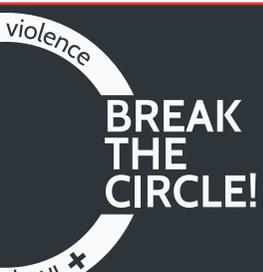


# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS A WORKPLACE ISSUE



This advice to [name of union] representatives is to assist you in supporting members experiencing domestic violence when its effects impact on the workplace.

**Keep the workplace informed:** If members are aware of the support and assistance the union can provide, then they will be more likely to come forward and ask you for assistance.

**Keep yourself informed:** Have a list of the support services offered in your area that is easily accessible and refer members to appropriate organisations that deal with domestic abuse.

**Safety Planning:** The indicators are that the violence is seriously escalating when it impacts on attendance, performance and safety at work. Domestic homicides do happen at work. All employees and customers need to be protected from the risk.

It is important that the member gets legal protection as soon as possible,

**Legal Situation:** insert here the legal arrangements for protection from domestic violence that apply in your country.

Planning for the safety of the member in the workplace is like planning for other occupational health and safety hazards and should be done with the member.

1. **Identify potential risk** including receiving abusive phone calls, text messages or emails; the abusive person turning up at the workplace, contacting co-workers or the employer. The abusive person may sometimes work in the same workplace.

2. **Assess the possibility of the risk occurring**

3. **Assess the severity of the risk**

4. **Eliminate or reduce the severity of the risk**

**Establish the facts:** find out the impact domestic violence is having on the member's ability to attend work and do their job; what is needed for them and their colleagues to be safe in the workplace; do they have the time they need to attend to personal and family responsibilities under the circumstances.



### **Domestic violence may:**

- Affect the member's ability to get to work and/or be on time for work
- Necessitate the member taking time off work
- Affect the member's and co-workers' ability to stay safe at work
- Impact on the member's work

### **Members may be:**

- Receiving abusive phone calls, text messages or emails
- Affected by the abusive person turning up at the workplace, contacting co-workers or the employer, or because the abusive person works in the same workplace
- Feeling unwell, sleep deprived or distracted
- Affected by injury

Ask the member what they would like you to do. Does the member want you to:

- Only provide information
- Assist them with accessing their rights and entitlements
- Advocate on their behalf with management

### **Suggest that the member:**

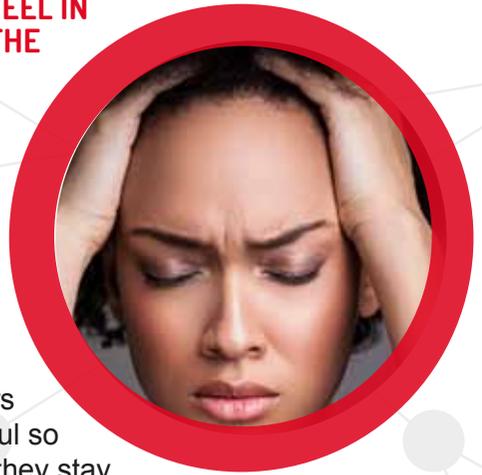
- Keeps a personal diary in relation to any domestic violence incidents and injuries and the impact on work such as attendance; performance; time off work; safety at work including abusive phone calls, text messages or emails; the abusive person turning up at the workplace or contacting co-workers or the employer
- Contact a domestic violence expert for support
- Develop a safe plan of action to keep themselves and their children safe
- Keep important documents such as Social Security cards, birth certificates, school records, vaccination records, medical cards etc. in a safe deposit box or have a trusted family member or friend keep copies for you.

### **If the member is pregnant**

Domestic violence during pregnancy can mean increased risk of infection, premature birth, low birth weight, injury or death to the unborn child, maybe through a miscarriage or stillbirth. In addition, it may cause significant injury or even death for the mother.

There may be difficulties in attending antenatal appointments since the abuser may try to prevent her from doing so, or she may even be reluctant to attend healthcare services if she feels she may be questioned about the abuse.

## REMEMBER - THE MEMBER NEEDS TO FEEL IN CONTROL AND THEY SHOULD DECIDE THE NEXT STEPS.



### Impact of domestic violence on co-workers

The surveys in Australia showed that domestic violence disclosed that to a co-workers were often aware, even if disclosure. In addition, co-workers cover and are at risk when domestic violence someone to work. Whilst some co-workers are very supportive, others can be resentful so there is a need to educate co-workers so they stay supportive.

It is important that the company's communications and education programme takes into account co-workers and that all trained contact people offer the appropriate support to co-workers.

Ensure that the safety plan covers co-workers where appropriate but remember to respect confidentiality.

### Trained contact person:

Liaise with the union or company trained contact person to ensure appropriate support is in place for the member.

## DO'S FOR UNION REPRESENTATIVES

**Do inform members:** so they understand how domestic violence can impact work and they can feel safe enough to disclose if they need support and protection from their workplace and union.

**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: discussing it only with those who need to know and telling the person you have confided in.

**Do assure them they are not to blame:** The only person responsible is the abusive person. Be aware that some victims may feel that they have to manage the abusive person or may feel embarrassed that their relationship has become violent.

**Do ask what impact domestic violence is having on their work life:** Your concern is with the impact domestic violence is having on your member's ability to attend work without interference, for them and their colleagues to be safe in the workplace, and to have the necessary time to attend to their personal and family responsibilities under the circumstances.

**Do encourage them to keep a diary** in relation to any domestic violence incidents and the impact on work such as attendance or abusive phone calls, emails etc.

**Do ask what they would like you to do:** Do they want you to advocate on their behalf, a co-worker to accompany them to court, need to be walked to their car at night ....? Ensure they have control over next steps.

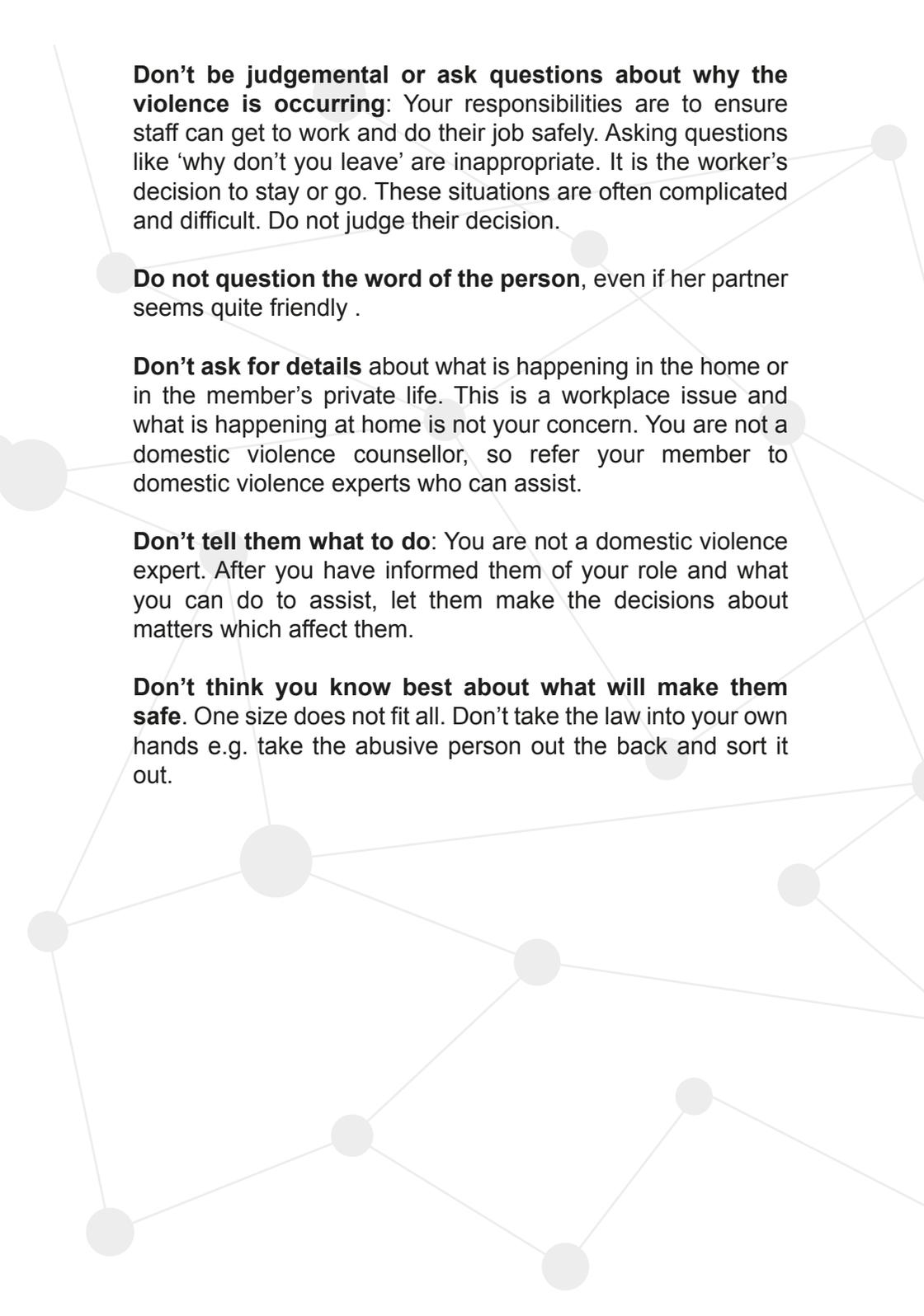
**Do discuss a safety plan:** Ask them what they need to ensure that they and their colleagues are safe at work. Go through the possible actions listed in the Safety Plan.

## **DON'TS FOR UNION REPRESENTATIVES**

**Don't look for warning signs or indicators:** be aware that many workers experiencing domestic violence at home will not experience it at work and may not wish to disclose. Don't jump to conclusions and infringe on their right to privacy.

**Don't become personally involved:** your role is not to fix the domestic violence but to help your member at work. Under no circumstances should you visit the member's home or place yourself at risk.

**Don't make this a conversation 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.

**Do not question the word of the person,** even if her partner seems quite friendly .

**Don't ask for details** about what is happening in the home or in the member's 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 member to domestic violence experts who can assist.

**Don't tell them 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 about what will make them safe.** One size does not fit all. Don't take the law into your own hands e.g. take the abusive person out the back and sort it out.

### **Acknowledgements**

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