

DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY

Introduction

VONNE recognises that every employee who is experiencing or has experienced domestic abuse has the right to raise the issue with their employer in the knowledge that the matter will be treated effectively, empathetically, and confidentially. This policy also covers the approach we will take where there are concerns that an employee may be the perpetrator of domestic abuse.

Under the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974), the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1992), Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (1995) and the Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations (1996), VONNE recognises its legal responsibilities in promoting the welfare and safety of all staff. This policy applies to all employees and associates, trustees and volunteers, and should be read in conjunction with VONNE's safeguarding adults and safeguarding children policies.

Through this domestic abuse policy and working to reduce the risks related to domestic abuse, we aim to create a safer workplace and send out a strong message that domestic abuse is unacceptable.

VONNE recognises that domestic abuse is an equalities issue and undertakes to not discriminate against anyone who has been subjected to domestic abuse both in terms of current employment or future development.

All employees will be made aware of this policy through a range of methods including induction, awareness raising sessions, and online and offline communications.

What Is Domestic Abuse?

Domestic abuse is complex. It can go unidentified by agencies, families, and friends, and even by those who are experiencing it.

Domestic abuse does not only occur between couples. It can also involve wider family members, including parental abuse by an adolescent or grown child. It can exist between older siblings, or the wider extended family, for example in elder or honour-based abuse.

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Anyone can be a victim of domestic abuse, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, sexuality or background.

Domestic abuse is most commonly perpetrated by men against women. However, VONNE recognises that controlling and abusive behaviour also occurs in same sex relationships and can be perpetrated by women against men.

Domestic abuse involves many different acts and behaviours and can be seen in any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse. It can encompass but is not limited to the following types of abuse:

- Psychological
- Physical
- Sexual
- Financial
- Emotional

Domestic abuse includes stalking, so called 'honour' based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage.

Domestic abuse does not always involve violence. It is important that all forms of domestic abuse are acknowledged and addressed, including those that can be hardest to identify:

Controlling behaviour is a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance, and escape, and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour is an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten a person.

Domestic abuse can be both a 'one off' occurrence and frequent and persistent, aimed at instilling fear into, and compliance from, the victims/survivors. On average a victim/survivor of domestic abuse is assaulted 35 times before they report the matter to the police.

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Identification of the problem at work

VONNE will follow the “4Rs” as recommended in the Refuge and Respect Domestic Violence Resource Manual for Employers:

- Recognise the problem (look for signs and ask)
- Respond appropriately
- Refer on to appropriate help
- Record the details

Recognise the problem

While it is for the individual themselves to recognise they are a victim/survivor of domestic abuse, there are signs which may indicate an employee may be a victim/survivor. These may include the following:

- the member of staff may confide in their colleagues/manager
- staff may inform their manager that a colleague is suffering from domestic abuse
- there may be obvious effects of physical abuse (it is important not to make assumptions)
- it may come to light as a result of enquiries into a drop in performance or a significant change in behaviour
- it may reveal itself as the background to poor attendance or presenteeism

It is essential to understand that any of the above may arise from a range of circumstances of which domestic abuse may be one. Managers should address the issue positively and empathetically, ensuring that the employee is aware that support and assistance can be provided.

VONNE respects employees' right to privacy and will not force employees to share information if they do not want to.

Confidentiality and right to privacy

Employees who disclose experiencing abuse can be assured that the information they provide is confidential and will not be shared with other members of staff without their permission.

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Where domestic abuse in a same sex relationship is disclosed, due regard will be paid to the double disclosure of confidential information if the individual recipient of abuse is not 'out' at work.

There are, however, some circumstances in which confidentiality cannot be assured. These occur when there are concerns about children or vulnerable adults or where the employer needs to act to protect the safety of employees.

In circumstances where VONNE has to breach confidentiality it will discuss with the employee why it is doing so, and it will seek the employee's agreement where possible. As far as possible, information will only be shared on a need-to-know basis.

All records concerning domestic abuse will be kept strictly confidential. Improper disclosure of information, i.e. breaches of confidentiality by any member of staff, will be taken seriously and may be subject to disciplinary action.

Respond appropriately

VONNE will respond empathetically, confidentially, and effectively to any member of staff who discloses that they are being subjected to domestic abuse.

VONNE's Deputy Chief Executive, who is also VONNE's Designated Safeguarding Lead, will act as an additional confidential contact if required. The DCEO can also provide support for line managers who are approached by staff who are being abused.

Support for individuals experiencing domestic abuse

VONNE recognises that developing a life free from abuse is a process not an event and will provide ongoing support for employees who disclose abuse.

VONNE may offer employees experiencing domestic abuse a broad range of support appropriate to individual circumstances. This may include, but is not limited to:

- special paid leave for relevant appointments, including with support agencies, solicitors, to rearrange housing or childcare, and for court appointments
- temporary or permanent changes to working times and patterns
- changes to specific duties, for example to avoid potential contact with an abuser in a public facing role

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- measures to ensure a safe working environment, for example changing a telephone number to avoid harassing phone calls and risk assessing the working environment
- using other existing policies, including flexible working
- support to access counselling/support services
- an advance of pay and / or support to change bank details quickly
- record any threatening or violent incidents by the perpetrator in the workplace including visits, abusive/persistent phone calls, e-mails and other forms of harassment which can be used by the police or if the employee wants to seek a court order.

VONNE will respect the right of staff to make their own decision on the course of action at every stage. It must be recognised that the employee may need some time to decide what to do and may try many different options during this process.

Safety planning

VONNE will prioritise the safety of employees if they make it known that they are experiencing domestic abuse. Line managers may have to consider incidents such as violent partners or ex-partners visiting the workplace, abusive phone calls, intimidation or harassment of an employee by the alleged perpetrator, and these will need to be addressed in any safety planning and risk assessments.

VONNE will remind staff of the importance of not divulging personal details of other employees, such as home addresses or personal telephone numbers.

Refer on to appropriate help

Staff experiencing domestic abuse may choose to disclose, report to, or seek support from a line manager or colleague.

Managers and colleagues will not advise or counsel victims/survivors, but offer information, workplace support, and signpost to relevant specialist organisations.

When an employee discloses domestic abuse, VONNE will encourage its employee to contact a specialist support agency and make appropriate referrals where necessary.

VONNE will work with the employee and a specialist agency (with the employee's consent) to identify what actions can be taken to increase their personal safety as

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well as address any risks there may be to colleagues, taking into account the duty of care for all employees.

Record the details

If an employee discloses domestic abuse VONNE will keep confidential, accurate records of discussions and agreed actions in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and VONNE's Data Protection Policy.

VONNE has a duty to maintain a safe place of work which may necessitate monitoring and recording all incidents of violence or threatening behaviour in the workplace. These may include persistent telephone calls, e-mails, visits to the workplace by the perpetrator, etc.

This information may be used if the employee wants to pursue criminal justice processes. As such it is important that records are clear, accurate, detailed and devoid of personal opinion or conjecture.

Perpetrators of domestic abuse

Domestic abuse perpetrated by employees will not be condoned under any circumstances nor will it be treated as a purely private matter. VONNE recognises that it has a role in encouraging and supporting employees to address violent and abusive behaviour of all kinds.

If an employee approaches VONNE about their abusive behaviour, VONNE will provide information about the services and support available to them and will encourage the perpetrator to seek support and help from an appropriate source.

VONNE will treat any allegation, disclosure, or conviction of a domestic abuse related offence on a case-by-case basis with the aim of reducing risk and supporting change.

There are four potential strands in the consideration of an allegation:

- a police investigation of a possible criminal offence
- disciplinary action by the employer
- providing specialist, safety-focused counselling
- identifying risk

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An individual cautioned or convicted of a criminal offence may be subject to the organisation's code of conduct and / or disciplinary policy. VONNE also reserves the right to consider the use of this policy should an employee's activities outside of work (whether or not it leads to a criminal conviction) have an impact on their ability to perform the role for which they are employed, and/or be considered to bring the organisation into disrepute.

VONNE is committed to ensuring that:

- allegations will be dealt with fairly and in a way that provides support for the person who is the subject of the allegation or disclosure
- all employees will receive guidance and support
- confidentiality will be maintained and information restricted only to those who have a need-to-know
- investigations will be thorough and independent
- all cases will be dealt with quickly avoiding unnecessary delays

The alleged perpetrator will be:

- treated fairly and honestly
- helped to understand the concerns expressed and processes involved
- kept informed of the progress and outcome of any investigation and the implications for any disciplinary process
- advised to contact sources of professional support, for example their union or Acas

If a colleague is found to be assisting an abuser in perpetrating the abuse, for example, by giving them access to facilities such as telephones or email then they will be seen as having committed a disciplinary offence.

If it becomes evident that an employee has made a malicious allegation that another employee is perpetrating abuse this will be treated as a serious disciplinary offence.

Review

This policy will be reviewed by VONNE's Board of Trustees every three years unless there are changes in legislation, best practice, or other organisational policies impact on its effectiveness.

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Useful references: - Information and guidance

Women's Aid provides services for women and children and works to build a future where domestic violence is not tolerated. Their website has links to local services www.womensaid.org.uk.

Refuge supports women, children & men experiencing domestic violence with a range of services www.refuge.org.uk and runs the free 24 hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk **0808 2000 247**.

Men's Advice Line is a confidential helpline, email, and webchat service for male victims of domestic abuse. mensadviceline.org.uk/.

Respect is the UK association for professionals working with people to end their abusive behaviour. Respect is the leading national voice on working with men on domestic violence issues www.respect.uk.net.

Employers Initiative on Domestic Abuse www.eida.org.uk.

Refuge and Respect [Domestic violence resource manual for employers](#)

Useful references: - Legal and policy framework

Domestic Abuse Act 2021

- Legislation <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/17/contents/enacted>
- Overview <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-bill-2020-factsheets/domestic-abuse-bill-2020-overarching-factsheet>

Health and Safety Act

- <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1974/37/contents>

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