



Domestic Abuse and Violence

Policy and Guidance for Students and Staff

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Policy - Purpose and scope

This procedure has been agreed by the Joint Unions Consultative Committee in consultation with the University.

This policy is for staff and students and acknowledges that members of our community will experience abusive relationships in their personal lives.

Aston University is committed to providing guidance and assistance to members of the University Community who undergo such experiences and heightening awareness of domestic violence. If a member of staff or student feels that they are at risk of harm or are a victim of abuse, they should feel confident to seek information, guidance or support from the university.

Domestic violence is unacceptable behaviour, and the responsibility for domestic violence lies with the perpetrator. Aston University will strive to create a work and study environment where domestic violence is seen as unacceptable.

Guiding Principles

The University recognises that there are agencies better equipped to provide specialist advice and support, and contact with such agencies will be suggested, where appropriate.

The University will take its responsibilities seriously to:

- promote a culture of dignity and respect where domestic violence is seen as unacceptable behaviour
- assist and support employees and students who seek help in addressing problems that arise from domestic violence
- respond appropriately, promptly, and confidentially to any reported cases
- assist in supporting managers in dealing with these issues in a sensitive, fair and consistent manner
- provide training for managers in dealing with such behaviour and impact

- publish and maintain contact details of appropriate internal and external sources of help which is accessible to all of the University community

Advice and information will be available (as defined within this document) to all student and staff.

The University will treat as confidential all records concerning reports of domestic violence. Any report of domestic violence will be treated with due care and discretion, with the safety of the person undergoing the abuse as the highest priority. However, the University has a duty of care to all its members, both staff and students. Therefore, when informed of an incident, it may be necessary in exceptional circumstances, for further action to be taken even if this is not the course of action sought by the person concerned. Such circumstances could include a situation where there is a risk to other members of the University community. In these circumstances, the person concerned will be advised of the action to be taken and why. In all cases, information will only be divulged to key individuals within the system who have the responsibility and authority to take the necessary action.

The University will not discriminate against anyone who has been subjected to domestic violence in any way.

The University is aware that people who experience domestic violence may have performance problems at work and study. Therefore, when addressing performance, the University will make reasonable efforts to consider all aspects of the employee's or student's situation.

Sympathetic consideration will be given to requests by staff and students for time off to deal with emergencies such as seeking protection, going to court, looking for new housing, counselling, arranging child care etc

The University has a duty to ensure the safety of its employees. Accordingly, it will provide support to employees experiencing domestic violence to minimise the risk to their safety at work.

Definitions

The Crown Prosecution Service has provided this definition of domestic abuse:

“Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to, psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional.” This definition includes so-called 'honour'-based violence, forced marriage, and female genital mutilation (FGM). Central to the definition of domestic abuse is that a victim and the person who is abusing them have a personal relationship”.

Central to the definition of domestic abuse is that a victim and the person who is abusing them have a personal relationship. People who are 'personally connected' include:

- Ex-partners
- Family members
- Individuals who share parental responsibility for a child.

There is no requirement for a victim and the person who is abusing them to live in the same household. Not all abuse is overt; the close victim-abuser relationship can obscure the abuse taking place, making it difficult for a victim themselves or people outside of that relationship to identify, which is another barrier to help-seeking.

Forms of domestic abuse

This can encompass but is not limited to the following types of abuse:

- psychological
- physical abuse
- sexual abuse
- economic or financial
- emotional

The UK government's definition of domestic abuse also recognises, but is not limited to:

- Stalking
- Digital and online abuse
- 'Honour'-based abuse (including forced marriage) and FGM (Female Genital Mutilation)
- Spiritual abuse
- Pet abuse
- Controlling or coercive behaviour

The Home Office defines controlling behaviour as:

'a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.'

Coercive behaviour is:

'an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.'

People experience domestic violence regardless of their social group, class, gender, ethnicity, disability status, sexuality, religion, culture or age. The abuse can begin at any time, in new relationships or after many years spent together. It is also important to recognise that females are far more likely to be victimised and suffer serious injury, and that there is a strong link between domestic abuse and sexual violence.

Given the high prevalence of domestic abuse across the UK generally, it would be easy to assume that universities simply reflect this wider societal trend. This is not

the case. In fact, full-time students (7.7%) are the most likely to experience domestic abuse compared to any other occupation. Again, female students (10.5%) were more than twice as likely than male students (4.8%) to be a victim, and both staff and students with disabilities, are over twice as likely to experience domestic abuse as those without – with disabled women almost twice as likely as disabled men.

It is important to keep in mind that people's experiences of domestic abuse are generally underreported.

Guidance for victims of domestic abuse or violence

What can I do if I am subject to domestic violence whilst on University premises?

If you are assaulted or are the victim of intimidation, violent behaviour or the threat of violent behaviour on campus, don't hesitate to get in touch with Security by ringing 222 or 2222 from Residences or seek assistance from someone who can make contact with them for you.

The external telephone number is 0121 359 2922. Security will report such incidents to the police and the Chief Operating Officer, as appropriate and, except in very exceptional circumstances, this will be done only with your consent.

How can the University help?

The University may be able to help in several ways by, for example:

- helping you to recognise and think through the options open to you
- directing you to professional/specialist sources of advice and support
- offering counselling through the University Counselling Service
- arranging for special leave or flexible working hours to deal with emergencies or urgent domestic problems
- recognising the impact of your circumstances on your work or study and making appropriate adjustments for this
- arranging for specific security arrangements for you within the University where you are concerned that a perpetrator may try to contact you at work (e.g. intercepting telephone calls)

The University will treat all reports sensitively and in confidence and take all reasonable action to protect you while at the University. However, the University can only offer support and information and cannot, in normal circumstances, address the broader issues. The aim is to provide practical help that will enable you to deal better with the adverse effects of your personal experiences. The University Counselling Service is also available to offer emotional support to students. PamAssist Counselling Service is available to staff.

Who can I contact about domestic violence or an abusive relationship?

Contacts for Staff

The important thing is to talk to someone you trust and feel will help. If you are a staff member, you could arrange to meet and talk to your supervisor or line manager. Where this is not possible or appropriate, you may wish to contact your HR Partner, your Trade Union Representative, or other colleagues within the University.

The University has a team of trained mental health first aiders who can act as the first point of contact for people experiencing abuse and talk through available options. A list of mental health first aiders is available on the Human Resources Wellbeing web-pages: <https://www2.aston.ac.uk/staff/wellbeing/wellbeing/first-aiders>

Staff contacts and mental health first aiders will not tell you what to do but will listen to your concerns and give you information and advice about the courses of action open to you and the sources of support available both within and outside the University.

PamAssist Counselling Service is also available as a source of support. You can call PamAssist on 0800 882 4102 (quoting the reference Aston1). Please also see the link for further support via the HR intranet page:

<https://www2.aston.ac.uk/staff/wellbeing>

Contacts for Students

If you are a student, you could arrange to meet and talk to your Personal Tutor, Personal Advisor, Residence Officer or Tutor, Student Support and Counselling, the Student Advice Centre in the Guild of Students or the Equal Opportunities Advisor.

In addition, there may be other staff within the School or University with whom it would be appropriate to discuss the issue; the important thing is to talk to someone you think will help.

The Counselling Service is also available via the counselling mental well-being team: [How to Contact Us \(aston.ac.uk\)](#).

Guidelines for supporting victims of domestic abuse

Disclosures of domestic abuse are never made lightly and will be extremely stressful and emotional for a victim. Speaking about, leaving, or escaping an abusive relationship takes enormous courage. Domestic abuse victims have limited opportunities to seek support; they are often isolated and may have small social networks, due to the coercive tactics used by abusers and the shame and embarrassment that victims feel. Therefore, when university staff and students indicate that they are a victim of abuse, it is important that they are believed, and the disclosure viewed as a red flag. Professionals must recognise that a disclosure might be the 'one chance' to help and follow the 'one chance rule' - a potential life-saver for victims.

There are a range of staff, including managers and people in other key positions who may, on occasion, have to deal with staff or students who have experienced domestic violence or abusive personal relationships.

People often choose to speak to someone they know and trust. Handling such disclosures is not easy or straightforward. It requires those to whom such reports are made to be both sensitive to the needs of individuals and aware of the consequences of particular types of action. It is recommended that you familiarise yourself with this policy and guidance.

Confidentiality

The evidence suggests the point of leaving is when the most serious injuries or deaths occur. Never underestimate the danger or assume fears are groundless. Be clear about the boundaries of confidentiality in any discussion you may have. Breaching confidentiality can have serious consequences.

Managers should at all times remind any other staff or students who are told the importance of confidentiality. You may need to discuss in detail who the information can be shared with to keep the person safe.

Advice

Certain principles will help when considering advising people who experience harassment or other forms of inappropriate behaviour. Irrespective of your relationship to the individual concerned and your existing knowledge of and responsibility for the people involved, it is advisable to:

- listen carefully and sympathetically
- ensure that their safety is prioritised
- acquire a clear account of the situation through sensitive questioning
- try to be objective and non-judgmental about what you hear
- work through the possible routes to solutions and discuss the options for how to proceed and suggest that the person takes time to think these through and may need to try different options without feeling judged.
- help the person to identify appropriate sources of support
- do not try to persuade the person to take a particular course of action

Practical Support

If an employee needs to be absent from work due to domestic violence, the length of the absence will be determined by the individual's situation through collaboration with the employee and their line manager. Consider the use of:

- Emergency care of dependants/Compassionate Leave Policy for time off to attend court, find alternative housing, meeting solicitors, attending counselling
- Flexible working options, e.g. change in hours for a specific period

Practical arrangements for an individual's safety could include:

- Arranging for a change of telephone number or for calls to be intercepted for a temporary period
- Removing an employee's contact details or employee profile from Aston University's intranet pages. Please speak with Digital Services to action this when requests are made by the employee.
- Understanding that members of our community may wish to restrict their use of social media platforms for promoting their work or the university. These matters should be dealt with sensitively, respecting the wishes of the individual.
- Alerting Security and other staff to the potential for partners, ex-partners or family members to turn up at the University.
- Making arrangements for the safe storage of important documents (or copies) on campus.
- Arranging temporary accommodation in Conference Aston, where necessary.

Financial support could include:

- Arranging advances on salary
- Referral to CAB

Other Sources of support may include:

- colleagues, friends or family
- mental health first aiders and Study contacts
- the University Counselling Service for students
- PamAssist counselling service for staff
- Trade Union Representatives
- the Student Advice Centre
- University Security
- external agencies

Further information

For staff and students:

University Counselling Service: 4711 or studentcounselling@aston.ac.uk

PamAssist Counselling Service: 0800 882 4102 (Quoting reference: Aston1)

Emergency Contact: Security: 222 or from Residences: 2222

Students may also contact the following:

Advice and Representation Centre (ARC) in the Guild of Students: 4848 or email arc@aston.ac.uk

Personal Tutor

Personal Advisor

Residence Officer and/or Tutor

Staff may also contact the following:

Trade Union Representative

HR Business Partner

Useful External Organisations:

- Rape Crisis: [Rape Crisis England & Wales](#)
- Samaritans: [Samaritans](#) or Telephone: 116 123
- Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid: [Homepage - Birmingham Solihull Women's Aid \(bswaid.org\)](#). For a free, confidential helpline and access to Refuge Accommodation contact: Freephone 0800 800 0028
- Forced Marriage & Honour Based Abuse Helpline: [Home | Roshni \(roshnibirmingham.org.uk\)](#)
- Police Domestic Violence Officer: 0845 113 5000
- Citizens Advice: [Domestic abuse - Citizens Advice](#)
- RSVP Birmingham: [Rape & Sexual Violence Project \(rsvporg.co.uk\)](#)
Tel: 0121 643 0301
- West Midlands Police: [Domestic Abuse | Your Options | West Midlands Police \(west-midlands.police.uk\)](#)

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Human resources

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