

To employers across the UK,

I hope you are well during what is an undeniably testing time for everyone across the country.

As you may be aware, the first lockdown in March last year precipitated a surge in calls for domestic abuse services, with Refuge reporting an 80% increase in calls to their domestic abuse hotline. Troubling recent reports seem to indicate that this trend has continued in the current lockdown. In light of this, I would like to urge you to look at what more your organisation can do to help survivors of domestic abuse.

A new report published by my department today has found that few employers are aware of the signs of domestic abuse, and an even smaller number have a clear policy in place to support survivors.

For too long, a lack of awareness of and stigma around speaking about domestic abuse has stopped workplaces from putting in place the kind of help that survivors so desperately need. It was once taboo to talk about mental health, but now most workplaces have well-established policies in place. We want to see the same happen for domestic abuse, but more quickly and more effectively.

Colleagues and managers can often be the only other people outside the home that survivors talk to each day and are therefore uniquely placed to help spot signs of abuse –such as an individual becoming more withdrawn than usual, sudden drops in performance or mentioning controlling behaviours in their partner.

Whether it is providing a safe space to disclose issues, or helping put workers in touch with the right organisations, employers can be a bridge between a worker and the support they need.

I am not asking that employers become specialists in handling domestic abuse, nor that colleagues should take on the role of healthcare workers or counsellors.

What I want to do is burst the stigma associated with domestic abuse, which means we may shy away from these difficult conversations even when we suspect something is amiss.

Every person in every workplace should feel comfortable raising an issue.

I know it can be difficult to know where to start, so I have set out a few steps that I hope employers are willing to take on board:

1. Raise awareness of domestic abuse – the first barrier is often simply awareness and understanding. Ensuring staff can spot the signs of a colleague facing domestic abuse, such as changes in behaviour or a sudden drop in productivity, means they can respond appropriately and sympathetically. This could be through simply listening to concerns, helping them access support, or referring the issue to the right contacts in the organisation.
2. Don't overcomplicate it – many businesses don't have large senior teams or HR functions, but neither of those things are necessarily needed to support survivors. Simple, practical steps like promoting or downloading the [Bright Sky App](#) which provides a service directory for survivors can make a real difference.
3. Be inclusive – anyone can suffer domestic abuse and it can be especially difficult to ask for help if you have to disclose information about your personal life at work. Senior leaders should look to foster an environment where all workers feel comfortable “being themselves” and talking openly, allowing survivors to feel able to open up.
4. Ask what you can offer – ask what support you can practically offer and be receptive to the needs of the individual. For many, the workplace is the place where they can be away from their abuser and they might benefit from a bit of time, space and privacy to make calls and arrangements. Access to money, whether through paying salaries into a dedicated bank account or offering financial support can be a great help. At times, survivors can also need flexibility around working hours and patterns – allowing them the time they need to access vital services and look after their mental and physical health.
5. Make your support clear to all – there's no point having support in place if it's unclear, or staff are unaware it's available. Putting your support package for survivors front and centre, whether in an employee handbook or on bulletin boards, can help survivors access support. Think about who else enters your place of business who might also be impacted by domestic abuse,

whether contracted staff or customers. Something as simple as displaying an informative poster, translated into different languages for maximum inclusivity, can make a difference.

6. Involve experts – domestic abuse is a complex issue and victims can be at high risk of serious harm. Senior leaders should not be afraid to bring in or speak with specialists such as Hestia in this space, who can advise on handling sensitive situations and help staff access existing pathways to specialist support.
7. Use free support available – there is a range of excellent free guidance for both employers and employees to support domestic abuse survivors in the workplace, including toolkits from organisations like [Business in the Community](#) and [Public Health England](#). It is also free to join the [Employers Initiative on Domestic Abuse](#). Make use of them, both in terms of helping refer survivors to support tools and using guidance to create your own support policies.

The government has today published the final report from its review into workplace support for victims of domestic abuse. I urge you to read the report and consider what pragmatic new measures could be put in place in your workplace to support survivors of domestic abuse.

Private sector firms like Vodafone and Lloyds are already doing amazing work in this space, building domestic abuse policies for their workforce, and there is a real opportunity for more employers to follow suit.

I hope that I can count on your help in making sure we get survivors the support they need as quickly and effectively as possible. Thank you.

Yours sincerely, Paul Scully MP, Business Minister