

Family and Domestic Violence

MPCN recognises the devastating impact domestic violence can have on the lives of those who experience abuse, including their work and financial security. MPCN is committed to supporting employees who experience domestic violence and providing a workplace environment that promotes their safety and provides the flexibility to support them to live free from violence.

Our organisation has a role in North Western Victoria in commissioning health services for women and their children who may also be experiencing domestic violence.

Domestic violence is an abuse of human rights, perpetrated within intimate partner relationships.

A central element of domestic violence is an ongoing pattern of behaviour aimed at power and control through fear. Domestic violence takes a number of forms, including physical and sexual violence, threats and intimidation, psychological, emotional and social abuse and economic deprivation.

We recognise that anyone, male or female, can be a victim of domestic violence. However, we know that the overwhelming majority of people who experience violence and abuse in the home are women.

In Australia, 15-17% of women are affected by domestic violence at some time in their lives. Of those women two-thirds are in paid employment. Paid work plays a critical role in providing the financial stability to enable women to leave abusive relationships and to recover from abuse. The workplace also has a key role to play in supporting women and providing the flexibility to enable them to take action against violence whilst maintaining their employment.

There are obvious benefits to the employer, the employee, the employee's children and to the broader community if those who are experiencing domestic violence can maintain their employment. In order to maintain employment, we know there are times when an employee may need time off work or greater flexibility in their working arrangements, to attend to health, legal, financial or other personal matters.

Whilst the workplace may create a safe haven for many people who experience domestic violence, there are occasions where an employee may be at risk from violence in the workplace.

In such circumstances MPCN is committed to working with the employee to implement a workplace domestic violence strategy plan, to improve the safety of the employee and their colleagues.

We also recognise that the experience of violence or abuse in an employee's personal life may affect their attendance or performance at work.

MPCN is committed to responding to these issues with sensitivity and ensuring the employee's experience of domestic violence and the impact this may have on performance is taken into consideration when addressing attendance and/or performance issues.

The aim of this policy is to detail how employees who are experiencing or escaping violence can be supported to improve their safety and work towards a life free from violence and abuse.

Definition of “domestic violence”?

Domestic violence is an abuse of power perpetrated mainly (but not only) by men against women both in intimate partner relationships and following separation. A central element of domestic violence is an ongoing pattern of behaviour aimed at power and control through fear. The most commonly acknowledged forms are physical and sexual violence, threats and intimidation, emotional and social abuse and economic deprivation.

Definition of “Aboriginal family violence”?

The term Aboriginal Family Violence is accepted amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as a more appropriate term to describe violence perpetrated against Aboriginal people, families and communities. The term Aboriginal Family Violence includes violence perpetrated within intimate partner relationships, however, it is also encompasses other forms of violence perpetrated against individuals, families and communities. Whilst the term domestic violence is used throughout this policy, it is important to recognise for Aboriginal employees, the term family violence may be more appropriate.

Other forms of violence/abuse not covered by the MPCN Domestic Violence Workplace Policy

An individual is not considered to be experiencing domestic violence if they have been a victim of violence by someone who is not intimately known to them. For example, being a victim of crime by an unknown person, whilst distressing, is not considered domestic violence.

Support in the Workplace

The experience of domestic violence can have serious impacts on a person’s physical, mental and emotional health, financial and housing security.

Employees who are experiencing or escaping domestic violence are encouraged to advise their manager or Human Resources in order that appropriate safety measures can be put in place (in the workplace) and support provided. Managers and/or Human Resources can discuss options for flexible working arrangements and leave that may assist the employee to address health or personal matters related to their experience of violence and can also refer them to counselling and support services.

A consequence of domestic violence may be the deterioration in an employee's attendance and/or performance at work. The MPCN Domestic Violence Workplace Policy recognises the need for managers to consider the impact violence can have on an employee's performance and be sensitive to their experience of domestic violence when addressing attendance and/or performance issues.

Confidentiality

An employee who discloses they are experiencing domestic violence to their manager or to Human Resources is assured their information will be kept strictly confidential and will not be recorded on their personal file. There may be times, however, when there is an inherent safety risk to either the affected employee or other employees (for example, if there is a risk the perpetrator might come into the workplace). In these instances, disclosure of the situation will be kept to a minimum and on a 'need to know' for the purpose of maintaining safety in the workplace.

Employee Assistance Program

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provides counselling and support to any employee or their immediate family member seeking assistance with a challenging issue or to improve their health and wellbeing.

The Employee Assistance Program provides timely intervention to help employees deal effectively with any difficulties, and assists them with referral to other professionals or agencies if longer-term assistance is needed.

Leave

There are times when an employee who is experiencing or escaping domestic violence may need time away from work for a range of reasons, for example to address health, legal, childcare, housing or other personal matters. Leave options are outlined in HR002 Human Resources Handbook. that outlines paid and unpaid leave options and flexible working arrangements that may be available to them

Safety Planning

In situations where an employee who is experiencing or escaping domestic violence is concerned for their safety in the workplace it is recommended they develop a workplace domestic violence safety plan in consultation with their manager. The plan should reflect the specific needs of the employee and consider the nature of their role and the workplace environment. A workplace domestic violence safety plan may include:

- programming mobile phones with emergency and contact numbers
- screening incoming calls to the employee
- changing work phone numbers and email addresses
- ensuring the employee is in a security restricted area/location.

Changes to an employee's work phone number, email address, working hours and nature and place of work can be negotiated on either a temporary or permanent basis to support the safety of the employee.

Workplace Domestic Violence Safety Plan

A workplace domestic violence safety plan is a document developed in partnership between an employee and their manager, when it has been identified that the employee's safety in the workplace or that of their co-workers is at risk.

When developing a safety plan, risks associated with the current working arrangements should be discussed and changes to improve safety identified. The following considerations may be discussed to help form an effective safety plan:

- Inform your manager if the perpetrator has threatened you at the workplace, in person, over the phone, via email or fax, or threatened to come to the workplace, or if you are concerned this may occur.
- Inform your manager if stalking has been a problem.
- Consider obtaining an intervention (restraining) order and include the workplace as a location the perpetrator is prevented from approaching.
 - o Intervention Orders are legally binding orders made by a magistrate to protect the safety of the victim. They include conditions that prevent the perpetrator contacting the victim or frequenting places the victim is likely to be.
 - o Applications for an Intervention Order can be made through the Police or can be made directly to the Magistrates Court.
 - o If an intervention order has been filed that includes the workplace it is recommended that a copy be provided to management and security.
 - o Save any threatening or intimidating e-mails, letters or voicemail messages from the perpetrators and provide copies to the police or courts.
- Phone/email
 - o If possible have your phone calls screened.
 - o If possible have your phone number and email changed
 - o Remove your phone number from any internal directories
- Can your work area be relocated for better security?
- Do work hours and schedules need to be temporarily adjusted?
- Can parking/travelling to work arrangement be altered to increase safety?

- Can security assist in keeping the workplace safe?
- If you are temporarily residing in a confidential location, ensure that designated workplace personnel have emergency contact information.
- Identify an emergency contact person you can be contacted through in an emergency.

Returning to Work

When returning to work after leave due to domestic violence related issues, employees are encouraged to talk to their manager regarding any ongoing safety concerns they may have. Employees who have identified a risk to their safety or that of their colleagues in the workplace are encouraged to develop a workplace domestic violence safety plan (if they have not previously developed one), or to review a safety plan that was previously in place if circumstances have changed.

Perpetrating Domestic Violence from the Workplace

MPCN does not tolerate domestic violence being perpetrated in or from the workplace; any employee who threatens, harasses or abuses a family or household member at, or from, the workplace will be subject to disciplinary action.

This includes employees who use workplace resources such as phones, fax machines, email, mail or other means to threaten, harass or abuse a family member. If an employee is observed or suspected of perpetrating domestic violence from the workplace, managers have a responsibility to enact the appropriate action, which may result in disciplinary action.