

Strengthening practice in responding to domestic and family violence

A TOOLKIT FOR COMMUNITY HOUSING PROVIDERS





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Supporting staff working with domestic and family violence

As we grow our understanding of the widespread social prevalence of domestic and family violence (DFV), it is important for employers to consider how they might respond if an employee is affected in some way by domestic and family violence.

Support strategies

Given the prevalence of domestic and family violence – employees may be affected through personal or vicarious exposure. It is important to remember that disclosure of DFV needs to be managed sensitively and confidentially with a range of support options. It is imperative that employees are supported respectfully and within the organisations human resource scope.

While the following support strategies may be appropriate for some individuals, it is important to recognise the need to respect individual differences. Managers and employees should discuss the most suitable arrangements for each individual as required.

1. **Debriefing** – wherever possible, in the first instance, it is helpful to discuss support strategies with the appropriate line manager and develop a support plan. The support plan may include debriefing through supervision or accessing external support.
2. **Employee Assistance Program** – An Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a work-based intervention program designed to enhance the emotional, mental and general psychological wellbeing of all employees. The aim is to provide preventive and proactive interventions for the early detection, identification and/or resolution of both work and personal problems that may adversely affect performance and wellbeing.

3. **1800RESPECT** – is a national, professional telephone and online counselling service established by the Commonwealth Government.

1800RESPECT provides a confidential and professional counselling, information and referral service available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The service is available to individuals who have experienced or are at risk of domestic and family violence and/or sexual assault, their family and friends, as well as frontline and isolated workers.

1800Respect also has information available for employers to guide their response in how they can support employees



www.1800respect.org.au

→ WORKERS

1. www.arts.unsw.edu.au/research/gendered-violence-research-network/gendered-violence-work



Responsibilities

RESPONSIBILITIES OF MANAGERS

- » Employees should be informed that their employer understands that domestic violence can affect the workplace and that support will be confidentially provided.¹
- » To support Work Health & Safety, follow up with effected employees to ensure they have undertaken the agreed support strategy.
- » The Domestic Violence Workplace Package has been developed by the Queensland Government and includes some resources that CHPs as employers could use and adapt to support employees impacted by DFV.



<https://www.forgov.qld.gov.au/workplace-package-domestic-and-family-violence>

RESPONSIBILITIES OF EMPLOYEES

- » Wherever possible, as part of good work health & safety, it is good practice to regularly check-in with line management.
- » Disclosures of domestic and family violence can have a personal and professional impact - if employees feel negatively impacted it is important to bring this to the attention of line management as soon as practicable.
- » It is important to understand that any requests for support will be managed respectfully and confidentially.
- » It is the responsibility of employees to follow up their preferred support strategy and to advise their manager of their attendance.



DO's and DON'Ts for supporting employees impacted by domestic and family violence throughout the course of their work

- » **Do inform staff** that their workplace understands how domestic violence can impact work and **they can feel safe enough to disclose** if they need support from their workplace.
- » **Do be sensitive.** Approach your discussion with the same sensitivity and confidentiality you would use with any sensitive workplace issue.
- » **Do assure the member that you will respect their privacy and keep the matter confidential.** Discuss the matter only with those who need to know.
- » **Do validate the disclosure.** Be aware that some victims may feel embarrassed that their relationship has become violent – validate their experience and reinforce their courage.
- » **Do ask what they would like you to do.** Do they want you to advocate on their behalf – offer the range of options, Individual support, EAP or 1800RESPECT. Ensure that the person has control over next steps.
- » **Do discuss a support strategy.** Ask them what they need to ensure that they feel safe and supported at work. Go through the possible actions listed in the support strategies.
- » **Don't become personally involved.** Your role is not to fix the domestic violence but to assist your employee in the first instance at work. Under no circumstances should you visit the employees' home or place yourself at risk.
- » **Don't make this a conversation topic around the water cooler.**
- » **Don't be judgemental or ask questions about why the violence is occurring.** Your responsibilities are to ensure staff can get to work and do their job safely. Asking questions like 'why don't you leave' are inappropriate. It is the worker's decision to stay or go. These situations are often complicated and difficult. Do not judge their decision.
- » **Don't ask for details about what is happening in the home or in the employees' private life.** This is a workplace issue and what is happening at home is not your concern. You are not a domestic violence counsellor, so refer your employee to appropriate supports that can assist.
- » **Don't tell the person what to do.** You are not a domestic violence expert. After you have informed them of your role and what you can do to assist, let them make the decisions about matters which affect them.
- » **Don't think you know best.** One size does not fit all. Provide options for support; further information such as the legal process can be provided through 1800RESPECT or Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

REFERENCE Material adapted from the DO's and DON'Ts to supporting employees impacted by Domestic and Family Violence; Safe at Home Safe at Work project: Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearing House. SDA Union ACT/ NSW & University of NSW.



NSW Federation of Housing Associations Inc.

Suite 301, 64-76 Kippax Street
Surry Hills NSW 2010

t: 02 9281 7144

e: nswfha@communityhousing.org.au
www.communityhousing.org.au



nswFHA



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Queensland
Government

Q Shelter

Diamantina House
515 Wickham Tce Spring Hill QLD 4000

t: 07 3831 5900

e: info@qshelter.asn.au

www.qshelter.asn.au