline.org](mailto:24hrsupport@dvhelpline.org)**

Direct website access by scanning the QR code below:



**Fermanagh Women's Aid**

**Call : 02866328898**

**Email:**

**[womensaidfermanagh@btopenworld.com](mailto:womensaidfermanagh@btopenworld.com)**



**Foyle Family Justice Centre (FFJC)**

One-stop, wrap around support service

**Call : 02871416800**

**Email : [info@foylejc.org](mailto:info@foylejc.org)**

Direct website access by scanning the QR code below:





**MapNI – Men's Advisory Project**

Providing support for male victims of domestic or sexual violence and abuse.

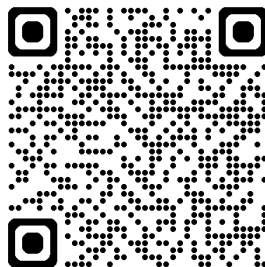
**Foyle:** 02871160001  
**Belfast:** 02890241929  
**Email:** [info@mapni.co.uk](mailto:info@mapni.co.uk)

Direct website access by scanning the QR code below



**Call :** 02871 283030  
**Email:** [info@rainbow-project.org](mailto:info@rainbow-project.org)

Direct website access by scanning the QR Code below:





0808 808 8000



Call 116 123 for free



[NIDirect is the official government information website for NI Citizens](#)

Access information on how to get support via the QR code below:



### Ask for ANI Scheme

Ask for ANI (Action Needed Immediately) is a codeword scheme that provides a safe, discreet and confidential way for victims of domestic abuse to access immediate help from their local pharmacy or jobcentre. Find out where you can access the scheme by scanning the QR code below:



## **Domestic Violence and Abuse Disclosure Scheme (DVADS)**

The Domestic Violence and Abuse Disclosure Scheme (DVADS) enables a person (aged 16 or over) to make enquiries to the police where they are concerned that their partner, or the partner of someone that they know (such as a friend or family member), has a history of violence, abusive or controlling and coercive offending.

### **What is the Domestic Violence and Abuse Disclosure Scheme (DVADS)?**

The DVADS gives members of the public a 'Right to Ask', a formal mechanism to make enquiries about an individual who they are in a relationship with, or who is in a relationship with someone they know, where there is a concern that the individual may be abusive towards their partner.

The concerned relative or friend will not, under normal circumstances, receive any information on the person causing concern. If a disclosure is deemed necessary, lawful and proportionate, the person potentially at risk will receive the information or the person best placed to safeguard that individual (in exceptional circumstances only).

The scheme also creates a formal mechanism for the Police Service of Northern Ireland to tell both men and women, who are potentially at risk of abuse from their partner, about that partner's past where a proactive decision is made to consider disclosing the information in order to protect a potential victim.

If Police checks show that the individual has a record of abusive behaviour, or there is other information to indicate you, or the person you know may be at risk from their new partner, the Police will consider sharing this information with the person at risk.

The aim of this scheme is to increase public safety and afford victims of domestic abuse, in all its forms, with better protection by enabling potential victims to make an informed choice on whether to continue the relationship. It also provides help and support to assist individuals when making that choice.

The police will make contact with the applicant to discuss their concerns and ask for more information as well as confirming their identity during a face to face meeting.

Further information on making an application under the scheme can be found on the PSNI website by clicking [here](#) or by scanning the QR code below



## Additional Resources for Managers and Colleagues

Women's Aid guidance on supporting someone experiencing domestic abuse  
Can be accessed by scanning the QR code below or clicking the link.



[Supporting Someone Experiencing Domestic Violence](#)

WHSCT Supporting Someone who is Experiencing Domestic Abuse Leaflet



WHSCT Supporting  
those experiencing d

**A Regional e-Learning Module is available on Learn HSCNI**

**Domestic Abuse: Context and Change**

[LearnHSCNI | Domestic Abuse: Context and Change](#)

**Domestic Abuse Awareness Raising Tool NI**

The tool provides an overview of the main considerations when identifying and responding to domestic abuse. It takes 45 – 60 minutes to complete.

Access at the QR code below:

