



Organisation response to Domestic Abuse (Staff and Volunteers) Procedure

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Purpose of Procedure

Guide Dogs recognises that some of our colleagues (staff or volunteers) may be vulnerable to harm in the form of domestic abuse and that this harm may be happening outside of Guide Dogs. The procedure that follows is based on best practice principles and recognises that as an employer Guide Dogs has a duty to safeguard the wellbeing of staff in the workplace and volunteers in role. Guide Dogs will seek to support our colleagues and volunteers to address any abuse or harm they are experiencing which impacts upon them in their role.

We have a zero-tolerance approach to anyone who causes harm or abuse within Guide Dogs and will investigate and respond to concerns which are raised within the organisation, working sensitively with victims and survivors to safeguard them and work alongside police and/or local authorities where appropriate.

Staff and volunteers who experience abuse should be supported regardless of gender, sexuality, role, and the type of abuse. Guide Dogs workplaces and volunteering spaces must be safe spaces and can act as a lifeline for victim-survivors of domestic abuse as they offer unique opportunities to seek help. Engagement in work or volunteering also provides physical and mental health benefits. An overall organisational safer culture with high levels of trust, support and psychological safety will enable colleagues to notice or share any concerns. Providing opportunities for staff and volunteers who are affected by abuse to remain in Guide Dogs, safe spaces within the organisation can support their wellbeing over the long term.



Definitions:

Coercive Control - Where a victim and perpetrator are personally connected and patterns of abuse occur over a prolonged period of time or cause fear of violence, which enables an individual to exert power, control or coercion over another.

Domestic Abuse - Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. (Domestic Abuse Act 2021)

Perpetrator / Abuser- the person causing the harm

Victim - Survivor - the person who has been subject to domestic abuse

Please see Appendix Three for an outline of Legislation relating to Domestic Abuse in each of the UK nations.

Introduction:

This resource provides practical guidance to employees on responding to colleagues and volunteers who are perpetrators or who are experiencing domestic abuse which is affecting them in the workplace/volunteering activities. It should be read alongside the [Safeguarding Key Principles.docx \(sharepoint.com\)](#) and [Safeguarding Adults Procedure.docx \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

Details of resources and organisations to signpost to are on the Pawtal pages [Safeguarding - Help and Support - Domestic Abuse](#)

As with all safeguarding concerns the [4 Rs of Safeguarding](#) should be followed: Recognise, Report, Record, Respond.



Measures: Procedure Instructions

1. Recognise the signs:

What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse can happen between partners/spouses, from adult child to a parent (or vice versa) or in any close relationship for example between siblings. In practice domestic abuse is the abuse of power and control over one person by another and can take many different forms, including physical, sexual, online, verbal, and economic/financial abuse. Emotional/ psychological abuse can occur over time and form a pattern amounting to coercive control which is a criminal offence.

Signs that an employee or volunteer might be experiencing domestic abuse can include:

- Unexplained injuries.
- Decreased productivity.
- Frequent lateness or absence.
- Changes in behaviour (for example reducing social contacts)
- Financial problems
- Changes in relationships with -others

These behaviours could reflect a range of issues and at the same time, some could potentially lead to performance concerns or even disciplinary procedures. It is therefore important to establish what is behind them. A full list of signs is in Appendix 1.

Receiving a Disclosure

If you have observed signs and have concerns about domestic abuse, establish open communication with the individual and try indirect questions, e.g. 'I've noticed that you seemed distracted/stressed recently, are you OK?' and offer support 'If you ever want to talk I am happy to support you.'

Understand it can be difficult for people to make a disclosure of domestic abuse, and your support is important:



DO be sensitive/non-judgemental/ practical/ supportive/ discreet.

DO prioritise safety over work efficiency.

DO allocate some private time and space to listen.

DO NOT seek proof of abuse.

DO NOT contact the abuser.

DO NOT compel a victim to accept support - they need to feel as in control of what happens as far as possible.

DO NOT adopt the role of being an advisor/counsellor yourself.

2. Report

If the employee or volunteer is in immediate danger, call 999.

All disclosures of domestic abuse and reported concerns should be treated as strictly confidential and should not be shared with anyone other than the individual or through appropriate reporting channels

If the victim or perpetrator is uncomfortable discussing the situation with their line manager, consider offering an alternative appropriate point of contact, possibly of the same gender, to advise the individual directly and on a confidential basis. For staff members, this might be a colleague from Safeguarding, HR or the Employee Assistance Programme. For volunteers this might be a colleague from Safeguarding. The appropriate point of contact could also advise the line manager on how to manage sensitive disclosures and proceed safely.

The recommended option for anyone experiencing domestic abuse is to be referred to specialist practitioners trained to assess risk and advise on safety. Refer or signpost the employee or volunteer to a domestic abuse helpline, web resource or external specialist domestic abuse service. See the Domestic Abuse resources on the Safeguarding pages of Pawtal: [Safeguarding - Help and Support - Domestic Abuse](#) and on the Volunteer Information Point (VIP). Staff members may also wish to



seek confidential support for their own wellbeing via the [Employee Assistance Programme \(EAP\)](#)

- Staff who have concerns about the situation of other staff colleagues, can confidentially seek advice from Guide Dogs Safeguarding team or HR Consultant.

Staff who have concerns about a volunteer can seek advice from the Safeguarding Team, and their own line managers, and there may also need to be confidential discussions with the volunteer's Volunteer Manager/s.

For Volunteers who are concerned about somebody else, please speak confidentially to the Guide Dogs Safeguarding team, or your Volunteer Manager or local Volunteering Co-ordinator.

In all of these situations, you can also speak to any of the organisations listed on the Pawtal/VIP links above (without naming the individual experiencing domestic abuse).

- Risk in domestic abuse situations is dynamic and can change very quickly. In a small number of cases, victims may be at high risk of serious harm or murder from domestic abuse. It is important for victims of domestic abuse to feel in control of what happens following the disclosure, so aim to seek their agreement to any referrals made to external agencies.

Reporting to external agencies without the victim-survivor's consent may happen in exceptional circumstances:

- If it is believed the employee or volunteer is at risk of serious injury or death.
- If it is believed that there is a substantial risk of harm to any children involved in, or witnessing (seeing/hearing), the violence / abuse.



3. Record:

Any written record, including any agreed adjustments, should be held outside of official employee / volunteer records and stored securely within Guide Dogs Safeguarding confidential records.

Please submit a Safeguarding referral where discussions and follow-up actions can be stored confidentially. [Report a Safeguarding Concern form](#)

Disclosures of domestic abuse should not impact on the person's work record, provided their performance is maintained as agreed.

Any decision to disclose without consent (if an individual is at serious risk of injury or death) should be documented and ideally done in conjunction with the Safeguarding Team and/ or HR and/ or a line manager unless an immediate and urgent situation.

All incidents of violence, threatening behaviour or breaches of security in the workplace should be recorded via a Safeguarding referral and retained for evidence purposes if required. The record must be clear, accurate and include dates, times, locations, and any witnesses. Any breaches of orders, for example, non-molestation orders should also be noted and saved by Safeguarding.

4. Respond

Guide Dogs' policy is to provide relevant support to any employee/ volunteer who discloses that they may be at risk of harm.

Adjustments may be put in place to reflect this. These should be reviewed periodically to reflect any change in risk. Examples of adjustments include:

- Making emergency and safe contact arrangements.
- Improving the safety of the employee/volunteer while engaged within the organisation.
- Adjusting their responsibilities and workload/activities.
- Reviewing communications and IT safety.

Further examples of adjustments are in Appendix 2.



It may be necessary to inform others within the organisation: for example, to ensure staff can respond safely, to implement any agreed adjustments, or when line managers change or cover each other. This should usually be done with the full knowledge and consent of the employee or volunteer, and only on a need-to-know basis.

Do consider what potential impact the perpetrator's behaviour may have on other staff or volunteers. Assess the risk and take appropriate action to reduce or eliminate the risk.

Considerations when staff / volunteers are alleged/ suspected perpetrators of abuse:

Where there are both perpetrators and victims of abuse in the workplace or volunteering space, it is important to ensure the victim is protected and the perpetrator removed if in the same location.

Agreement should take place between the person's line manager/ HR / Safeguarding team to assess the concerns and agree a plan to follow up. Engaging with an alleged perpetrator does not mean condoning the abuse but can be important in preventing harm. This policy is clear on zero tolerance of domestic abuse, and we will work with an alleged perpetrator to seek support from specialist organisations. It may be necessary to use other Guide Dogs policies, for example Disciplinary Procedure, Performance Management or relevant volunteer policies which may include asking the volunteer to exit the organisation.

Additional consideration for children and animals:

Being exposed to domestic abuse has serious consequences for children and young people; and it can affect how they feel, think and behave in harmful ways. Children who are exposed to domestic abuse are now legally recognised as victims in their own right (Domestic Abuse Act 2021) and can access protection and support services.

Perpetrators of domestic abuse use animals in many ways - they may control, coerce, physically harm and threaten the animal. Research found that almost 9 in 10 households who experienced domestic abuse have said their animals were also abused by the perpetrator (Bristol



University 2021). Our support to staff and volunteers needs to understand the situation for any guide dog stock, and any other pets or animals in the situation. We can signpost to pet fostering organisations as part of our support to volunteers/ staff, where relevant.

An Inclusive response to domestic abuse in a diverse workforce:

Fostering a culture of psychological safety is vital for employees and volunteers to have confidence that they can come forward to report experiences of domestic abuse, and for the right support to be available when they do. Several groups are likely to face additional barriers to recognising and addressing domestic abuse

Consider:

- People with disabilities are more likely to experience domestic abuse than non-disabled people
- In 2022, new research found that 1 in 12 people with visual impairment is estimated to be a victim of domestic abuse.
- People from some ethnic minorities are often made responsible for their family's honour. When abuse is disclosed, it often means leaving more than just their perpetrator.
- LGBTQ+ people might not be open about their sexuality at work, meaning to disclose abuse also involves coming out
- Transgender people have fewer tailored services available to them
- Men can find it more difficult to disclose abuse and often find more barriers to accessing support
- People who regularly work from home or undertake remote work or volunteering can more easily feel isolated and signs of domestic abuse be less noticeable to colleagues or other volunteers
- Older employees / volunteers' experiences can be overlooked - on average people over 60 years old wait twice as long before seeking help for domestic abuse - useful information from Age UK: [Worried about domestic abuse | Age UK](#)



Appendix 1:

Signs that someone might be experiencing domestic abuse (some of these signs may reflect a range of sensitive issues):

Productivity signs:

- Change in the person's working/ volunteering patterns: for example, frequent absence, lateness or needing to leave work early.
- Reduced quality and quantity of work/volunteering: missing deadlines, a drop in usual performance standards.
- Change in the use of the phone/email: for example, a large number of personal calls/texts, avoiding calls or a strong reaction to calls/texts/emails.
- Spending an increased amount of hours at work/volunteering for no clear reason.

Changes in behaviour or demeanour:

- Conduct out of character with previous employment or volunteering history.
- Changes in behaviour: for example, becoming very quiet, anxious, frightened, tearful, aggressive, distracted, depressed etc.
- Isolating themselves from colleagues/ volunteers.
- Obsession with timekeeping.
- Secretive regarding home life.
- Worried about leaving children or pets at home with abuser.

Physical signs:

- Visible bruising or single or repeated injury with unlikely explanations.
- Change in the pattern or amount of make-up used.
- Change in the manner of dress: for example, clothes that do not suit the climate which may be used to hide injuries.



- Substance use/misuse.
- Fatigue/sleep disorders.

Other signs:

- Partner or ex-partner stalking employee/ volunteer in or around the workplace or in other known venues.
- Partner or ex-partner exerting unusual amount of control or demands over work or volunteering schedule. Partner or ex-partner contacting staff or other volunteers to ask about the person's whereabouts
- Flowers/gifts sent to employee/ volunteer for no apparent reason.
- Isolation from family/friends.

Appendix 2:

Questions for you to consider in relation to environment safety and examples of adjustments:

Questions for the employee/ volunteer

Q. Does the alleged abuser know where the employee /volunteer works or does their volunteering?

Q. Have they ever been followed on their way to/from work/ volunteering?

Q. Is the employee / volunteer frightened of anything specific that might take place at work/during their volunteering or to and from work/volunteering?

Q. Does the abuser have their work email address and/or work telephone number?

Q. What information can be shared with the wider team or relevant staff to ensure any changes are implemented and they can deliver an appropriate response?



Contact arrangements

- Retain an up-to-date contact number for the staff member/volunteer. Staff should also provide an emergency contact at home (not the perpetrator).
- Arrange in advance when and who to contact if an employee/volunteer doesn't come into work/ their usual volunteering activity (family member/police/neighbour etc.).
- Maintain communication with the individual during any absence of the staff member from work and agree how you will stay in touch with them. Similarly, the Volunteer manager should agree a plan for contact with the volunteer, where domestic abuse is a known risk (also following the volunteering Taking a break procedure on keeping in touch). If relevant, the person's whereabouts and activities should be kept confidential from the alleged perpetrator and any other people as agreed.

Home-based workers

- Ensure a plan is in place for regular contact at appropriate and agreed time with the person with at least one colleague and agree in advance what action will be taken if not able to contact.
- Facilitate working from an alternative base if home is not a safe place

Safety to and from work or volunteering activities

- Change the route to and from work/ volunteering (e.g. different bus or train time).
- Change the location of where they work / volunteer or consider a transfer.
- Change the start and finish time of work/volunteering hours.
- Following a risk assessment, it may be suitable to provide an escort (colleague or another volunteer) to and from a car / transport links.



Safety while at work

- Ensure regular contact at agreed intervals during activities.
- Change the locks/codes to enter the workplace.
- Consider a personal or workstation alarm.
- Consider an alternative entrance to, or exit, from the workplace.
- Consider screening access to the workplace. If possible and required, enable reception/security to identify the abuser (photo, car registration), and advise them on what to do if the abuser arrives at the workplace.

Communication safety

- Review the security of all employee/ volunteer records and personal information.
- Change email addresses/work phone number or divert incoming phone calls and emails.
- Issue instructions to all staff NOT to reveal the employee's/ volunteer's personal details or their whereabouts to anyone, including family members.

Managing responsibilities at work

- Consider flexible working or changing work patterns or locations of work or volunteering.
- Adjust workload (extend deadlines, reassign responsibilities).
- Buddy up with a colleague for work or volunteer if appropriate for role
- Consider additional support /supervision/debriefing sessions.
- Provide flexibility as agreed, which may include special leave/compassionate leave or time off during the day to attend appointments or court.



Appendix Three:

Legislation in the UK Nations

Scotland: Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Act 2021

The Act defines domestic abuse as behaviour by an individual towards their current or ex- partner where a reasonable person would think that that behaviour is likely to cause the victim to suffer physical or psychological harm. This mirrors the definition in the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 which introduced psychological abuse and coercive behaviour as criminal offences.

Northern Ireland: Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021

Domestic abuse is an offence when

- there has been a pattern of abusive behaviour two or more times
- the two individuals are partners or former partners, or are family members
- a reasonable person would consider the behaviour likely to cause physical or psychological harm
- the abuser intends to cause harm or is reckless to this

England and Wales: Domestic Abuse Act 2021

Domestic abuse is any single incident, course of conduct or pattern of abusive behaviour between individuals aged 16 or over who are “personally connected” to each other as a result of being, or having been, intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality. Children who see, hear or experience the effects of the abuse and are related to either of the parties are also considered victims of domestic abuse. 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; or psychological, emotional or other abuse. This includes incidences where the abusive party directs their behaviour at another person



(e.g., a child). Economic abuse means any behaviour that has a substantial adverse effect on someone's ability to acquire, use or maintain money or other property, or obtain goods or services.

Resources:

Additional resources and advice for managers:

Respond to Abuse is a resource for employers to advise them on how to approach disclosures of domestic abuse by their employees: [Respond To Abuse](#)

Employer's Initiative on Domestic Abuse has resources to help employers and runs training and events for employers: [What we do | Employers' Initiative on Domestic Abuse \(eida.org.uk\)](#)

Documentation:

(Please identify any documentation that must be completed to support the procedure instructions):

HR:

Safeguarding: Referral form [Report a Safeguarding Concern](#)

Volunteering:

Permissible exceptions:

No exceptions.

Related Policies or Processes:

[Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Policy.docx](#)

[Safeguarding Adults Procedure.docx](#)

[Safeguarding Adults Code of Conduct.docx](#)

[Safeguarding Children and Young People's Procedure.docx](#)

[Safeguarding Children Code of Conduct.docx](#)



Governance Information. Please do not remove.

Governance Review & Approval Table*:

The table below contains two rows and five columns.

Governance Area:	H&S	Protection of Children & Adults	Insurance	Legal	GDPR
Date Approved:	02/02/2024	29/01/2024		06/03/2024	

Review Frequency:

Procedures - Core: Annually

Procedures - Subject Specific: Every 2 years

Reviews should be done in accordance with relevant regulation, legislation changes or as a result of ad hoc activity, such as continuous improvement initiatives.

Version control table:

The table below contains four rows and four columns. (Only the original approval date and the most recent amendment should be included in the table.)

Date	Version	Status	Details of Change
21.2.24	1.0	Approved	Kathryn Ward
06.3.24	1.1	Approved	Update following consultation with Legal

*Please see below when a document must be reviewed by Governance

Safeguarding - All documents with any reference to safeguarding, recruitment and training, working with clients (Adult and CYP).

Legal - All documents with any reference to agreements or contracts, third party partnerships, potential reputational risk, reference to compliance with any statutory or regulatory obligation.

Health and Safety - All documents where an activity could cause harm to a member of staff, service user, volunteer or third party or where there is reputational risk.



Insurance - A change to the way we deliver our services.

GDPR - If we are gathering any personal information on volunteers or service users.

End of document