

# Supporting staff experiencing domestic abuse during social distancing and isolation



Cymorth i Ferched Cymru  
Welsh Women's Aid

## Introduction:

Domestic abuse is a pattern of incidents of control, coercion, threats, and / or violence between intimate partners, ex-partners or family members, and is most often carried out in the home. Self-isolating and working from home can, therefore, escalate the abuse for victims and survivors; for many the workplace is often the only escape from their perpetrator.

This document highlights matters line managers may need to consider with regards to supporting team members who are experiencing domestic abuse and are working from home.

Isolation and social distancing provide further opportunities for a perpetrator of domestic abuse to invent new tactics to control given the change in environment. Therefore being available and supportive to all your staff during this time is vital along with understanding that your staff's productivity and opportunity to work from home may differ to their usual working day will help to support through the period.

Please be mindful also to your staff who may have separated from their abusive partner previously. Isolation and social distancing can provide an opportunity for ex-partners to re commence controlling behaviours, including, but not limited, to failing to comply with legal protective orders such as restraining orders, non-molestation order and child contact orders by not returning children following contact. This will have immense impact on staff experiencing this post separational abuse.

## How to support:

Providing a safe and supportive environment for your team member to be able to speak about their experience with trust and confidence is imperative, and so managers should continue to ensure safe and sympathetic handling of situations arising from domestic abuse by:

- Communicating (preferably speaking) to team members every day if possible. Agreeing which is more manageable for them and remaining consistent with this as a manager is vital.
- Set up a code word system with the team member to determine whether they need help or not.

Please note that during COVID-19 higher levels of sick leave are anticipated and consideration should be given where usual managers may not be available at potentially short notice. Having another designated manager to be aware of the plan made above would be beneficial. This needs to be fully communicated to your staff from the outset so that they are aware and have some control over who knows about their experiences.



Live Fear Free Helpline  
Llinell Gymorth Byw Heb Ofn  
**0808 80 10 800**



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It takes a huge amount of courage to make a disclosure, even if your team member knows you have an awareness of them experiencing domestic abuse already. It is fundamental therefore, to create a safe environment to make a disclosure by:

- Thanking and reassuring them for trusting you.
- Not making promises that you are unable to keep.
- If in doubt, be honest and ask for clarification 'I'm not sure I understand...!'
- Giving choices and options. Refer to specialist services if appropriate. Don't tell them what to do.
- Keep boundaries and understand the limitations of your role, you are not a counsellor and need to take care of yourself too.
- Provide initial support – be clear about available workplace support e.g. company wellbeing scheme.
- Discuss how the organisation can contribute to safety planning by altering working arrangements and having code words during contact.
- Signpost to the **Live Fear Free Helpline on 0808 80 10 800**

Offer the following guidance to anyone experiencing domestic abuse:

- Keep a charged mobile phone with them at all times, not to hesitate to dial 999 if they feel they are in danger, make them aware of the Silent Solutions system - if they cannot speak press 55 to make the call handler aware you are in danger and can't speak.
- Tell someone they trust. Let them know they might be at risk from their partner / family member. Arrange a secret code with someone who lives close by to them (such as ringing and hanging up, or a blank text), that lets them know they need help.
- Get specialist support: the **Live Fear Free Helpline 0808 80 10 800** is available 24/7 for free confidential support and advice. The helpline has many ways to get in touch which can be found at the following website, there is also a quick exit button on the website which will take them to an inconspicuous webpage should the need to leave the site <https://www.welshomensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/our-services/live-fear-free-helpline/>
- There will be a local specialist domestic abuse support service in their area that can provide ongoing support, and refuge if necessary, without their partner finding out. The Live Fear Free Helpline 0808 80 10 800 can provide contact details for referrals to services in their area, or they can look them up online. If they are searching online, remember that their partner / family member might be tracking their search history – try to use a computer they do not have access to (e.g. work)
- Keep a record: Think about ways they can gather evidence of their perpetrator's behaviour safely. Make notes of abusive incidents, including times, dates, names and details of how it made them feel. Save any abusive messages. However, make sure they aren't stored anywhere (physically, or digitally) where their partner / family member might find them.



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**In an emergency: If the perpetrator is threatening, attacking or pursuing them, ring 999 as soon as possible.**

They could also:

**Plan an escape route – think about where they will go so they can call the police or alert a neighbour, and plan a place to meet with their children if they get separated.**

**Teach their children how to call 999 in an emergency.**

**Avoid rooms like the bathroom, kitchen or garage, which contain objects that could be used to hurt them.**

**If they are not able to get out of the house, barricade or lock themselves in a room, from which you can call the police and contact friends, family or neighbours.**

**Move to lower-risk parts of their home, where there is an escape route or access to a phone.**

## Important note about breaking confidentiality:

In circumstances where confidentiality cannot be assured, e.g., where there are concerns about children or vulnerable adults or where Civil Service Wales needs to act to protect the safety of employees – information will, as far as possible, only be shared on a need to know basis and in accordance with your own organisational safeguarding procedures.

In circumstances where you must breach confidentiality, discuss this with the employee to explain why this is the case, seeking the employee's agreement where possible.

## Live Fear Free Helpline

Live Fear Free is open 24 hours 7 days a week and is free to contact. They can provide help and advice to:

- Anyone experiencing domestic abuse.
- Anyone who knows someone who needs help. For example, a friend, family member or colleague.
- Practitioners seeking professional advice.

All conversations with Live Fear Free are confidential and are taken by staff that are highly experienced and fully trained.

**Call: 0808 80 10 800**

**Text: 07860 077333**

**Email: [info@livefearfreehelpline.wales](mailto:info@livefearfreehelpline.wales)**

**Live chat service: <https://gov.wales/live-fear-free/domestic-abuse-wales>**

Please promote the above information about the Live Fear Free Helpline in your workplace, examples of this could be including on your email signature, including in staff handbook, putting it on the staff intranet.



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