



## Domestic Abuse Policy

<b>Ratifying Committee</b>	<b>Health, Safety &amp; Safeguarding</b>
<b>Date</b>	<b>Nov 2024</b>
<b>Review</b>	<b>Annually</b>

## **Model domestic abuse policy**

**“EHRC research found that 75% of those enduring domestic abuse are targeted at work, from harassing phone calls and abusive partners arriving at the office unannounced.”**

**Peter Cheese, Chief Executive of the CIPD. October 2020**

*The Bridge School* is committed to supporting any member of staff who is affected by domestic abuse. It recognises that its employees will be amongst those affected by domestic abuse; as a survivor of domestic abuse, someone who is currently living with domestic abuse, an individual impacted upon by domestic abuse or as an individual who perpetrates domestic abuse.

We are committed to developing a workplace culture in which there is zero tolerance for abuse and which recognises that the responsibility for domestic abuse lies with the perpetrator.

*The Bridge School* has a ‘zero tolerance’ position on domestic abuse and is committed to ensuring that any employee who is the victim of domestic abuse has the right to raise the issue with their employer in the knowledge that they will receive appropriate support and assistance. This policy also covers the approach we will take where there are concerns that an employee may be the perpetrator of domestic abuse.

By developing an effective domestic abuse policy and working to reduce the risks related to domestic abuse, we will create a safer workplace and we will also send out a strong message that domestic abuse is unacceptable.

*The Bridge School* recognises that domestic abuse is an equalities issue and undertakes to not discriminate against anyone who has been subjected to domestic abuse in terms of current employment or future development.

This policy is part of *The Bridge School* commitment to family friendly working, and seeks to benefit the welfare of individual members of staff; retain valued employees; improve morale and performance; and enhance the reputation of *The Bridge School* as an employer of choice.

Under the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1992), *The Bridge School* recognises its legal responsibilities in promoting the welfare and safety of all staff. Therefore this policy applies to all staff at *The Bridge School*.

### **Definition of domestic abuse**

Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass but is not limited to the following types of abuse:

- Coercive control

- Psychological and/or emotional abuse, including 'gas-lighting', threats of harm (to others)
- Digital and online abuse, including 'revenge porn'
- Stalking and harassment
- Physical violence, or the commission of this from others
- Sexual abuse, including rape
- Financial exploitation and/or control

Controlling behaviour is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour is: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.”\* \*This definition includes so called 'honour' based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage, and is clear that victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group.

### **Who may experience domestic abuse and how they might be affected**

- “ **1 in 4 women** and **1 in 6 men** in their lifetime. Leads to, on average, two **women** being murdered each week and 30 men per year “
- Older women and men are less likely to report their experiences of domestic abuse
- Those with disabilities are more likely to experience domestic abuse and sexual violence than non-disabled people
- Ethnic minority women and men face additional barriers to accessing support. Their experiences may be compounded by discrimination. They may be unwilling to seek help from statutory agencies because they fear a racist response
- Women and men from different cultural backgrounds might experience abuse in different forms, such as so called 'honour' based violence
- Lesbian, gay and bisexual women and men can be vulnerable to abusers who threaten to 'out' them to colleagues, employers and family members
- Transgender women and men have fewer services available to them, and can face similar emotional abuse
- Pregnancy can be a trigger for domestic abuse, and existing abuse may get worse during pregnancy or after giving birth
- Men experiencing domestic abuse and sexual violence find it more difficult to disclose abuse and often find more barriers to accessing support. For more information on understanding the indicators that a male employee may be experiencing domestic abuse please use the following link <https://hubble-live-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/respect/attachment/file/16/Respect-Toolkit-for-Work-with-Male-Victims-of-Domestic-Abuse-2019.pdf>

- Perpetrators may be very reluctant to acknowledge what they are doing and to ask for help.

### **Identification of the problem**

Whilst it is for the individual themselves to recognise they are a victim of domestic abuse, there are signs which may indicate an employee may be a victim. These may include;

- The member of staff may confide in their colleagues/manager.
- Staff may inform their manager that a colleague is suffering from domestic abuse.
- Visible signs of injury with unlikely explanations, it is important not to make assumptions.
- It may reveal itself as the background to poor attendance.
- A change in the persons working patterns, e.g. frequent lateness, absenteeism, needing to leave work early and spending increased time at work with no explanation
- Changes to productivity and performance
- Changes in the use of phone/email e.g. increase in personal calls, avoiding calls, or strong reaction to calls/texts/email
- Changes in behaviour/demeanour e.g. becoming quiet, anxious, frightened, tearful, aggressive, distracted, depressed, isolating self from colleagues, obsession with time keeping, secretive about home life, worried about children at home
- Change in appearance e.g. change in amount of make-up used, changes in dress, or clothing that doesn't suit the climate
- Partner or ex-partner attending work, or exerting unusual control or demands over work schedule, sending unwanted gifts/flowers

It is essential to understand that any of the above may arise from a range of circumstances of which domestic abuse may be one. Managers/colleagues who support staff in such matters should address the issue positively and sympathetically ensuring that the employee is aware that support and assistance can be provided.

*The Bridge School* respects employees' right to privacy. Whilst *the Bridge School* strongly encourages victims of domestic abuse to disclose domestic abuse for the safety of themselves and all those in the workplace, it does not force them to share this information if they do not want to.

### **Confidentiality and right to privacy**

Employees who disclose experiencing abuse can be assured that the information they provide is confidential and will not ordinarily be shared with other members of staff without their permission.

There are, however, some circumstances in which confidentiality cannot be assured. These occur when there are safeguarding concerns about children or vulnerable adults or where the employer needs to act to protect the safety of employees.

In circumstances where *The Bridge School* has to breach confidentiality it will seek specialist advice via their HR Officer before doing so. If it decides to proceed in breaching confidentiality after having taken advice, it will discuss with the employee why it is doing so and it will seek the employee's agreement where possible.

As far as possible, information will only be shared on a need-to-know basis.

All records concerning domestic abuse will be kept strictly confidential. No local records will be kept of absences related to domestic abuse and there will be no adverse impact on the employment records of victims of domestic abuse.

Improper disclosure of information i.e. breaches of confidentiality by any member of staff will be taken seriously and may be subject to disciplinary action.

Where domestic abuse in a same sex relationship is disclosed, due regard will be paid to the double disclosure of confidential information particularly where the individual recipient of abuse may not be out at work.

### **Support for individuals**

*The Bridge School* recognises that developing a life free from abuse is a process not an event and *The Bridge School* will provide ongoing support for employees who disclose abuse.

*The Bridge School* and Union/Professional organisation representatives will work together cooperatively to help staff experiencing domestic abuse.

*The Bridge School* will respond sympathetically, confidentially and effectively to any member of staff who discloses that they are experiencing domestic abuse.

Where domestic abuse has been reported line managers will treat unplanned absences and temporary poor timekeeping sympathetically.

### **Responding to a survivor**

- Listen to and validate their experience. Don't be afraid to ask whether they are safe or scared at home as a direct question; if the person knows you are comfortable asking the question, they will believe you are confident in responding to the answer"
- Remain sensitive/non-judgemental/discreet/supportive
- Allocate time in private to listen
- Not seek proof of the abuse – validate their experience
- Not contact the abuser (even if asked to do so)

- Not adopt the role of support worker, but signpost to appropriate agencies and specialist support available and give support to contact
- If the employee is disclosing fears for their safety, then they should be advised to call the Police and should be supported in so doing.
- **Shropshire Domestic Abuse Service** and **West Mercia Women's Aid** will always provide advice and support. If the employee consents, they are able to use a recognised risk assessment tool with the employee (face to face, over the telephone or via an online platform), do some safety planning with the employee and advise the employer of actions to help promote their employee's safety and well-being.

Line managers may offer employees experiencing domestic abuse a broad range of support. This may include, but is not limited to:

- Special paid leave for relevant appointments, including with support agencies, solicitors, to rearrange housing or childcare, and for court appointments.
- Temporary or permanent changes to working times and patterns.
- Changes to specific duties, for example to avoid potential contact with an abuser.
- Work with Human Resources to consider the possibility of redeployment or relocation.
- Measures to ensure a safe working environment, for example blocking telephone numbers to avoid harassing phone calls.
- Using other existing policies, including flexible working.
- Access to counselling/support services in paid time.
- Access to support from Specialist DA Services which may include 1-2-1 regular support or group work depending on the colleagues individual needs; assessed in partnership with specialist service.

Managers will respect the right of staff to make their own decision on the course of action at every stage.

Other existing provisions (including occupational health, independent counselling service, others) will also be signposted to staff as a means of support

### **Organisational planning**

All employees will be made aware of this policy through a range of methods including induction, training, appraisal, leaflets and posters.

The Bridge School will remind staff of the importance of not divulging personal details of other employees, such as addresses, telephone numbers or working hours. All victims of domestic abuse should feel safe at home, employers should be aware of any disclosure that suggests they are experiencing stalking or harassment.

## Disclosure of abuse

Staff experiencing domestic abuse may choose to disclose, report to or seek support from a union representative, a line manager, or colleague. Line managers and union representatives will not counsel victims, but offer information, workplace support, and signpost to other organisations.

The Bridge School will respond sympathetically, confidentially and effectively to any member of staff who discloses that they are suffering from domestic abuse. A further member of staff, selected by the member of staff experiencing the abuse, will be nominated as an additional confidential contact for staff.

## Training

The Bridge School is committed to ensuring all managers are aware of domestic abuse and its implications in the workplace. Information, briefings or awareness raising sessions will ensure that all managers are able to:

- Identify if an employee is experiencing difficulties because of domestic abuse.
- Respond to disclosure in a sensitive and non-judgemental manner.
- Provide initial support – be clear about available workplace support.
- Discuss how the organisation can contribute to safety planning.
- Signpost to other organisations and sources of support.
- Understand that they are not counsellors.

## **Safety planning**

The Bridge School will prioritise the safety of employees if they make it known that they are experiencing domestic abuse.

When an employee discloses domestic abuse, The Bridge School will encourage its employees to contact a specialist support agency (who can undertake a Domestic Abuse Stalking and Harassment (DASH) risk assessment and make appropriate referrals where necessary.

The Bridge School will work with the employee and a specialist agency (with the employee's consent) to identify what actions can be taken to increase their personal safety at work and at home as well as address any risks there may be to colleagues.

## **If the victim and the perpetrator work in the same organisation**

In cases where both the victim and the perpetrator of domestic abuse work in the organisation, The Bridge School will take appropriate action.

*The Bridge School* will take advice from their Human Resources officer in considering disciplinary action against the employee who is perpetrating the abuse. Action may need to be taken to ensure that the victim and perpetrator do not come into contact in the workplace and how to minimise the potential for the perpetrator to use their position or work resources to find out details about the whereabouts of the victim. This may include a change of duties for one or both employees or withdrawing the perpetrators access to certain computer

programmes or offices. Changes to work patterns for both parties will only happen if it is safe to do so.

The Bridge School encourages all employees to report if they suspect a colleague is experiencing or perpetrating abuse. Employees should speak to their line manager about their concerns in confidence. In dealing with a disclosure from a colleague, employers should ensure that the person with concerns is made aware of the existence of this policy.

### **Perpetrators of domestic abuse**

Domestic abuse perpetrated by employees will not be condoned under any circumstances nor will it be treated as a purely private matter. The Bridge School recognises that it has a role in encouraging and supporting employees to address violent and abusive behaviour of all kinds. Employees should report if they suspect a colleague is a perpetrator of abuse.

If an employee approaches The Bridge School about their abusive behaviour, The Bridge School will provide information about the services and support available to them.

The Bridge School will treat any allegation, disclosure or conviction of a domestic abuse related offence on a case-by-case basis with the aim of reducing risk and supporting change.

The Bridge School views the use of violence and abusive behaviour by an employee, wherever this occurs, as a breach of the *organisation's* Code of Conduct for disciplinary purposes.

The Bridge School Code of Conduct is intended to inform all staff, of the standards of conduct expected of them inside and outside of *The Bridge School*. It identifies a set of principles governing behaviour by which staff members are expected to abide. Staff members are expected at all times to present high standards of personal integrity and conduct that will not reflect adversely on *the organisation* and its reputation.

In some circumstances it may be deemed inappropriate for the individual to continue in his/her current role(s), due to a caution or conviction. The Bridge School views the use of violence and abusive behaviour by an employee, wherever this occurs, as a breach of the organisation's Code of Conduct for disciplinary purposes.

These procedures can be applicable in cases where an employee has:

- Behaved in a way that has harmed or threatened his/her partner.
- Possibly committed a criminal offence against his/her partner.
- Had an allegation of domestic abuse made against him/her.
- Presented concerns about their behaviour within an intimate relationship.

The Bridge School is committed to ensuring that:

- Allegations will be dealt with fairly and in a way that provides support for the person who is the subject of the allegation or disclosure.
- All employees will receive guidance and support.

- Confidentiality will be maintained and information restricted only to those who have a need-to-know.
- Investigations will be thorough and independent.
- All cases will be dealt with quickly avoiding unnecessary delays.
- All efforts will be made to resolve the matter within 4-6 weeks, although some cases will take longer because of their nature or complexity.

The alleged perpetrator will be:

- Treated fairly and honestly
- Spoken to if it is safe to do so
- Helped to understand the concerns expressed and processes involved
- Kept informed of the progress and outcome of any investigation and the implications for any disciplinary process
- Advised to contact their union or professional organisation

**There are five potential strands in the consideration of an allegation:**

1. A police investigation of a possible criminal offence
2. Disciplinary action by the employer
3. Providing specialist, safety-focused counselling
4. Identifying risk
5. Referral to Local Authority regarding risk to general public/vulnerable people

If a colleague is found to be assisting an abuser in perpetrating the abuse, for example, by giving them access to facilities such as telephones, social media or email it is essential that this is investigated to establish in the first instance, whether the person is being coercively controlled, so therefore may be another victim, before assuming that they have committed a disciplinary offence.

If it becomes evident that an employee has made a malicious allegation that another employee is perpetrating abuse then this will be treated as a serious disciplinary offence and action will be taken.

### **Professional role and risk management**

All organisations should have clear policies in line with those from Telford and Wrekin Safeguarding Partnership when dealing with allegations against people who work with children.

An allegation may relate to a person who works with children who has:

- Behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child
- Possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child:
- Behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children.

If you are in any way concerned about the safety of a child please inform your Designated Safeguarding Lead who will contact Family Connect on 01952 385385.

Each Local Authority has a Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) who is involved in the management and oversight of individual cases. The LADO will provide advice and guidance to employers, liaising with the police and other agencies and monitoring the progress of cases to ensure that they are dealt with as quickly as possible, consistent with a thorough and fair process.

The Local Authority Designated Officer for Telford and Wrekin is Glenn Ashbrooke who can be contacted on **01952 382848** or [glenn.ashbrooke@telford.gov.uk](mailto:glenn.ashbrooke@telford.gov.uk)

The LADO should be informed within one working day of all allegations that come to an employer's attention or that are made directly to the police.

In relation to Vulnerable Adults all referrals must be directed through Family Connect on 385385.

### **Review**

This policy will be reviewed in line with organisational procedures unless there are changes in legislation, best practice or other organisation policies impact on its effectiveness.

