

DFV and supporting employees during a pandemic

As COVID-19 continues to impact our community, many employees are still working from home and finding themselves feeling isolated. During this time, it is important to understand how this could impact someone experiencing domestic and family violence (DFV). Employees experiencing DFV may be at home for extended periods with an abusive partner or family member and may have limited options when it comes to seeking help or support. The workplace plays a critical role because it can provide support and a safe place for employees.

The pandemic has created additional stress across families and individuals. Stress on finances, unstable employment, home-schooling, childcare or vulnerable family members or children, are all contributing factors and, while the pandemic is not a direct cause of DFV, it can isolate individuals and heighten their risk of abuse.

WHAT IS DFV?

Domestic and Family Violence is defined as one person in a current or former relationship using violence and abuse to exercise or maintain power and control over another person. This can include:

- physical, sexual, emotional, spiritual, psychological, or financial abuse, or
- threatening and coercive behaviour aimed at controlling or dominating the other person through fear.

Domestic violence can occur in any relationship including current or former partners, spouses, carers or paid support workers, parents, guardians, adult children, and adolescents. We know domestic and family violence does not discriminate and it can happen to anyone regardless of their religion, culture, social background, gender identity or sexuality.

[Learn more about DFV here.](#)

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS:

- Always be careful and considerate around how you communicate with the employee, particularly if the employee is working from home. It is best to assume the partner using violence or abuse may hear or see all communication.
- If you know (or suspect) an employee is experiencing DFV, it is important to ensure that when you approach them to provide support, that you do not unintentionally create further risk of harm.
- It is recommended that when contacting your colleague to offer support, that you ensure you can have a private and confidential conversation to check in on them.
- If you need advice about how to help someone you are concerned about, call 1800RESPECT or your [state-wide DV service](#).

[More here](#) for Queensland Government domestic and family violence support.

[More here](#) for Champions of Change article around workplace responses during a pandemic.

DFV and supporting employees during a pandemic

SIGNS AN EMPLOYEE MAY BE EXPERIENCING DFV:

When working remotely, it may be difficult to recognise signs an employee may be experiencing DFV. Below are some indicators that something may be occurring for an employee at home:

Change in behaviour



Absenteeism / presenteeism



Change in productivity



Observing physical injury



Observing anxious behaviour



Hearing abuse in background of calls



SAFETY STRATEGIES

Provide an option to work from the office:

- If your organisation provides an essential service and requires team members to work onsite, consider offering or inviting employees to work from the office if they are unsafe at home, or concerned about their own behaviour at home,
- Communicate support services to the organisation using an all-employee Health and Wellbeing email,
- Promote workplace policies and procedures and include a DFV policy,
- Provide a contact person who is trained to Recognise, Respond and Refer to those impacted by DFV,
- [Click here](#) to find out more about training your team members.

When communicating with your team about DFV support services, consider the following:

- Include information about DFV alongside mental health and other wellbeing issues and helplines (such as Lifeline etc),
- Use a generic subject line like "Your Wellbeing". This will ensure the content is not obvious should another household member see it and may encourage team members to save this information,
- Provide information about DFV support services in emails sent to all staff to ensure team members do not feel singled out. Consider contacting employees through different communication channels. Some channels may be safer than others when providing support to someone experiencing DFV,
- Consider providing weekly wellbeing tips and ideas including physical movement, mindfulness apps, podcasts, and social connection,
- A list of support services is available here: <https://www.challengedv.org/support-services>.