



Northern Ireland
Assembly

SECTION 7.07

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE POLICY (draft 050319)

Introduction

1. The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission (“the Assembly Commission”) acknowledges and recognises that domestic violence and abuse (“DVA”) is a significant issue affecting all sections of society; the human cost can be enormous including physical, emotional and psychological harm, breakdown in relationships and families, and a reduction in life opportunities for individuals.
2. DVA is a serious crime and is a violation of an individual's human rights. It knows no boundaries with regard to age, gender identity, marital status, race, ethnicity or religious group, sexual orientation, social class, disability or geography.
3. For the purposes of this policy, the terms violence and abuse are intended to encompass all forms of abusive behaviour relevant to both domestic violence and abuse and sexual violence and abuse.

Purpose

4. DVA occurs primarily outside of the workplace. However, it can adversely impact on attendance and work performance and ultimately on service provision. It can affect a staff member's punctuality or attendance and in extreme circumstances, their ability to remain in the workplace. The Assembly Commission recognises that its staff may be amongst those impacted by DVA and wishes to support them in dealing with issues of DVA. The Assembly Commission is committed to the principle that all forms of DVA are unacceptable and that all of its staff have the right to live free from fear and abuse.
5. The purpose of this Policy is to increase awareness of the signs of DVA and provide a safe and supportive working environment. The Policy aims to provide support to a victim of DVA and provide information on the external sources of advice and support available. The Policy also sets out how the Assembly Commission can assist perpetrators to address the consequences of their violence and/or abuse on others.

Scope

6. This Policy will apply to all permanent staff and those staff employed on fixed term contracts. Line managers and the Human Resources Office are responsible for the implementation of the Policy and the Human Resources Office is also responsible for providing advice on the Policy.

Definitions

7. The Departments of Health and Justice joint *Stopping Domestic Violence & Sexual Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland Strategy 2016* (the Strategy) provides the following definitions, which are accepted by the Commission:
 - Domestic Violence and Abuse is defined 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.’
 - Sexual Violence and Abuse is defined as ‘any behaviour (physical, psychological, verbal, virtual/online) perceived to be of a sexual nature which is controlling, coercive, exploitative, harmful, or unwanted that is inflicted on anyone (irrespective of age, ethnicity, religion, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation or any form of disability).’
 - A Victim is defined as a person who is, or has been, the subject of domestic and/or sexual violence and abuse. It may also include; a parent or guardian of a victim aged under 18; a close family member (next of kin) or family representative where the crime results in death or very serious harm or injury; or a close friend e.g. where there is no close family and they are acting as a family representative.
 - A Perpetrator is defined as a person who displays behaviour which falls into the definition of domestic or sexual violence and abuse but who has not yet been convicted of an offence.
 - An Offender is defined as a person who displays behaviour which falls into the definition of domestic or sexual violence and abuse and has been convicted of an offence associated with this behaviour.
8. The Strategy recognises links between domestic and sexual violence and abuse and specific acts such as stalking; female genital mutilation (FGM); forced marriage; ‘honour’ based crimes; sexual exploitation/trafficking; and historical institutional abuse.

What is DVA?

9. DVA is essentially a pattern of behaviour which is characterised by the exercise of coercive control and misuse of power by one person over another within an intimate relationship or a family. A family member could include (but is not limited to) a mother, a father, a son, a daughter, a brother, a sister, grandparents, whether directly or indirectly related, including in-laws and step-family. While often associated with being in an intimate partner relationship, it can include violence and abuse by any other person who has a close or blood relationship with the victim, and may include same-sex or young/teenage relationships.
10. DVA can take the form of physical violence such as, but not limited to:
 - pushing, punching, kicking, slapping or choking;
 - use of a weapon;
 - cutting, burning, biting; and
 - sexual violence.
11. It can also involve emotional, psychological and controlling behaviour (abuse) such as, but not limited to:
 - undermining of self-confidence;
 - threat or threats to others (including children);
 - humiliation or intimidation;
 - isolation from family, friends or sources of support;
 - deprivation of means to live independently/limiting access to property e.g. money, personal items, food, transportation, communication and contraception;
 - regulation of everyday behaviour and freedom;
 - destruction of property;
 - stalking (physical and digital);
 - virtual and online abuse; and

- abuse of pets.

Victims of DVA

12. Annex 1 is the Domestic Violence Wheel which shows the relationship of physical abuse to other forms of abuse and the tactics used by a perpetrator to control or gain power in a DVA situation.
13. It is difficult in the workplace for a victim to acknowledge that they are experiencing DVA. It is important to be sensitive and supportive in order to help victims feel comfortable speaking to their colleagues and line managers about this.
14. Women are more likely than men to experience multiple incidents of domestic abuse (intimate partner violence, sexual assault and stalking) and in particular sexual violence. Women are also more likely than men to be killed by partners/ex-partners. Other individuals can be affected and hurt by DVA too. For example: children; men; and/or those who are in a same-sex relationship.
15. Statistics from the NSPCC state that 1 in 5 children have been exposed to domestic violence and one third of children witnessing domestic violence also experienced another form of abuse.
16. Men or women in a same-sex relationship may face a fear of discrimination or actual discrimination, and often a same-sex partner takes advantage of homophobia to manipulate a partner to keep the abuse secret and/or threaten to 'out' them to family, friends and work colleagues.
17. For male victims, whether in a heterosexual or same-sex relationship, coming forward to talk about abuse in a relationship and ask for help and support is difficult to do. Men will need different kinds of support from women and often can be further isolated in an abusive relationship due to the myths about maleness and the meaning of strength and self-sufficiency etc.
18. It is important to remember that whilst there are similarities in responses, DVA will affect women, men and LGBTQ¹ in different ways and victims may need specialised support. Information about support services available are detailed later in the policy.

Help and Support for Victims of DVA

19. Any victim of DVA should be made aware that there is help available. Individuals can contact their line manager or a manager in the Human Resources Office who can provide information on organisations which offer advice and support – details of these organisations are included at the end of the Policy.
20. **Anyone who feels in immediate danger should dial 999.**

Inspire Workplace

21. [Inspire Workplace](#) is the provider of an Employee Assistance Programme for Assembly Commission staff. It provides free independent and confidential counselling, advice and support for all permanent staff for any personal or work-related difficulty.
22. Staff can call Inspire at any time to talk to someone who can help them to access specialist support and information.

¹ LGBTQ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning.

Welfare Support Services

23. Welfare Support Service provides an independent and confidential service to staff to help individuals work through personal and work related issues which may affect their ability to work effectively. Welfare visits can be arranged in 1st Floor, 2-4 Bruce Street, Belfast, BT2 7JD, at work or at home.
24. Staff can contact [Welfare](#) directly at any point to avail of their services.

Barriers to Seeking Help

25. Victims of DVA may not report or may not be willing to talk about their suffering due to a number of barriers, which include:
 - victims not recognising their experience as abuse;
 - threats of violence;
 - blaming themselves;
 - fear of not being believed;
 - a sense of embarrassment;
 - being unaware of their options;
 - fear of losing their independence;
 - fear of financial implications;
 - fear that their children would be taken away;
 - false counter-allegations; and
 - not trusting agencies to respond effectively.
26. There are also a number of problems faced by victims of DVA, which include:
 - disclosure of abuse – victims are often reluctant to disclose if they are not asked directly;
 - lack of accessible service provision – can be a significant barrier for victims in seeking help, especially victims with disabilities;
 - accommodation – victims with disabilities can be reluctant to leave their own housing if it has been adapted for them; and
 - refuge provision – accessible refuge provision is scarce, and many victims believe they cannot be accommodated according to their requirements.

Identifying DVA

27. There are a number of signs, both physical and behavioural, which may indicate that an individual is a victim of DVA. These can include, but are not limited to:
 - poor timekeeping or obsession with time;
 - absenteeism;
 - low self-confidence and low self-esteem;
 - changes in quality of work performance for no apparent reason;
 - poor concentration or becoming easily distracted;
 - uncharacteristic depression or anxiety;
 - the receipt of repeated upsetting phone calls/e-mails/social media posts;
 - increased hours being worked for no apparent reason;
 - being a victim of vandalism or threats;
 - repeated injuries, unexplained bruising or explanations that do not match the injuries displayed;
 - needing regular time off for appointments;
 - inappropriate or excessive clothing or makeup;
 - limited money or access to money;
 - social withdrawal or change of routine; and
 - prevented from seeing children or fear of not seeing children.
28. Although not an exhaustive list of the signs that an individual is a victim of DVA, some the signs described above may arise from a range of circumstances, of which DVA may or may not be one. It is also important to note that some victims may show no signs of being a victim of DVA and that a victim can suffer a broad range of physical and emotional consequences.

DVA and the Workplace

29. The Commission recognises that home and work issues cannot always be separated and that DVA can impact greatly on the working life of staff. The Commission has a duty, under the Health and Safety Work (NI) Order 1978, to ensure the health, safety and welfare of staff at work and seeks to support and assist staff experiencing problems, including those who are victims of DVA and those who are perpetrators. By having policies in place to assist staff affected by DVA, it is possible to create a safe and supportive environment where the workplace can become a place of safety.
30. The Management of Health and Safety at Work (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2006 states that the Commission must assess the risks of violence to staff and make arrangements for their health and safety by effective planning, organisation and control in the workplace. The Commission is committed to complying with the legislation.
31. The Commission acknowledges the rights of individuals under the ECHR as incorporated by the Human Rights Act 1998 in particular:
 - Article 2 the right to life;
 - Article 3 the right not to be tortured or inhumanely or degradingly treated or punished;
 - Article 4 the right not to be required to perform forced labour;
 - Article 5 the right to liberty and security of person; and
 - Article 8 the right to respect for one's private and family life, home and correspondence.
32. The costs of DVA to employers can be huge. DVA can contribute to sickness absence, bad time-keeping and lack of productivity. There are many professional organisations and groups who are specifically trained to support those affected by DVA (see Advice, Support and Helplines section below). However, the Commission recognises it can also play an important supporting role by developing policies, raising awareness among staff, and signposting staff to organisations which can provide specialist advice and support.

Confidentiality, Record Keeping and Sharing Information

33. DVA is a sensitive issue and staff experiencing it are often reluctant to discuss it with managers or colleagues. All records concerning DVA will be kept strictly confidential and held by Human Resources Office.
34. Any information regarding a DVA situation or a perpetrator will usually only be disclosed with the consent of the individual. It is important to note, however, that in certain circumstances, where a member of staff knows or believes that a relevant offence has been committed, there may be a legal obligation on a member of staff to provide information to the police. For example, where information has been given to a member of staff about child abuse and where a risk to children or vulnerable adults is identified, the Head of Human Resources will take advice from Legal Services Office and, where appropriate, provide the information to the police. Where this arises, the member of staff will be informed.
35. Improper disclosure of information, i.e. breaches of confidentiality by any member of staff, may be treated as a disciplinary offence and it is therefore important to consult with the Head of Human Resources with regard to these matters.

Supporting a Victim of DVA

36. Any member of staff could be in a position of providing support to a victim of DVA within the workplace. It is important to create an environment where victims feel safe to talk about what they are experiencing.
37. It is important to provide a sensitive non-judgemental response to a disclosure of DVA and reassure the victim that they are not to blame. There is no justification for DVA and it is important to make the victim aware that there is help and support available, both through the Assembly Commission and with specialist agencies.

38. Where DVA is disclosed, the victim may need specialist help and should be reminded of the counselling service available through Inspire Workplaces. Referral can also be made to Welfare Support Services by contacting the Human Resources Office or the individual can contact Welfare directly for support.
39. There are other support options available to the victim which are detailed at the end of this Policy, including how to contact local DVA support and information services and specialist counselling services. If requested by the victim, please assist them to make contact. Advice can also be sought from the Human Resources Office.
40. The victim should be encouraged to talk with a manager from the Human Resources Office and/or line management, where appropriate, to explore the various work-related support options within the Assembly Commission to assist them and these are detailed later in the Policy.
41. Telling another person about DVA is a courageous step. Therefore, please respect the choices and decisions the victim may make about their situation. Often it is difficult for a victim to leave a perpetrator (as described in the Barriers to Seeking Help section). In the majority of cases a victim will make many attempts before they finally leave the perpetrator and it is important to support them throughout this.
42. It is important not to seek proof of abuse nor attempt to contact the perpetrator. The victim should not feel compelled to accept support nor should you adopt the role of being a support worker/counsellor. You should however encourage the individual to seek help.

The Role of Line Managers

43. In addition to the *Supporting a Victim of DVA* section above, line managers should be aware of the warning signs of DVA as detailed in the *Identifying DVA* section in the Policy. If a manager is concerned that there are signs that a member of staff may be a victim of DVA, they should initially speak to the individual.
44. Line managers must seek advice from Human Resources Office when dealing with potential victims of DVA. Managers should make a managerial, rather than a personal commitment, to help resolve any issue when asked for assistance. This reduces the potential for confusion arising about the line manager's role and can reduce the potential for complications or blurring of responsibilities for both the manager and the individual.
45. Any conversations about the individual's situation should take place in private and any questions asked with care and sensitivity, reinforcing that, subject to the provisions of the law, confidentiality will be respected. The individual should not feel pressurised into disclosing any personal information that they do not feel comfortable disclosing.
46. Managers can play a role in supporting a member of staff who is being subjected to, or has been a victim of, DVA. Managers should:
 - encourage victims to get professional support from an external organisation with the required expertise;
 - endeavour to support those experiencing DVA in a sympathetic, empathetic, non-judgemental and confidential manner;
 - work with the Human Resources Office to enable victims to visit support organisations such as Women's Aid within core working hours. Such organisations can offer advocacy, advice and support to victims of DVA and may be able to provide access to free legal advice;
 - advise of the right to request special paid leave for relevant appointments, including with support agencies, solicitors, to rearrange housing or childcare, and for court appointments;
 - advise of the right to request temporary or permanent changes to working times and patterns through the Flexible Working policy; and
 - advise of the right to request financial support by way of advance in pay.
47. If staff performance or attendance has been affected as a result of DVA, the matter should be managed sensitively and managers should seek advice from the Human Resources Office.

The Role of the Human Resource Office

48. The Human Resources Office will provide advice to both staff members and managers on DVA situations. It is responsible for:
 - ensuring up to date information on external support organisations is available;

- making referrals to Welfare Support Services if the individual wishes to attend;
- working with managers to support staff who are experiencing DVA e.g. assessing and approving special leave, considering work patterns;
- working with staff and their manager to agree what information the individual wants to share with colleagues and agree what the response should be if the perpetrator contacts or visits the office;
- working with managers to support staff who have admitted or disclosed that they have perpetrated DVA to attend support /educational classes to facilitate time off in line with policy provisions;
- advising managers on the sensitive use of performance/attendance procedures; and
- ensuring confidentiality in order to support staff who are experiencing DVA.

Workplace Safety Plan

49. The Assembly Commission takes the health and safety and wellbeing of its staff seriously and will make every effort to make adjustments to support victims. Therefore, the Human Resources Office, in conjunction with the line manager may carry out a workplace risk assessment, where appropriate, to determine potential risks within the workplace to the victim or other staff by the perpetrator.
50. Victims of DVA are especially vulnerable once they attempt to leave an abusive situation and may become vulnerable going to or coming from work or while they are at work as the perpetrator knows where they can be located.
51. Should the individual wish, the line manager and Human Resources Office will work with the individual to develop a personalised workplace safety plan to support the individual in the workplace.
52. Potential workplace support based on risk to safety within the workplace may include:
 - agreeing with the individual a method of communication or an emergency contact in the event that the Assembly Commission is unable to contact them when they do not report for work unexpectedly;
 - discussing the individual's arrangements for getting safely to and from work;
 - changing their work extension number;
 - providing an alternative e-mail address or setting up e-mail blocking filters;
 - working with the individual and their manager to agree what information the individual wants to share with colleagues and agree what the response should be if the perpetrator contacts or visits the office; and
 - recording of any incidents of abuse in the workplace including persistent telephone calls, emails etc. and taking appropriate action.

Perpetrators or Offenders of DVA

53. The Commission would strongly encourage staff who are perpetrators of DVA or offenders as defined in this Policy to seek help and support voluntarily. They will have access, where appropriate, to the help and support contained within this policy. Alternatively, it may be the case that such help may be mandatory, for example as a part of a court sentence.
54. When a perpetrator or offender has identified themselves to either Human Resources Office or a line manager, or has been identified by a relevant statutory agency, then this must be treated confidentially. The safety of the victim must be paramount and taken into consideration.
55. Requests for time off to attend appropriate intervention appointments will be considered sympathetically, as far as can reasonably be expected. Management will agree with the individual, in conjunction with Human Resources Office, how leave can be facilitated, based on an individual's circumstances and service delivery. This may include special paid leave, unpaid leave, flexi time (including flexi time outside normal provision if required), or changes to start and finishing times of work or a combination of leave provisions.
56. Staff should be aware that conduct outside of work may lead to disciplinary action. Staff are reminded that the Standards of Conduct policy requires them to report to the Human Resources Office, as soon as possible if they have been arrested, charged or convicted by a Court of any criminal offence. Failure to do so may be considered a disciplinary matter.
57. A criminal conviction may lead to disciplinary action, although not all stages of the disciplinary procedure may be appropriate.

58. If a manager suspects that a member of staff may be perpetrating abuse during work-time, including using work resources, this could be considered as a discipline issue and advice should be sought from the Human Resources Office.
59. Perpetrators/offenders could also involve other colleagues, who may or may not be aware of their motives, to assist them. Any staff knowingly assisting an action to carry out DVA may also be liable to disciplinary action.
60. If the victim of DVA and the perpetrator/offender are both employed by the Commission and the perpetrator/offender remains in the workplace, neither party will work within the same business area and every effort will be made to ensure a workplace safety plan is put in place to safeguard the victim.
61. Where necessary, action will be taken to minimise the potential for the perpetrator/offender to use their position or organisational resources to find out details about, or the whereabouts of, their victim. This may have to include a change of duties or role, or the withdrawal of access to certain resources.

General Information

62. The policy is effective from (insert date).
63. If you require any advice or support in relation to this policy, please contact the Human Resources Office.

Related Policies, Guidance and Forms

- 3.08 Special Leave
- 3.12 Flexible Working and Partial retirement policy
- 6.01 Standards of Conduct Policy
- 6.02 Protection of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults
- 6.03 Discipline
- 6.08 Dignity at Work
- 6.10 Social Media
- 7.02 Staff Welfare

Advice, Support and Helplines for DVA

Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)

Anyone who feels in immediate danger should dial 999

Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Officers are available in all areas. Ask to speak to the local Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Officer. **Call 0845 600 8000**

Women's Aid

Women's Aid is the lead voluntary organisation responding to domestic and sexual violence and abuse in Northern Ireland. Its main aim is to create a safe and supportive society for women, children and young people affected by domestic and sexual violence and abuse. It can also provide support to men who are victims of DVA.

24 hour helpline 0800 917 1414

Local Women's Aid Groups

Antrim, Ballymena, Carrickfergus, Larne and Newtownabbey Women's Aid	028 2563 2136
Armagh and Down Women's Aid	028 3025 0765
Belfast and Lisburn Women's Aid	028 9066 6049
Causeway Women's Aid	028 7035 6573
Fermanagh Women's Aid	028 6632 8898
Foyle Women's Aid	028 7141 6800
Mid Ulster Women's Aid	028 8676 9300
North Down and Ards Women's Aid	028 9127 3196
Omagh Women's Aid	028 8224 1414

Nexus

Nexus NI offer counselling and support to any survivors of sexual abuse, victims of sexual violence including those who have experienced rape and sexual assault.

Belfast	028 9032 6803
Derry/Londonderry	028 7126 0566
Enniskillen	028 6632 0046

Men's Organisations

These organisations **provide counselling services for men experiencing domestic abuse**. They can **provide support and help individuals to understand their options and make their own choices and decisions**.

Men's Advisory Panel	Belfast 028 9024 1929 Foyle 028 7116 0001
Men's Action Network	028 7137 7777
Men's Health Forum in Ireland	07715 164 796

LGBTQ Helplines

These organisations provide **advocacy services to support people in total confidence and provide information about other support available**. **Abuse in any relationship is wrong, don't suffer alone, come and speak to someone.**

Cara Friend	Cara-Friend Helpline	0808 8000 390
	GLYNI (Youth)	028 9089 0202
	(Thursday Evenings)	028 9023 8668
Here NI		028 9024 9452
Rainbow Project		028 9031 9030
SAIL		028 9532 0023

Young People & Children

Trained helpline counsellors provide 24/7 help, advice and support

NSPCC	0808 800 500
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Other Useful Numbers

The Rowan (Sexual Assault Referral Centre NI)	0800 389 4424
Victim Support	028 9024 3133 (Belfast) 028 9267 5642 (Lisburn)

Disability Action	028 9029 7880
Citizen's Advice Bureau	028 9023 1120
Law Society of Northern Ireland	028 9023 1614
Relate	028 9032 3454
Samaritans	028 9066 4433
Parenting NI Ltd	0808 8010 722
Age NI	028 9024 5729
Children in Northern Ireland	028 9040 1290
PIPs (Suicide Prevention	028 9080 5850
	0800 088 6042
Lifeline (Suicide Prevention 24/7)	0808 808 8000
Childline	0800 1111

Domestic Violence Wheel

The domestic violence wheel below shows the relationship of physical abuse to other forms of abuse. Each part shows a tactic used by a perpetrator to control or gain power in a DVA situation.



It is important to note that the behaviours outlined above are not only reinforced by the actual use of physical and sexual violence but the continued threat of such violence. The level of abuse used by the perpetrator is likely to escalate if the victim challenges the control they are exerting.