

Domestic Abuse Workplace Policy

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Alternative Formats

This documentation can be made available in alternative formats such as large print, Braille, disk, audio tape or in an ethnic-minority language upon request. Requests for alternative formats can be made to the Probation Board using the following contact information:

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Appendix 1 Workplace Charter on Domestic Abuse

1. Introduction

Domestic and Sexual Abuse have a devastating impact on victims and their families. Research conducted with employees has shown that 1 in 3 employees had experienced domestic abuse with various impacts on survivors' health and wellbeing and their productivity and career development at work.

The Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) has been awarded the Onus Workplace Charter Platinum Award on domestic abuse and seeks to implement best practice policies and procedures to support employees affected by domestic abuse. See Appendix 1.

PBNI has also signed up to the Safe Place initiative which signposts to a wide range of services to all victims of domestic or sexual abuse. See Appendix 2.

It is vitally important that people are aware that they no longer have to endure domestic or sexual abuse, and that there is support for them. The PBNI is also committed to the principle that domestic abuse is unacceptable behaviour and everyone has the right to live free from fear and abuse.

2. Policy Statement

PBNI recognises that its employees will be amongst those impacted by domestic abuse. PBNI therefore recognises its responsibility for the well-being of staff and will respond sympathetically, confidentially and effectively to any member of staff who discloses that they are experiencing domestic abuse.

PBNI is committed to ensuring that it will

- Assist and support employees who approach the organisation for help in addressing problems arising from domestic abuse.
- Ensure those employees seeking assistance are confident their situation will be handled with understanding and sensitivity and with the seriousness it warrants.
- Ensure, as far as it is possible, that all cases brought to the attention of the organisation will be treated confidentially by those involved.
- Offer ongoing support if necessary.
- Signpost employees to external support agencies who can carry on the support beyond the workplace.
- Raise awareness of domestic abuse and ensure a consistent approach across the PBNI.
- Deal effectively and appropriately with employees found to be perpetrators (and alleged perpetrators) of domestic abuse. Meet all obligations placed on it as an employer 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 employees.

3. Policy Aim

The aim of this policy is to create a safe and supportive working environment and to ensure that victims of domestic abuse who raise the issue will be treated promptly, sensitively and with regard to personal safety and confidentiality.

4. Policy Scope

This policy is directed to all employees to highlight the levels of support available, to increase awareness of the scale of the issue and the short and long term impact of domestic abuse, and to provide a supportive structure in which to deal effectively with cases.

With regard to employees found to be a perpetrator (or an alleged perpetrator) of domestic abuse, the PBNI reserves the right to invoke appropriate PBNI Policies and Procedures such as Disciplinary.

5. Policy Outcome

Issues relating to domestic abuse will be dealt with in a sensitive and supportive manner with due regard for confidentiality.

6. Definition

There are a number of different definitions of domestic abuse. The NI Executive's Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy 2024-2031 defines domestic 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".

Domestic abuse is essentially 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 relationship or family. It is usually frequent and persistent. It is the use of physical or emotional force or threat within close, adult relationships in a way that causes harm, or is to 'punish', frighten or cause distress to victims, children or other vulnerable adults.

Women still make up the largest proportion of domestic abuse victims but anyone can be a victim. Any intimate partner relationship can be abusive, including LGBTQ+ relationships.

Whilst domestic or sexual abuse happens most often in intimate partner relationships, abuse can also happen between family members. Up to a quarter of all reports to PSNI involve parent and child relationships. It can also include harm inflicted on, or witnessed by children and young people and this can have a long-term life changing impact.

Domestic abuse can be physical and can include: slapping, punching, beating, kicking, knife wounds, often leading to permanent injuries and sometimes death. Abuse can be virtual: online or furthered through technology.

It can be financial abuse, controlling a person's money and resources with the intention of increasing their dependency on the other person.

It can be sexual abuse, this could include being forced to have sex and sexual degradation.

Domestic abuse need not involve physical violence. It can involve emotional and psychological 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.

Coercive control is an act or pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation and is designed to make a person dependent by isolating them from support, exploiting them, depriving them of independence and regulation of everyday behaviour. Some common examples of coercive behaviour are:

- Isolating the victim from family and friends.
- Depriving of basic needs such as food.
- Monitoring the victim's time.
- Monitoring online communication tools.
- Taking control over aspects of everyday life such who the victim can see, what they can wear, when they can sleep.
- Depriving of access to support services such as medical services.
- Repeatedly putting the person down, such as saying you're worthless.
- Humiliating, degrading or dehumanising the victim.
- Controlling finances.
- Making threats or intimidating behaviour.

Legislation to make stalking a specific offence was introduced in 2022 (Protection from Stalking Act (NI) 2022) in recognition of the fear, alarm and distress caused to victims. Analysis carried out in 2020 found that the majority of stalking involved ex-partners and stalking is a key indicator for future potential serious harm.

Taken in isolation, some of the behaviours may seem like small acts, but together them make up a consistent pattern of behaviour that is frightening, upsetting and potentially high risk.

Unwanted communications include:

- emails
- graffiti
- letters
- messages on social networking sites
- sending or leaving unsolicited materials/gifts
- telephone calls
- text messages

7. Impact of Domestic Abuse on the Workplace

Home and work issues cannot always be separated and domestic abuse can impact greatly on working life. Domestic abuse can result in deterioration in an employee's performance, increased absenteeism or poor time keeping, threatening job prospects and job security.

A person can also continue to experience abuse in the workplace through, for

example, abusive or threatening phone calls and other colleagues can also be affected as they too could experience the threatening or intimidating behaviour from the perpetrator.

People experiencing domestic abuse 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 abuse.

8. Procedure

This policy is supported by the Domestic Abuse Workplace Procedure. The procedure should be read in conjunction with this document and referred to when dealing with domestic abuse.

9. Linkages

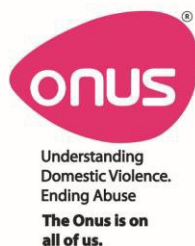
This policy links with the following:

- Adult Safeguarding Policy
- Child Safeguarding Policy
- Dignity at Work Policy
- Disciplinary Policy and Procedure
- Domestic Violence and Abuse Policy (Organisational)
- Flexible Working Policy and Procedure
- Managing Attendance Policy and Procedure
- Social Media Policy
- Special Leave Guidance

10 Review

This Policy will be reviewed four years from date of approval by the Board.

Interim reviews may also be prompted by feedback, and/or identified changes in practice.



The Workplace Charter on Domestic Abuse

1. We will support the Safe Place Campaign Pledge: never to commit, condone or stay silent about domestic or sexual abuse.
2. We will acknowledge domestic and sexual abuse impacts on all of us as a society and will be prepared to play our part in supporting victims and survivors and sending a clear message to perpetrators that abuse is intolerable.
3. We will provide a Safe Place for victims of domestic or sexual abuse to confidentially access information.
4. We will ensure that we can effectively respond to disclosures of abuse and how to seek support.
5. We will ensure that a victim or survivor will not be disadvantaged within the terms and conditions of their employment and will take all reasonable measures to facilitate any needs in the workplace.
6. We will commit to working/participating with other organisations to facilitate best support for victims and survivors.
7. Our policy (or policy statement) will be clearly communicated to all employees and will be easily and discretely accessed within the workplace.
8. We will ensure that a designated person, or people, within our organisation has received appropriate training and information on issues related to domestic and sexual abuse and the workplace.
9. We will regularly update and evaluate our organisational policy/policy statement on domestic and sexual abuse in consultation Onus.
10. We will ensure that we have sufficient employees trained across our organisation, to ensure there is adequate access to support within the workplace for all employees. Staff trained should be representative of our workplace and will include peer support staff ('Safe Place Advocates').
11. We will put in place effective procedures to act upon disclosures of domestic or sexual abuse.
12. We will commit to annual evaluation of our workplace strategy and support and share learning and examples of good practice with Onus.
13. We will work in partnership with Onus and other organisations to become Safe Place Advocates.
14. We will seek out new opportunities to extend the Safe Place message, never to commit, condone or stay silent about or sexual abuse.
15. We will develop in partnership with Onus new means of creating safer workplaces and communities with zero tolerance to domestic or sexual abuse.