

# STAFF WELLBEING LINE MANAGER BRIEFING

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The line manager briefing series provide an overview of wellbeing issues for line managers.

The Government defines **Domestic Violence** as: 'Any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial, or emotional) between adults who or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality'.

**One in four women** and **one in six men**<sup>1</sup> will experience domestic abuse at some point in their lifetime. Although these statistics are similar, women often experience repeated abuse for longer than men before reaching out for help. This means you may well at some point be involved - either directly or indirectly - in managing someone that has experienced or is experiencing domestic abuse, as well as those who are perpetrators of abuse.

**Seventy-five per cent** of those experiencing domestic abuse are **targeted at work** and it is often possible for perpetrators to use workplace resources such as phones, email and other means to threaten, harass or abuse their current or former partner. Corporately Public Health England has made a commitment to do everything we can to prevent stalking, violence or abuse in

the workplace. We do not expect line managers to become specialists in domestic violence but this briefing provides some practical tips for line managers on how to respond should a member of staff disclose violence or abuse. Further information is available on PHEnet, and senior members of the HR team have been given additional training to provide advice and support to line managers.



### PRACTICAL TIPS FOR LINE MANAGERS

#### Recognise the problem

- Look for sudden changes in behaviour and/or changes in the quality of work performance for unexplained reasons despite a previously strong record
- Look for changes in the way an employee dresses, for example excessive clothing on hot days, changes in the amount of make-up worn

<sup>1</sup> Prevalence of intimate partner violence: WHO 2006

## RESPOND

- Believe an employee if they disclose experiencing domestic abuse – do not ask for proof
- Reassure the employee that the organisation has an understanding of how domestic abuse may affect their work performance and the support that can be offered

## PROVIDE SUPPORT

- Divert phone calls and email messages and look to change a phone extension if an employee is receiving harassing calls
- Agree with the employee on what to tell colleagues and how they should respond if their ex/partner telephones or visits the workplace
- Ensure the employee does not work alone or in an isolated area and check that staff have arrangements for getting safely to and from home
- Keep a record of any incidents of abuse in the workplace, including persistent telephone calls, emails or visits to the workplace
- Where possible, put up domestic abuse help-line posters on the back of toilet doors or noticeboards

## REFER TO THE APPROPRIATE HELP

Use the list of national support services offered in the Staff Wellbeing Briefing: Domestic Violence

## If an employee takes an opportunity to self-disclose to you:

This can be challenging and even traumatic for you too. Here are a few tips to guide you:

- Suggest that you go somewhere quiet and comfortable – not an office/desk area
- Acknowledge the courage of the employee and how difficult it must be to talk
- Confirm confidentiality - exceptions are imminent threats to life, harm of children, threats against PHE
- Have an open posture, reach towards them but be aware that they may feel threatened by invasion of personal space
- Be prepared for them to be upset and tearful
- Do not be judgmental – avoid language that indicates blame/fault (“Why don’t you leave”/“How can you let this happen”/“Why haven’t you told anyone before”)
- Allow plenty of time and space for them to speak
- If there is disclosure of high risk, contact a Deputy Director of HR for advice
- Following disclosure contact a Deputy Director of HR for a debrief while respecting the individual’s confidentiality