

NAVIGATING A WORKPLACE DOMESTIC ABUSE RESPONSE

**A HANDBOOK FOR SMALL TO
MEDIUM-SIZED BUSINESSES**

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CONFIDENTIALITY NOTICE

This handbook is intended solely for use within small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs) to educate, support and guide managers, HR staff, and employees in creating a safe and informed workplace. This resource is designed to encourage open dialogue and offer guidance. Any discussions or disclosures regarding domestic abuse must be handled with the highest degree of sensitivity, discretion, and confidentiality.

All people using this handbook are reminded that:

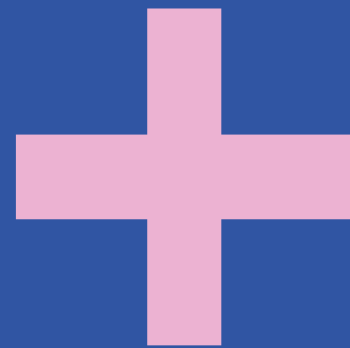
- Any employee disclosures related to domestic abuse should only be shared on a strictly need-to-know basis, in accordance with safeguarding, HR, and legal obligations.
- Personal information or case details shared in any related training or reporting processes must be protected in line with **relevant privacy/data protection law, e.g., GDPR**.
- Misuse of personal information or a breach of confidentiality may compromise the safety of those affected.

Please consult your line manager or senior leadership team or visit the [EIDA website](#) before taking any action.

PURPOSE OF THIS HANDBOOK

The purpose of this handbook is to support (SMEs) in recognising, responding to, and referring employees affected by domestic abuse to specialist support. It provides clear, practical guidance to help employers create a safe and supportive workplace, fulfil their duty of care, and connect staff with appropriate resources. Please note that employers are not expected to be experts, there are local and national domestic abuse services that can provide specialist support.

By raising awareness and offering simple steps, this handbook aims to empower SMEs – regardless of size or sector – to play a vital role in protecting employee wellbeing and fostering a culture of safety, dignity, and respect.



INTRODUCTION

WHY THIS HANDBOOK MATTERS

Change to: Fleet Street Quarter has developed this handbook specifically to support SMEs. It recognises that many small and medium-sized enterprises lack the internal expertise, policies, and resources needed to respond safely and effectively when domestic abuse affects the workplace. It has been designed as a first-step in bridging this gap and beginning a domestic abuse response within the workplace.

Domestic abuse does not discriminate, it does not make exceptions for race, gender, ethnicity, age, sex, social status etc. A staggering 1 in 3 women and 1 in 5 men will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime across the UK, ranging from coercive control to murder, ([ONS, 2025](#)).

For far too long, domestic abuse has remained a stigmatised topic, with people not encouraged to talk about openly, for fear of judgement, retaliation or risk to, or safety. As part of a wider wellbeing programme for employees, incorporating a domestic abuse policy or written guidance and signposting to useful resources, or having useful signposting practices for employees is the right thing to do.

This handbook aligns with national initiatives such as Women's Aid's "Come Together to End Domestic Abuse" campaign ([Women's Aid](#)) and the Employers' Initiative on Domestic Abuse (EIDA). Together, these organisations are working in accordance with the Domestic Abuse Act (2021) Statutory Guidance (2022) to help employers understand why domestic abuse is a critical issue they should engage with.

Please be advised that the implementation of a workplace domestic abuse response, such as a domestic abuse policy or guidance, is likely to increase awareness and may result in a positive outcome of a higher number of disclosures.

THE BUSINESS CASE: FOR SUPPORTING EMPLOYEES EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC ABUSE

Domestic abuse is a workplace issue as much as it is a societal one. Employers have a legal and moral duty of care to support their employees – and ignoring the impact of domestic abuse can result in significant human and financial costs.

According to a Home Office report, domestic abuse cost businesses in England an estimated £17 billion in 2022, with between 21% and 56% of people who experienced domestic abuse needing to take time off as a result. Domestic abuse can lead to reduced

productivity, poor concentration, diminished work quality, and even a decline in performance – all of which can severely affect daily business operations.

Paragraph 406 of the [Domestic Abuse Act 2021 Statutory Guidance](#) reinforces that employers must consider the impact of domestic abuse as part of their duty of care to employees.

If you would like to calculate how much domestic abuse could cost your business, please visit [Reducing the Risk](#) for further information.

WHAT YOU CAN DO AS AN EMPLOYER

Introducing a specific, comprehensive domestic abuse policy or written guidance as an employer has several important benefits both for the employee and the organisation as a whole.

FOR EMPLOYEES SAFETY AND SUPPORT

Ensures staff experiencing domestic abuse know what support is available and who to talk to about it. For example, you can create a safe space to take private phone calls or offer flexible working, as appropriate. This helps keep employees in work and financially independent.

AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING

Helps to raise awareness among colleagues and managers, reducing stigma and encouraging a compassion-first approach.

CLEAR PROCESSES

Provides clarity on how to report, confidentiality, signposting and access to useful resources.

BENEFITS TO THE OVERALL ORGANISATION DUTY OF CARE

Demonstrates compliance with legal and ethical responsibilities to safeguard employees and their wellbeing.

RETENTION AND PRODUCTIVITY OF STAFF

Supports affected employees effectively, reducing absenteeism, presenteeism, and staff turnover rates.

FOSTERS A POSITIVE WORKPLACE CULTURE

Promotes inclusivity, wellbeing, and a strong culture of trust and confidence.

REPUTATION AND RESPONSIBILITY IMPACT

Positions the organisation as proactive, socially responsible, and aligned with best practices that support employees.



WANT TO LEARN MORE?

If you would like to learn more about implementing a domestic abuse policy or written guidance for your business, please contact the team at the [Employers' Initiative on Domestic Abuse \(EIDA\)](#) at Support@eida.org.uk for more information and support through the process.

UNDERSTANDING DOMESTIC ABUSE IN THE WORKPLACE

WHAT IS DOMESTIC ABUSE?

Domestic abuse is defined in the [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#) as follows:

Behaviour of a person ("A") towards another person ("B") is "domestic abuse" if A and B are each aged 16 or over and are personally connected to each other, and the behaviour is abusive. Behaviour is "abusive" if it consists of any of the following:

- Physical or sexual abuse,
- Violent or threatening behaviour,
- Controlling or coercive behaviour,
- Economic abuse,
- Psychological, emotional or other abuse. It does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct. This applies to all forms of abuse.



TYPES OF ABUSE



PHYSICAL

Physical violence such as punching, kicking, dragging, shoving, slapping, strangling, or threatening with violence. It can also include withholding or forcing someone to take medication or substances or not allowing them to sleep. Serious physical abuse can also include sexual abuse, such as sexual assault or rape.



EMOTIONAL

Emotional and psychological abuse is a form of controlling or coercive behaviour with the specific intent to make a person feel fearful or undermined and diminish their confidence in their abilities. An example of this could be manipulating a person's anxieties or beliefs. It could also include being insulted in front of others – for example, about their age, faith or sexuality, or undermining a person's ability to work.



DIGITAL

Digital domestic abuse (sometimes called tech-facilitated abuse) is a form of domestic abuse where technology is used to control, threaten, monitor, or harass a partner, ex-partner or family member. It often mirrors traditional patterns of coercive control but takes place through digital tools such as smartphones, social media, messaging apps, email, or smart home devices.

The aim, just like with other forms of domestic abuse, is to assert power and control, but technology amplifies the abuser's ability to always intrude into the victim's life, even when they're not physically together.



ECONOMIC (OR FINANCIAL)

Financial or 'economic' abuse refers to behaviour that has a substantial negative impact on an individual's ability to acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or to obtain goods or services. Economic abuse can take subtle and insidious forms, such as secretly putting someone into debt, wrongfully taking child benefits, not paying bills, removing or controlling access to Wi-Fi, or hiding valuable items that the other person could rely on for cash.

Many abusers will specifically target someone's job or career (and thus, independence/earning potential), by preventing them from being in education or employment. This could involve limiting their working hours, making them consistently late for work, causing injury so they must call in sick, hiding car keys or breaking glasses so they can't drive to work, withholding money so they can't use public transport, forcing them to take unpaid leave, or not allowing them to attend training courses.



RECOGNISING THE SIGNS IN THE WORKPLACE

1. NOTICEABLE CHANGES IN BEHAVIOUR OR MOOD

- Sudden withdrawal, anxiety, appearing fearful or flustered
- Becoming unusually quiet, jumpy, or distracted from tasks
- A drop in confidence or self-esteem
- Withdrawing from their usual habits and isolating themselves from the rest of the team

2. FREQUENT ABSENCES

- Regularly arriving late or leaving early
- Increase in sick days or unexplained absenteeism
- Difficulty concentrating, missing deadlines or appearing distracted
- Changes in work patterns or asking to work from home more often

3. PHYSICAL SIGNS OF INJURY

- Unexplained bruises, cuts, or injuries
- Wearing long sleeves or scarves even in warm weather to cover marks
- Offering vague or inconsistent explanations if asked about physical signs of injury
- Avoidance of visibility (e.g. turning off cameras during online meetings.)
- Unexplained limited mobility or difficulty physically performing usual job tasks

4. EXCESSIVE COMMUNICATION OR MONITORING

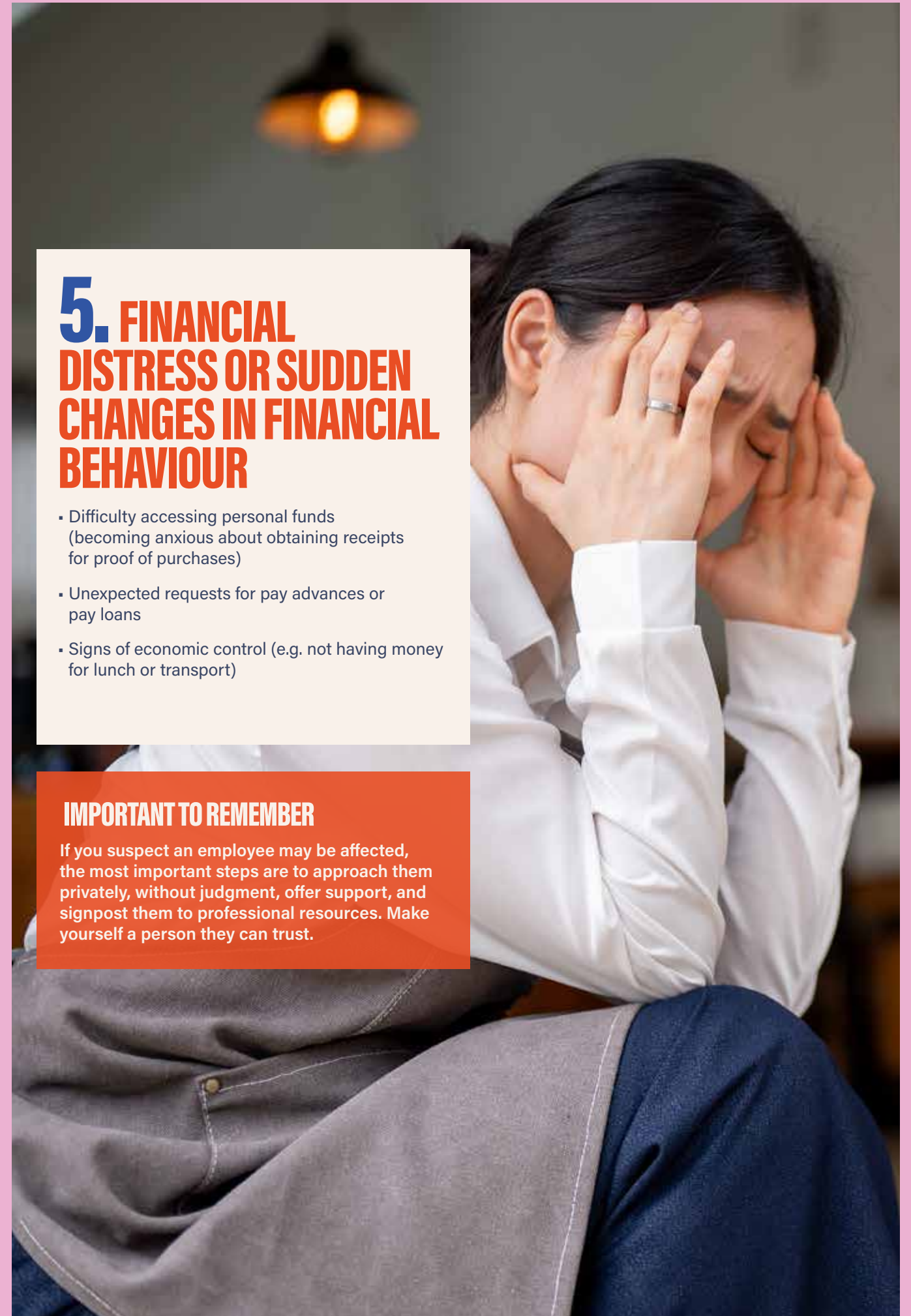
- Partner, ex-partner or family member constantly calling, texting, or showing up at the workplace unannounced
- Employee appearing nervous about responding immediately or answering the phone
- Partner, ex-partner or family member controlling transportation methods or insisting on picking them up from the workplace

5. FINANCIAL DISTRESS OR SUDDEN CHANGES IN FINANCIAL BEHAVIOUR

- Difficulty accessing personal funds (becoming anxious about obtaining receipts for proof of purchases)
- Unexpected requests for pay advances or pay loans
- Signs of economic control (e.g. not having money for lunch or transport)

IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER

If you suspect an employee may be affected, the most important steps are to approach them privately, without judgment, offer support, and signpost them to professional resources. Make yourself a person they can trust.



RESPONDING SAFELY: SIGNPOSTING AND SERVICES

HOW TO HANDLE A DISCLOSURE SENSITIVELY

If an employee tells you about their situation or about a colleague, confidentiality is very important. Responding compassionately, creating a safe space for further discussion in the workplace assists the employee in feeling supported.

It is important to remain impartial and professional, ensuring no direct intervention in the employee's

personal life and supporting them to make their own decisions. If you are concerned about safety, it may however be necessary to call the police.

PLEASE REFER TO OUR DOS AND DO NOTS ON PAGE 11



DO

LISTEN ATTENTIVELY give the person your full attention and space to speak safely.

BELIEVE THEM people do not disclose to others unless it's true and serious.

STAY CALM keep your tone of voice steady and supportive.

VALIDATE THEIR FEELINGS thank and acknowledge their courage in speaking up.

RESPECT THEIR PACE let them share as much or as little as they want.

ASK OPEN QUESTIONS e.g., "How can I best support you?"

OFFER PRACTICAL HELP such as flexible work, privacy, or time off. (See Chapter 2 for further guidance)

KEEP INFORMATION STRICTLY PRIVATE follow escalation processes where necessary within your company structure - share information only on a need-to-know basis.

BE CLEAR ABOUT LIMITS explain confidentiality can be kept unless there are safeguarding concerns.

FOCUS ON SAFETY check if they feel safe at work or travelling to/from work.

SIGNPOST TO PROFESSIONAL HELP give them helpline numbers or resources. (See Chapter 2 for further guidance)

FOLLOW UP CHECK-IN gently check in after the disclosure to show continued support.

RECORD DISCLOSURES (IF APPROPRIATE) factually and securely, not your opinions.

LOOK AFTER YOURSELF assess whether you may need to seek guidance if you feel overwhelmed.



DO NOT

DISMISS OR MINIMISE THE SITUATION avoid phrases like "It can't be that bad" or "Maybe you misunderstood."

JUDGE never suggest they should "just leave."

INTERROGATE avoid pressing for further details or evidence let the conversation be led by them.

ACT SHOCKED OR HORRIFIED minimise strong reactions, this may make them shut down or panic.

CRITICISE THE ABUSER DIRECTLY it could make them defensive or fearful of their situation further.

PROMISE TOTAL SECRECY you may need to act if their immediate safety is at risk.

CONFRONT THE ABUSER it could put the employee at a greater risk, no contact should be made.

PUSH THEM INTO ACTION such as making a report to Police or leaving the relationship.

ASSUME ALL ABUSE LOOKS THE SAME it can be emotional, financial, controlling, not just physical. (See Chapter 1 for further guidance)

TAKE ON THE ROLE OF 'COUNSELLOR' your role is to support and signpost, not to provide any fixes. Have clear boundaries in place. Remember employers are not expected to be experts.

PANIC OR ACT RASHLY seek further advice if you are unsure what to do. EIDA have great resources available online via their [website](#).

CONFIDENTIALITY AND BOUNDARIES

THE THREE R'S FRAMEWORK

When a disclosure is made by an employee, it is important that wellbeing, safety and confidentiality is paramount.

It is advised to maintain professional boundaries and understand limitations of care when handling a disclosure.

Support and guidance should be made available at the earliest opportunity with clear routes given to services and support that is available. Each disclosure can be treated with individual consideration to the most relevant and appropriate referral service.

It is important to remember that no one person is responsible for safety when a disclosure is made. Seek support as an employer to HR functions, or even anonymously to Hestia via their employer advice line on **0203 879 3695** or email advice@hestia.org.



ADDRESSING AND RESPONDING TO PERPETRATORS

If you are the manager of a small business, responding to an employee who is a perpetrator of domestic abuse requires a simpler, more direct approach than businesses with a large HR department. However, the same principles apply: safety, professionalism, and clear boundaries.

It is important to understand that addressing and responding to perpetrators can be a complex topic. However, the guidance below has been designed to

provide understanding and ensure that this topic forms part of your response.

You can access further guidance on how to address and respond to perpetrators in the workplace by visiting [EIDA's resource](#) and [Respect](#) for more information.

Below is practical, realistic guidance tailored specifically for small to medium sized business environments.

1. PRIORITISE SAFETY

- Assess whether the situation creates any risk to staff, customers, or the victim. If there is immediate risk, contact the police or a safeguarding helpline (Please refer to [page 14](#)). Keep the workplace secure and calm.

2. HAVE A PRIVATE, PROFESSIONAL CONVERSATION

- Speak to the employee in a neutral, confidential setting.
- Aim to keep the discussion focused on workplace behaviour – avoid judging, probing or questioning their private life.

3. SET CLEAR WORKPLACE EXPECTATIONS

- Explain that any behaviour affecting safety, professionalism, or business reputation will not be tolerated.
- This includes harassment using work resources, aggressive behaviour, or conflict spilling into the workplace. Explain that behaviours will be challenged if reported or witnessed. Remember to document the conversation and note any incidents clearly and succinctly.
- State your approach to perpetrators in your policy or written guidance.

4. TAKE ACTION IF MISCONDUCT OCCURS & SIGNPOST SUPPORT

- Depending on what happens at work, you may issue warnings, suspend, or dismiss. You will need to seek legal advice.
- You may offer support resources but do not excuse the behaviour.
- Signpost to the [Respect](#) helpline (**0808 8010327**) or other behaviour change programmes.

REFERRALS AND SERVICES

Please call 999 if you or someone you know is in immediate danger.

The following provides an overview of the national (and some London based) support services available to anyone affected by domestic abuse. This is not an exhaustive list.

BRIGHT SKY APP

A free to download mobile app providing support and information for anyone who may be in an abusive relationship or those concerned about someone they know. The app is also available to use in Polish, Punjabi and Urdu. Accessible via the Apple Store and Google Play.

24/7 REFUGE HELPLINE

The Freephone National Domestic Abuse Helpline, run by Refuge, is available on **0808 2000 247**, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The helpline is answered by fully trained female support workers and volunteers who will answer your call in confidence.

HESTIA – LIFE BEYOND CRISIS

Support for victims of domestic abuse in London and the Southeast. Their dedicated team provide support in 26 refuges across 8 London boroughs.

Hestia's Refuge Referral Line also helps women and children to find domestic abuse refuge spaces across London and the Southeast. Call **0808 169 9975** or email refuge.space@hestia.org, Monday to Friday, 10am to 4pm. Hestia employer advice line 9-5 everyday: **0203 879 3695**.

SOLACE

[Solace](#) offer free advice and support to women and children in London. They also offer help over the phone and face-to-face in a range of languages through interpreters and language line. Call advice helpline **0800 802 5565** or email advice@solacewomensaid.org for further help.

WOMEN'S AID

[Women's Aid](#) exists as a base to access direct support for yourself, a friend or a colleague. Offering over 400 local based services across the UK for women affected by domestic abuse.

SURVIVORS UK

An inclusive service for male and non-binary victim-survivors of sexual abuse, please visit [Survivors UK](#) on the helpline: **0203 598 3898** operating Monday-Sunday 12pm-8pm.

MEN'S ADVICE LINE

[Men's Advice Line](#), ran by Respect offer a freephone helpline for male-victim survivors, operating Monday-Friday 10am-5pm: **0808 801 0327**.

MANKIND INITIATIVE

The [Mankind Initiative](#) offer help for male-victim survivors of domestic abuse through their national helpline Monday-Friday from 10am-4pm (open weekdays but excluding Bank Holidays in the UK). Please call: **0808 800 1170** – freephone (will not show on your bills) or **01823 334 244** – helpline (for those with inclusive minutes).

GALOP

[Galop](#) offer a range of help for LGBTQ+ victim-survivors of domestic abuse through support services and a national helpline. Please call: **0800 999 5428** Monday to Thursday 10am-8.30pm and 10am-4.30pm on Fridays. Alternatively email help@galop.org.uk for further support.

HONOR-BASED ABUSE

KARMA NIRVANA

Helping those who have survived honour based domestic abuse since 1993, Karma Nirvana supports, empowers and educates those impacted, so they can live a life free of abuse.

The helpline is free to access and runs 24/7: **0800 5999 247** / Mon-Fri 9am-5pm.



FURTHER INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

As an employer, you can also visit [WeThrive](#). Direct support for organisations to build trauma-informed policies, deliver training and awareness, and create pathways for survivors to return to work.

By working with employers in this way, help is given to drive policy and intent into real impact, ensuring

survivors can rebuild their lives while organisations also benefit from skilled, resilient, and loyal talent.

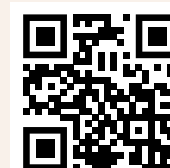
WeThrive are one of many organisations working to support those affected by domestic abuse. For a full list of resources, please refer to the EIDA Directory.

For more information and support, please visit – [EIDA directory of services](#). If you would like to access further guidance and explore becoming an EIDA member for free please visit the website [here](#).

The Employers' Initiative on Domestic Abuse (EIDA) have launched a **free e-learning resource**, designed specifically to help SMEs build an effective workplace response to domestic abuse. Developed with financial support from the City of London Corporation (an EIDA Beacon Member), the module provides a step-by-step guide to help recognise the signs of domestic abuse, respond safely and confidently, and put the right support in place for employees.

Access the [free e-learning here](#).

No prior knowledge is needed, just a commitment to making your workplace a safer place for everyone. Please contact support@eida.org.uk if you have any questions.



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