

WORKPLACE GUIDE

Domestic violence policy and procedures

Domestic violence - what can the workplace do?

Every workplace can make a significant difference to the safety and wellbeing of victims of domestic violence and their co-workers by introducing domestic violence clauses into enterprise agreements. In addition, a domestic violence policy and written procedures that emphasise safety, flexibility, and options for workers who are abused are critical. The policy should match and support standard workplace safety protocols and should balance the right of all personnel to a safe working environment with the need for a relaxed and accessible workplace.

The following recommendations are gathered from many existing Australian workplace policies and procedures and also draw on international experience from the American Corporate Alliance to End Partner Violence, the Occupational Health and Safety Council of Ontario, and the Northern Ireland Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

STEP 1: Create a process to develop a domestic violence policy which involves key stakeholders in the workplace

- Involve all relevant internal stakeholders such as senior management, human resources, corporate security, legal services, internal communications, media relations, employee assistance programs, unions, and medical, health or safety programs.
- Survey your workforce to find out how domestic violence affects your workplace. A sample survey can be found in the 'research' section.
- Ensure EAP providers are trained in domestic violence identification and response, and are able to appropriately refer to domestic violence services.
- Seek expertise externally from domestic violence specialists.
- Make sure staff are aware of the policy development process and have the capacity to meaningfully contribute

- Ensure that senior management sign off on this process and champion the outcomes.

STEP 2: Identify key areas of responsibility

- Responsibility for both the planning of program implementation.
- Identifying the safety aspects of the plan.
- Establishing timelines and accountability.
- Planning for program assessment, maintaining a database of incidents and reviewing case and incident outcomes.

STEP 3: Develop a policy addressing domestic violence that contains:

- A clear, plain English definition of domestic violence, with examples/case histories of how this affects the workplace. A clear statement that domestic violence is unacceptable at home and in the workplace.

- A clear statement of the employer's commitment to the introduction and implementation of domestic violence workplace entitlements.
- A full explanation of the workplace entitlements covered by the domestic violence clauses.
- A clear indication of where and how staff can access detailed procedures regarding domestic violence and the workplace.
- In a culturally mixed workplace ensure appropriate translations are available.

STEP 4: Develop procedures for implementing the clauses/entitlements, ensuring they include:

- Details of the first point of contact for employees needing support.
- The role of key personnel in liaison with domestic violence specialists.
- The security measures, plans and procedures provided in the workplace to protect against domestic violence (including a safety planning process).
- An assurance of a worker's right to confidentiality and support when they disclose domestic violence.
- Guidance about how managers and other 'go to' people should handle disclosures of domestic violence (including appropriate questions to ask when workers disclose).
- Information on relevant laws and police procedures.

STEP 5: Distribute the policy

- Produce a compact, easy to read version of the policy and provide to all staff.
- Include the policy in the workplace intranet and induction materials.
- Ensure that organisational units whose operations are inherent to the policy are fully engaged and prepared before the policy and procedures are widely shared.

STEP 6: Provide training

- Organise the provision of a range of training sessions to managers, supervisors, union delegates and general staff on domestic violence in the workplace, the entitlements and your policy and procedures. Training may include online materials.
- Train key staff in domestic violence identification and prevention in the workplace.
- Incorporate safety planning into basic training (e.g. to not divulge personal information about employees to callers).
- A local domestic violence service may be a useful partner for training.

STEP 7: Build awareness through workplace communication

- Display public education materials about domestic violence in accessible areas (e.g. kitchen, bathrooms, staff intranet).
- Create your own poster to display, using a key message like the one set out above in the 'Information for unions and employers' section. A sample poster of this kind (featuring ACTU President Ged Kearney) can be found in the 'resources' section on the Domestic Violence Workplace Rights & Entitlements Project website.
- Provide details of where victims and abusers can get help locally or an anonymous help line.
- Organise regular awareness training and education in all levels of the organisation about domestic violence.
- Incorporate domestic violence training into existing safety meetings.
- Add domestic violence information to existing safety policies such as new employee safety orientations, safety checklists, and safety audit procedures.
- Build awareness through activities such as White Ribbon Day or Not 1 More.

STEP 8: Create accountability measures for abusers if they work in the organisation

Perpetrators of domestic violence sometimes use workplace resources such as telephone, fax or email to threaten, harass or abuse.

This type of misuse of work time and resources may be a breach of workplace policy and/or their employment contract and could also amount to a criminal offence and/or breach of a domestic violence protection order.

Such abuse of workplace time and equipment requires an effective employer response as it is damaging and potentially dangerous for the victim. Where this behaviour comes to the attention of management, care must be taken to protect workplace safety and discipline the perpetrator:

- Available disciplinary options should be considered. This may include reporting the perpetrator to police.
- Conduct a detailed risk assessment if the perpetrator remains employed. Particular care should be taken if the victim of the abuse is also an employee of the organisation. Specific attention should be given to the individuals' workplace roles and responsibilities to determine whether they should be modified.
- Where appropriate, minimise the potential for perpetrators to use their position or work resources to find out details or whereabouts of the victim. This may include monitoring or withdrawing access to certain computer programs or a change of duties.

