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TITLE	<i>Domestic Violence and Abuse (Interim Workplace Policy)</i>

Summary	This Policy outlines the Trust's commitment to providing a harmonious and supportive working environment for staff affected by domestic violence / abuse. It outlines how domestic violence or abuse can impact significantly on the ability of individuals to function effectively both within and outside the workplace. Domestic violence / abuse holds no bounds and can affect anyone regardless of seniority, gender, sexual orientation, age, race, ethnicity or disability.
Purpose	To encourage a climate of honesty and openness in which it is safe and acceptable for any members of staff to raise concerns internally, and whose genuine concerns have been raised in good faith, staff in accordance with this Procedure will be protected against victimisation or any other detrimental treatment related to their act of disclosure.
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Belfast Health and
Social Care Trust

Domestic Violence and Abuse (Interim Workplace Policy)

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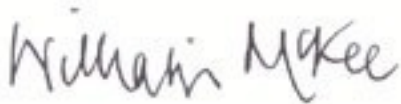
Domestic Violence and Abuse (Interim Workplace Policy)

SUMMARY

The Domestic Violence and Abuse, Interim Workplace Policy outlines the Trusts commitment to providing a harmonious and supportive working environment for staff affected by domestic violence / abuse.

It outlines how domestic violence or abuse can impact on the ability of an individual to function effectively, both within and outside the workplace and sets out the support mechanisms in place within the Trust. Domestic Violence / Abuse holds no bounds and can affect anyone regardless of seniority, gender, sexual orientation, age, race, ethnicity or disability.

This Policy has been developed to provide support and practical information for Employees of the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust who are experiencing or witnessing Domestic Abuse / Violence.



Chief Executive



Director of Human Resources

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- The Role of the Domestic Abuse Support Officer
- Facts on the Effect of Domestic Abuse

Domestic Violence & Abuse Workplace Policy

The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust greatly values all Employees. Developing and supporting staff is a high priority. The Trust, through equality employment and human rights legislation, adheres to and strives to develop more robust policies to ensure that Employees are treated with respect and are provided with a harmonious and supportive working environment.

This policy has been developed to provide support and practical information for Employees of the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust who are experiencing or witnessing domestic abuse.

Definition

(For purposes of this policy, domestic violence is defined as “Any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender, age or sexuality. (It is acknowledged that whilst it is usually women who experience domestic violence, this policy and guidance applies equally to men who require advice or help.)

Policy Statement

We are committed as an Employer to ensure that all Employees are aware that:

- Every person has a right to be safe from fear and abuse;
- Domestic violence/abuse is unacceptable and should not be tolerated;
- Violence in relationships is an abuse of power as well as likely to be a criminal offence;
- Anyone experiencing domestic violence/abuse should be supported and protected from further abuse.

We will therefore:

- Provide a supportive and enabling environment, which encourages people to report domestic violence;
- Provide information and advice to enable those experiencing domestic violence and abuse, to access help for the purpose of increasing their safety and ultimately ending abuse;

- Respect the choices made by the victims of domestic violence / abuse;
- Provide training for all relevant support staff on domestic violence / abuse issues;
- Conduct annual reviews to ensure all policy aims and objectives are met and where development needs are identified, implement change.

What staff can expect:

- We will arrange for you to speak to a support officer in private and in a safe environment;
- If possible we will arrange for you to speak to a member of staff who is of the same sex if you feel more comfortable with this arrangement;
- We will liaise with the relevant line Manager to ensure that you are given time to avail of our services;
- We will provide advice in relation to options and support available, respecting your right to make your own decisions.

What is Domestic Violence and Abuse?

According to the Regional Strategy to address domestic abuse in Northern Ireland entitled “Tackling Violence at Home”, “Domestic violence and abuse is essentially a pattern of behaviour, which is characterised by the exercise of control and the misuse of power by one person over another within an intimate relationship or a family. It is usually frequent and persistent. It can include violence by a son, daughter or any other person who has a close or blood relationship with the victim.”

Domestic violence knows no boundaries as regards age, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, wealth or geography, but in the majority of reported cases women are the victims.

Domestic violence / abuse can go beyond actual physical violence. It can involve emotional abuse – for example: undermining of self-confidence; the destruction of property; threats to others including children; controlling behaviour such as isolation from friends and family; control over access to money, personal items, food, transportation and the telephone; and stalking.

Domestic violence can and may include violence inflicted on, or witnessed by, children. The wide adverse effects for children living with domestic violence must be recognised as a child protection issue and may link to poor educational achievement, social exclusion and to juvenile crime, substance misuse, mental health problems and homelessness from running away.

It is acknowledged that domestic violence can also manifest itself through the actions of immediate and extended family members through the perpetuation of unlawful activities, such as forced marriage, so called 'honour crimes' and female genital mutilation. Extended family members may condone or even share in the pattern of violence. (DHSSPS, 2005, Tackling Violence at Home, A strategy for addressing domestic violence and abuse in Northern Ireland – (available at www.nio.gov.uk).

The Facts

- Domestic violence accounts for approximately one-third of all recorded violent crime in Northern Ireland.
- It is estimated that one in five women and one in nine men will experience domestic violence in the course of their lifetime.
- The Police Service attend an average of 60 domestic-related incidents per day, but recognise that there is still a large amount of under-reporting of this type of crime
- On average, there are five people killed in Northern Ireland each year as a result of domestic violence.
- On average, every day 12 women and 4 men are victims of domestic violence assaults in Northern Ireland.
- Domestic violence often starts and/or escalates during pregnancy.
- It is estimated that at least 11,000 children in Northern Ireland are living with domestic violence.
- Victims are at greatest risk of homicide at the point of separation or after leaving a violent partner.
- There is no typical perpetrator of domestic violence. Perpetrators come from a wide range of racial, religious or social groups.
- Domestic violence is a major cause of homelessness for women and children.
- Domestic violence is almost always a repeat victimisation crime, most abused women having experienced more than one attack by the same perpetrator.
- Domestic violence is largely hidden. It occurs in private and is likely to be concealed or denied by those subjected to the abuse as well as by those who perpetrate the abuse – and so most incidents are unreported largely because of real or perceived fear of the consequences.

www.womensaid.org.uk
www.psni.police.uk

The Impact of Domestic Violence on the Workplace

Home and work issues cannot always be separated and domestic violence can impact greatly on the working life of someone who is being abused. Domestic violence can result in deterioration in performance, increased absenteeism or poor timekeeping, threatening job prospects and job security. People experiencing domestic violence are especially vulnerable once they attempt to leave abusive partners and may become vulnerable going to or coming from work or while they are at work as the abuser knows where they can be located. This can give rise to health and safety issues and an increased risk of workplace violence. www.corporateallianceuk.com

By having a policy in place to assist those experiencing domestic violence it is possible to create a safe and supportive environment where the workplace can become a place of safety. A policy that supports Employees experiencing domestic violence is also of benefit to the Employer, helping them to ensure the health and safety and welfare of the workforce and reduce absence-related costs and increase productivity.

Right to Privacy

The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust respects an Employee's right to privacy in the event they do not wish to inform the Trust that they have experienced domestic violence.

Confidentiality

The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust respects an Employee's right to confidentiality. The Trust recognises that Employees experiencing domestic violence/abuse normally have the right to complete confidentiality. However, in circumstances of child protection or the protection of vulnerable adults from abuse, the child protection and adult protection services may need to be involved. Complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in these circumstances.

Anti-Discrimination

The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust will not discriminate against anyone who has been subjected to domestic violence/abuse, in terms of his or her existing employment or career development.

The Belfast HSC Trust is aware that domestic violence/abuse victims may have performance problems such as absenteeism or lower productivity as a result of domestic violence/abuse.

When addressing performance and safety issues the Belfast HSC Trust will make reasonable efforts to consider all aspects of the Employee's situation and safety problems.

Absence Options for Employee's Experiencing Domestic Violence / Abuse

The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust will make every effort to assist an Employee experiencing domestic violence/abuse.

If an Employee needs to be absent from work due to domestic violence/abuse, the length of the absence will be determined by the individual's situation through collaboration with the Employee and the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust Manager, HR Representative, Union Representative etc.

Employees, Managers and Supervisors are encouraged to first explore paid leave options that can be arranged to help the Employee cope with the situation without having to take unpaid leave of absence.

Depending on circumstances these options may include:

- Arrange flexible work hours so the Employee can seek protection, go to court, look for new housing, enter counseling, arrange child care etc.
- Considering use of domestic emergency leave, flexible working hours, job sharing, compensatory time, paid leave, unpaid leave etc, particularly if requests are for relatively short periods.

Safety at Work

The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust undertakes to ensure the safety of its Employees. The Trust will actively provide support to Employees to minimize the risk to their safety while at work, if they make it known to the Trust that they are experiencing domestic violence/abuse.

This support may include: work schedule adjustments, workplace relocation (if available), changing keys/codes for gaining entry to offices.

Finance

The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust can offer alternative methods of payment in certain circumstances as abusers may try to control their partners by seizing bank accounts, cash cards etc.

Guidance for Managers

The Trust recognises that the direct experience of domestic violence can impact upon the health and work of Employees. For example, an Employee experiencing domestic violence may be distracted by threatening phone calls, be harassed at or travelling to and from work, be in fear of harassment, be absent because of injuries, or may be less productive because of stress.

The Belfast Health & Social Care Trust will provide a safe and supportive environment for Employees experiencing domestic violence. Managers will also be understanding of the difficulties and reluctance that Employees may feel in having to explain intimate circumstances to colleagues.

Identifying Domestic Violence

Possible signs of domestic violence/abuse include:

- Late or high absenteeism rate without explanation;
- Uncharacteristic depression, anxiety, distraction or problems with concentration;
- Changes in the quality of work performance for no apparent reason;
- The receipt of repeated upsetting calls/faxes/emails. Or the individual being a victim of vandalism or threats;
- Obsession with time;
- Needing regular time off for appointments;
- Inappropriate or excessive clothing;
- Repeated injuries, or unexplained bruising or explanations that do not fit the injuries displayed;
- Increased hours being worked for no apparent reason.

It is important to note this is not a checklist. Some victims may display no signs of violence or abuse. Individuals experiencing domestic violence / abuse suffer a broad range of physical and emotional consequences. For some, the violence greatly affects their lives over a significant period of time and the process of recovery can be long and hard. Others may be able to recover and start a new life again relatively quickly after leaving an abusive relationship.

The Role of Line Managers

Individual Line Managers, in consultation with Human Resources and the role of the Domestic violence/abuse support officers, can play a key role in supporting staff who are being subjected to or have been victims of domestic abuse/violence. Managers should make a managerial commitment (rather than a personal commitment) to help a member of staff resolve any issue. This reduces the potential for confusion arising about the line Manager's role and can reduce the potential of complications or blurring of responsibilities for both Manager and individual. Any blurring of responsibility which arises should be discussed with the appropriate domestic violence / abuse support officer or the Employment Equality Section of Human Resources Service Group.

Where domestic violence is suspected, Managers should contact the Employment Equality Section of Human Resources Service Group for advice before any discussion with the Employee takes place. Any discussion about the Employee's situation should take place in private and any questions should be asked with **care** and **sensitivity**, reinforcing that, as far as possible, confidentiality will be respected.

The following are practical steps that might be taken to encourage disclosure and/or discussion of abuse.

- Providing information about the policy to staff e.g. on notice boards, notices in toilets, news-sheets, core and team brief, Intranet, Coffee Bar and Canteen;
- Providing information on the role of the Domestic Abuse Support Officers and how they can be accessed;
- Creating an environment where Employees feel safe and able to talk about issues that are affecting them;
- Prioritising safety. Explore with the victim the steps they can take to increase their personal safety;
- Taking time to talk to the Employee and ensuring that any discussions take place in private;
- Providing a sensitive non-judgemental response that includes providing details of the support systems that are available;
- Respecting the confidentiality of the individual concerned, although total confidentiality might not be possible in all cases, and should not be promised e.g. if there are any concerns about the safety of children, or unlawful activity has been disclosed, or it is essential to pass on information to others in the organisation such as Human Resources or Occupational Health.

Signs of violence should not be ignored, but Employees should not be pressurised into disclosing any personal information that they do not feel comfortable sharing.

Management Arrangements

Managers across the Trust have a number of responsibilities in implementing the Domestic Violence/Abuse Workplace Policy.

The following is a list of possible adjustments Managers could consider to help individuals experiencing domestic Violence/abuse.

- If the individual is absent, a method of communication should be arranged with line Managers so they are aware that the individual is safe.
- Identifying a work contact for support and an emergency contact should the organization be unable to contact the Employee;
- Allowing the individual to change work patterns or workload; and allowing flexible or more flexible working or special leave to facilitate any practical arrangements that are required, such as seeking legal advice, attending counseling, support group meetings and to attend court;
- Diverting telephone calls;
- Diverting emails to a separate folder;
- Checking that staff have arrangements for safely getting to and from home;
- Ensuring communication is maintained with the Employee during any absence, whilst maintaining the confidentiality of their whereabouts;
- If appropriate, facilitating a transfer to another post;
- With consent, advising colleagues of the situation on a need to know basis and agreeing what the response should be if the abuser/alleged abuser contacts the office.

Managers with responsibility for staff are to ensure that:

- All staff are familiar with, and act in accordance with, this policy;
- All staff are aware of their responsibilities under this policy and particularly with regard to security of information and safety of victims and children;
- All staff are aware that perpetrators may go to great lengths to find the person(s) who they have abused. Information that identifies or locates people who are fleeing abusive relationships, or information which locates refuge provision, must not under any circumstances be passed on in a way which can increase risk;
- Staff dealing with people experiencing domestic violence/abuse may find the work difficult and stressful and appropriate support is made available;

- Members of staff experiencing domestic violence/abuse are dealt with sensitively and informed about options in respect of support services and working conditions available to them.

Although Managers should try to provide as much support as possible to the individual experiencing domestic violence/abuse, the Employee should have a clear understanding of what is expected with regard to performance and attendance. Whilst dealing with the issue, therefore Managers should also be aware of their organisation's policies for dealing with unsatisfactory performance and ensure that a proper record is kept of discussion.

Perpetrators of Domestic Violence in the Workplace

Where a Manager is aware of any staff member who may be perpetuating abuse during working time the matter should be discussed urgently with the Employment Equality Section within the Human Resources Service Grouping in the first instance.

- Perpetrators of domestic violence / abuse might use workplace resources such as telephone, fax or e-mail to threaten, harass or abuse their current or former partners, and may involve other colleagues, who may or not be aware of their motives, in assisting them;
- Such abuse requires an effective Employer response because it could be damaging and potentially dangerous for those being abused, as well as possibly bringing the Organisation into disrepute if the abuse is allowed to continue.

Training

There will be on-going training to support this policy.

Managers should be trained to identify if an Employee is experiencing difficulties to provide initial support, offer referrals, discuss ways to help the person stay safe in the workplace. They should understand they are not counsellors and that counselling should be left to trained professionals and no one should attempt to act in place of a domestic violence/abuse support officer or counsellor.

As appropriate a Manager can make the arrangements to refer the person to the appropriate domestic violence/abuse officer.

The Belfast Health & Social Care Trust has developed a programme of training for all Managers to raise awareness of domestic violence/abuse and understanding of this policy and guidance.

All staff will be made aware of the policy by means of Briefings, Intranet, notice boards and leaflets etc..

A programme of appropriate training on Domestic Violence will be provided within the Trust.

The Legal Implications

Employers have a duty of care under the Health and Safety at Work (NI) Order 1978 to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety at work of their Employees.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (NI) 1992 also requires Employers to assess the risks of violence to Employees and make arrangements for their health and safety by effective planning, organisation and control.

Policy Development and Review

This Policy has been developed in partnership with Staff Side representatives within the Trust. It has been developed in support of the implementation of the Trust's Domestic Abuse Support Plan for staff and particularly in support of the piloting of the Domestic Abuse Support Officer role within the Trust with effect from 8th December 2008 for a period of 18 months in the first instance.

This Workplace Policy builds on the positive work undertaken by Legacy Trusts and in particular the partnership work between South and East Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and the Trade Union, Unison. The Policy is based on the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety guidance on developing a Workplace Policy on Domestic Violence and Abuse : Guidance for Employers.

It is an interim Policy, to be reviewed in light of the learning from the implementation of the Trust's Domestic Abuse Support Plan for staff and the current work in progress on a regional basis on the development of a Regional Workplace / Policy and Procedure.

Supporting Information

The Trust has attached the following two Appendices to this Policy providing relevant supply and information.