

# STOPPING DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE CAN START AT WORK

Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) is a major social issue. While workplaces are not the cause of the problem, they can be part of the solution. This factsheet addresses some of the questions managers and employers may have about DFV as a workplace issue.

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## What is DFV?

DFV is when one person, in an intimate (either current or former), family or informal care relationship, behaves in a way that controls, dominates or coerces another person and causes fear for their safety and wellbeing.

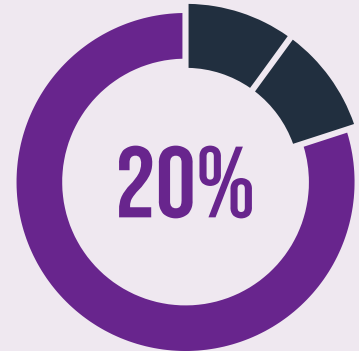
DFV is usually a pattern of abusive and controlling behaviour, it can include actual or threatened physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and/or economic abuse and coercive control.



## “No-one in my workplace is experiencing DFV.”

Statistically, it is very likely that there are **employees in your workplace** who are experiencing (or perpetrating) DFV. Approximately **3.6 million** Australian adults (**20% of the population**) reported having experienced physical and/or sexual DFV and it is more common for DFV to be perpetrated against women<sup>[1]</sup>.

Based on these statistics we know that, even in smaller workplaces, chances are there are victims and possibly perpetrators of DFV in your staff. Many of these employees will hide their experiences for fear of losing their job.



## “Isn’t DFV a private issue?”

DFV used to be thought of as a private issue, but we now know that DFV impacts on the **workplace** in many ways. DFV does not stay at home when a victim comes to work.

It can result in lateness, absence, sick leave, health issues, distraction, lack of concentration and underperformance at work. This can affect a workplace’s overall **productivity**, causing increased **staff turnover** and absenteeism.



DFV can also be perpetrated within the workplace, via email or phone, or by the perpetrator turning up at the workplace.

We may spend most of our waking hours at work – and we know that workplaces can be sources of support, friendship and safety. The workplace is one important sector of society – just like sporting clubs, schools and health care settings – that can help **stop DFV**.

<sup>[1]</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2023). Family, domestic and sexual violence. Retrieved from <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/domestic-violence/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence>

## “But how can the workplace help?”

There are many ways a workplace can help staff experiencing DFV. These include:

- ensuring that staff are aware of their right to access leave to deal with FDV, including:
  - o personal leave
  - o paid and unpaid DFV leave provided in the NES, Modern Award, Enterprise
- ensuring managers are properly trained to respond to DFV disclosures and how to support staff who wish to access DFV leave;
- ensuring that disclosing a violent situation will not result in adverse consequences for staff;
- developing and implementing DFV policies to support victim/survivors, including:
  - o ensuring confidentiality and safety planning procedures;
  - o allowing flexible work arrangements, in compliance with the Fair Work Act;
  - o appropriate referral processes to counselling and DFV specialist services;
- developing and implementing policies and disciplinary procedures which address employees perpetrating domestic violence at work, including the use of workplace phones, faxes or email to harass.



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## “How does all this help my staff?”

When workplaces send **strong messages** that DFV is not tolerated, and when these messages are supported by policies and training, staff are more likely to **seek help** and retain **employment**. Victims of DFV who are able to keep their jobs are far more likely to escape the violence.

**Economic security** is the single most important factor in whether a victim of domestic violence is able to withdraw from a dangerous situation.



## **“How does this help me and my business?”**

Retaining valuable staff is important for all workplaces – saving the cost of recruitment and training and avoiding the loss of corporate knowledge and skills.

Having a DFV strategy at your work sends a clear message to your staff (and your clients and communities) that DFV is not acceptable. It demonstrates that you care about your employees' health and wellbeing.

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We put an enormous amount of investment in people, and it disrupts small to medium size businesses a lot if they lose their good people... There is a straight out business imperative to get involved here.

**CEO, Blundstone**

A strong DFV strategy can result in significant benefits for employers, including retention rates, staff morale and loyalty, and health outcomes for their employees. Showing leadership on DFV also meets your Corporate and Social Responsibilities, provides a competitive advantage, and supports a positive public image and internal reputation. Indigenous employment strategies and retention of Indigenous staff will also be helped by a strong DFV policy.

## **“But I’m not a counsellor... I wouldn’t know what to say!”**

Most managers want to help; they just don’t know how and lack the confidence.

It is important to remember that DFV workplace policies are not designed to "solve" domestic violence and you are not being asked to “fix” the problem.

You are also not expected to be an expert. Managers and HR require specialised training so they know how to respond to this issue within the workplace, and how to refer to specialist services when necessary.

Training should be supported by clear policies, an aware workforce and referral pathways to specialist DFV services.

## **“But what if my staff exploits it?”**

Employers who have introduced DFV strategies have not found it burdensome.

In addition the National Employment Standards now provide minimum entitlements to family and domestic violence leave and a right to request flexible work arrangements.

From 1 February 2023, employees of non-small business employers (employers with 15 or more employees on 1 February 2023) can access 10 days of paid family domestic violence leave. This includes part-time and casual employees.

Employees employed by small business employers (employers with less than 15 employees on 1 February 2023) can access paid leave from 1 August 2023. Until then, they can continue to take 5 days of unpaid family and domestic violence leave each year. This includes part-time and casual employees.

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## **“What is everyone else doing?”**

DFV leave has existed in Australia for over a decade, beginning with many employers including domestic violence leave provisions in their Enterprise agreements.

The Federal Government has now legislated paid DFV leave as a national employment standard in the Fair Work Act, to apply to all employees (other than State public servants and Local government employees).

The Queensland Government has also made 10 days paid DFV leave available to all state public sector and local government employees.

Some employers provide DFV policy and leave provisions that are in excess of these statutory minimums.

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## **“Where can I get help?”**

The DV Work Aware program has been established to support employers in building their organisations' capacity to respond to DFV. We provide consultation, policy development, and training to assist you and your managers with the tools you need.