

WORKPLACE GUIDE

Domestic violence safety planning

Developing an effective safety plan

Your domestic violence policy should emphasise safety, flexibility and options for those who are abused. In particular it should include the development of a safety plan for the workplace. A domestic violence safety plan enhances general safe at work strategies, but targets specific risk factors associated with domestic violence.

This guide contains a number of ideas to help create a safety plan. They are drawn from the experience of a range different workplaces. Not all of them will be necessary in your workplace, and some may already exist as part of your workplace safety protocols in relation to dealing with the public, requiring only minor modification.

The most effective workplace domestic violence safety plan will have the full support of staff. You can involve workers in developing the plan through the short training sessions offered as part of this information package. This will enhance the acceptability and efficiency of any necessary general monitoring or surveillance measures. Any individual measures must be developed with the employee concerned, with their full informed consent.

STEP 1: Assess the nature of the workplace

Every work place is different. Safety plans needs to reflect the general safety measures that can be introduced as well as the specific plans tailored to the needs of individual staff who disclose, according to the nature of the workplace and the work patterns of individuals (e.g. do rosters expose staff to potentially hazardous times such as late at night, early in the morning or at very quiet times of day? Do staff work alone, offsite, or beyond mobile range?).

STEP 2: Assess the workplace for security

Is public access to the workplace restricted? Are there security guards onsite? Are employees working in remote or isolated locations within the building? Is car parking safe?

Possible actions to support safety:

- Provide locked entries/exits.
- Use cards or keys to access worker-only areas.
- Use reception desks and a sign-in procedure.
- Install door chimes or other means to notify workers when someone enters the workplace. Install personal or fixed alarms (either audible or silent alarms).
- Install desk or wall panic buttons.
- Accompany non-workers in restricted areas.
- Use or video surveillance, posting signs to inform people of the surveillance.
- Provide regular security patrols and regular alarm checks.
- Train staff how to question strangers or intruders about the appropriateness of their presence in a non-confrontational manner.
- Implement a system for warning workers of intruders in the workplace.

- Have more than one person working in an area where there might be open contact with the public or clients.
- Provide safe parking spaces (well-lit and close to the main entrance).
- Ensure clear sightlines (look at landscaping, layout, and bushes).

STEP 3: When an employee discloses

A tailored plan to protect the worker needs to be developed with the worker's consent and reflect their work patterns. Does the worker work at times of greater vulnerability to harassment or attack? Does the worker work alone or offsite? Is the worker within mobile range? How do they get to and from work? **Note that women are exposed to a higher risk of domestic violence during pregnancy and post-separation.**

Possible actions to support safety:

- Provide mobiles phones (pre-programmed to call an emergency number), walkie talkies, or other communication or monitoring devices.
- Use GPS tracking devices or other locating devices.
- Designate a person to monitor contact with workers and follow up if contact is lost.
- Shorten or vary the start and finish times for the protected worker.
- For workers without a car, provide a company car or at minimum organise taxi pick and drop off to home.
- For workers with a car, ensure someone escorts them to their parking spot when they leave the premises
- Alert workers to personal safety measures such as walking around their vehicle and checking the back seat for intruders before unlocking the door to get in, maintaining a full tank or filling up with petrol at well-lit, and busy petrol stations.
- Use an internal code word or words known to all staff to indicate that help is needed.

- Relocate the protected worker to a more secure area of the workplace.
- Arrange for other staff to support the worker at court in paid time.

STEP 4: Assess with the vulnerable staff member, the use of appropriate screening measures

The most common form of domestic violence that staff report experiencing at work is abusive phone calls. How can you prevent perpetrators gaining access to the vulnerable staff member? How can this be done without affecting the work performance of the worker? Can you collect evidence of stalking and harassment so that police can follow up concerns? Is there a domestic violence protection order in place so that you can report breaches? Are you aware of escalating risk?

Possible actions to support safety:

- Develop an email and phone policy. See the Domestic Violence Safety Plan: Responding to Abusive Calls and Emails section of this package.
- Ascertain if the protected employee has an protection order and if the conditions include 'not to enter, remain or access any premises the protected person occupies or works in' and 'not to contact'.
- Screen and track telephone calls, record voicemail where necessary.
- Provide evidence of abusive communications to the police and to the abuser's employer if emanating from their workplace.
- Instruct and train all staff on how not to reveal information to others such as location and movements of the protected worker.
- Develop a disciplinary policy to address cases where sensitive information is provided that endangers the safety of the protected worker.

STEP 5: Assess the capacity of the workplace to respond to emergencies

Are you prepared for a crisis situation?

Possible actions to support safety:

- Strongly encourage domestic violence protection orders to include the workplace as a prohibited location for the abuser.
- Provide security staff with a photo of the abusive person and a copy of the order.
- Post a photo of the abusive person on a staff noticeboard to alert colleagues.
- Institute a clear reporting procedure for incidents of violence or threats.
- Have an emergency plan with procedures for contacting the police when workers observe threatening behaviour.
- Outline the steps the workplace has committed to undertake once aware of an incident/potential incident, and how the workplace will record incidents and disclose information on a 'need to know' basis in order to protect confidentiality while ensuring worker safety.

STEP 6: Assess the need for a safe area

This is a place where someone under threat can retreat to escape the violence. It may be a room, an enclosed outdoor area or an adjoining business.

Possible action to support safety:

- Create a safe room or space that has an easily accessible entry.
- Ensure the space has a lock that can be used from the inside but which can also be accessed by security from the outside, in an emergency.
- Include a means of summoning immediate assistance from within the space, such as a call button that goes directly to the police or a pre-programmed mobile phone.

