

Responding to Domestic and Family Violence

November is a month dedicated to raising awareness about a significant societal issue: domestic violence. Both Domestic Violence Awareness Month and White Ribbon Day serve as a reminder that the battle against this pervasive problem is far from over.

Domestic violence (DV/DFV), also referred to as intimate partner violence, family violence, or domestic abuse, is a social issue that transcends borders, socioeconomic statuses, and demographics. In Australia, the staggering statistics paint the severity.

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, one in six women and one in sixteen men have experienced physical or sexual violence by a current or former partner since the age of 15.

It's estimated that of all Australian adults:

- **11.8% (2.2 million) had experienced violence from a husband, wife or partner.**
- **5.1% (935,000) had experienced violence from a boyfriend, girlfriend or date.**
- **6.6% (1.2 million) had experienced violence from another family member.**

WHAT ARE THE OBSTACLES TO DISCLOSURE?

One obstacle for victims of domestic and family violence (DFV) when considering disclosure is the fear of stigma and how that impacts an individual's safety. A 2018 Australian survey featured in the publication "How are gender inequality and violence against women related?," unveiled certain misconceptions related to DFV that may deter victims from seeking assistance.

1. Nearly one in three (32%) Australians believed that women who remain with abusive partners share partial responsibility for perpetuating the violence.
2. More than two in five (42%) Australians concurred that false sexual assault allegations are commonly used to retaliate against men.

3. One in five (20%) Australians considered violence a normal response to everyday stress.
4. Over one in five (21%) Australians agreed that sometimes, a woman's actions could inadvertently provoke a man to hit her.

Another issue highlighted by the survey is that approximately 40% of Australians do not know where to seek help for domestic violence concerns. This issue is mirrored in the workplace, where victims' chances of seeking help are often further diminished.

In 2019, the Sightlines team at Domestic Violence Service Management conducted a survey involving individuals with personal experiences of family and domestic violence.

The findings included:

- Roughly half of all surveyed employees were uncertain whether their employer had a DFV policy.
- The majority of employees grappling with DFV chose not to disclose their situation to their employer (66%).
- Of the 34% who did disclose, most confided in their manager or a colleague.

The workplace can serve as a potential protective factor for those experiencing domestic and family violence to disclose their experiences in a safe environment and seek help.

HOW CAN A WORKPLACE OFFER HELP AND SUPPORT

It's crucial to recognise that some victims may refrain from coming forward due to ingrained stigma, feelings of shame, and the fear that not being heard may further impact their safety. If someone is experiencing domestic and family violence, it's essential to approach the situation with care and



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1300 687 327

0800 666 367

+613 8620 5300

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empathy.

The changes in an employee or co-worker to look out for could include:

- **Work productivity** — A change in the person's working patterns. e.g., frequent absence, lateness, or reduced quantity and quality of work.
- **Changes in behaviour** — A change in conduct that is out of character with previous behaviour. e.g., becoming quiet, anxious, easily frightened, aggressive, distracted or depressed.
- **Physical indications** — Visible bruising or repeated injury with unlikely explanations. The victim may also use more makeup than they used previously to hide injury.
- **Other indicators** — This can include a partner or ex-partner stalking the employee in or around the workplace.

If someone chooses to open up about their situation, you can offer help in the following ways:

- **Non-judgmental listening:** Listen without judgment, believing what they share and refraining from blaming them for their circumstances.
- **Focus on safety:** Avoid delving into the details of domestic and family violence; instead, concentrate on assisting them in being safe and referring them to appropriate services. Nobody understands their safety better than the victim so listen and respect their decisions and be guided by what they need to keep them safe. This is particularly relevant regarding their decision to leave their partner. Know what resources are available and provide options, but always respect their choices and decisions. Victims assess the trustworthiness of those they confide in and may react negatively to signs of judgment. It's important to trust that they know their situation best.
- **Respect their choices:** Refrain from insisting that they leave their relationship or criticising them for staying.
- **Inform about workplace support:** Discuss their domestic and family violence workplace entitlements and available options, such as taking leave (if domestic and family violence leave is available) or accessing flexible work arrangements.

- **Safety measures:** Explore potential safety measures that can be implemented in the workplace if the employee feels unsafe. This may include screening incoming calls, blocking emails, changing phone numbers, or adjusting working hours or locations.
- **Provide contacts:** Offer the employee contact information within your organisation and inform them of external support resources (see external support details below).
- **Confidentiality:** Take steps to ensure that all disclosures and actions remain confidential unless there is a legal or safety requirement for sharing information. Always consult with the employee regarding the information that can be shared and with whom. Certain minimum information may need to be shared with others to implement safety measures.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

If your employer is with Converge, you could have access to our specialised Domestic and Family Violence Support (check with your HR department what is available to you). You can find the number within your Converge Portal, or call one of our friendly staff on 1300 687 327. We also offer tailored training courses to help managers and employees create a safe space for victims and provide them with the help that they need.

Alternative support lines:

- **1800 Respect: 1800 737 732**
- **Lifeline: 13 11 14**
- **Mensline: 1300 789 978**
- **Kids Helpline: 1800 551 800**



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