



Supporting professionals experiencing domestic abuse: A good practice guide

Barriers to professionals accessing support, pathways to getting help, employer responsibility, and illustrative case studies.

Supporting professionals experiencing domestic abuse

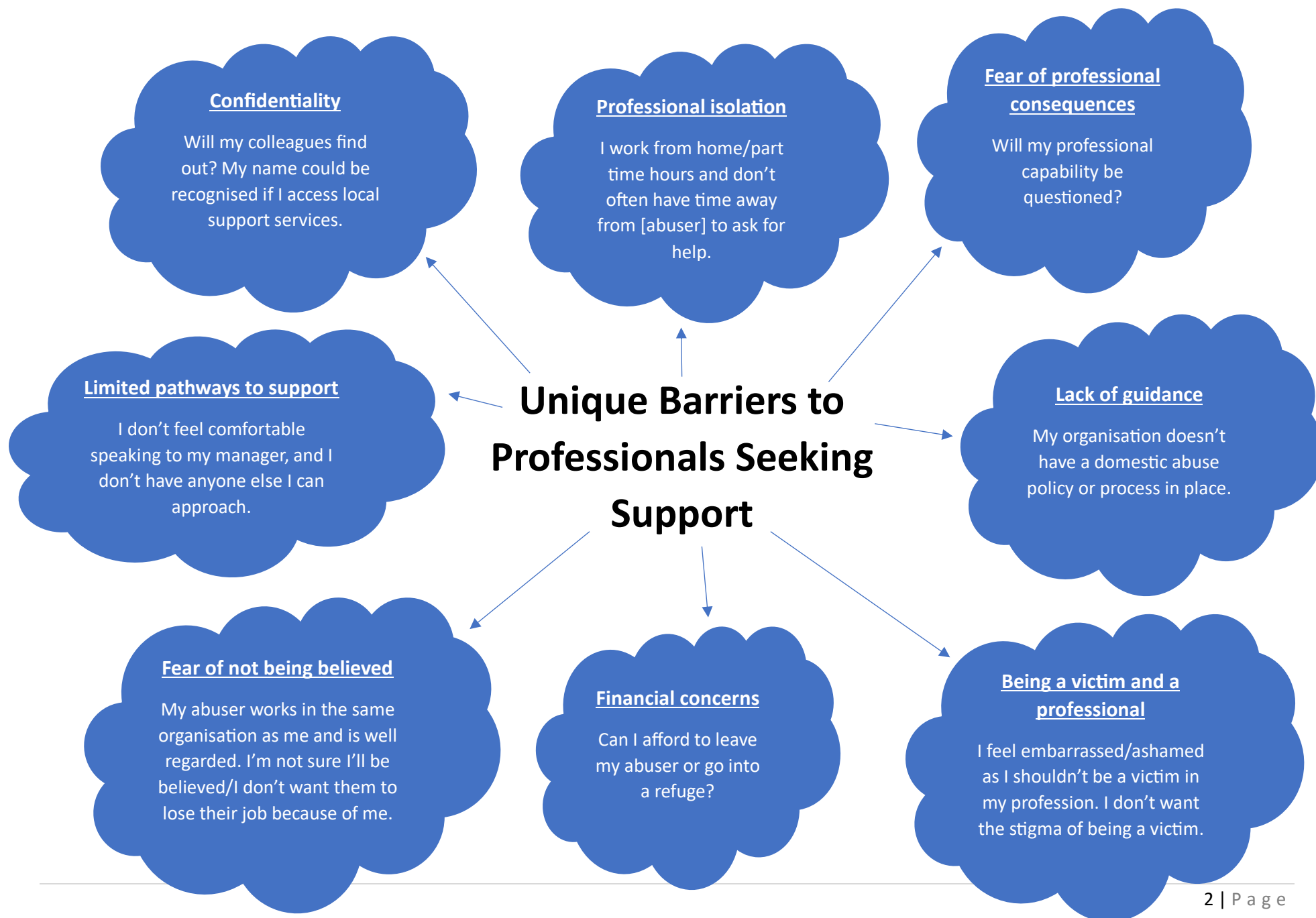
One in five adults experience domestic abuse, one in three women and one in six men. It's important to recognise **anyone** can be a victim of domestic abuse. There are unique challenges faced by professionals and those working within domestic abuse services if they themselves become victims.

Employer responsibility

Employers have a duty of care to support employees experiencing domestic abuse. Staff members may be worried about seeking help due to fear of being known by colleagues, potential professional consequences, stereotypes, along with many other barriers.

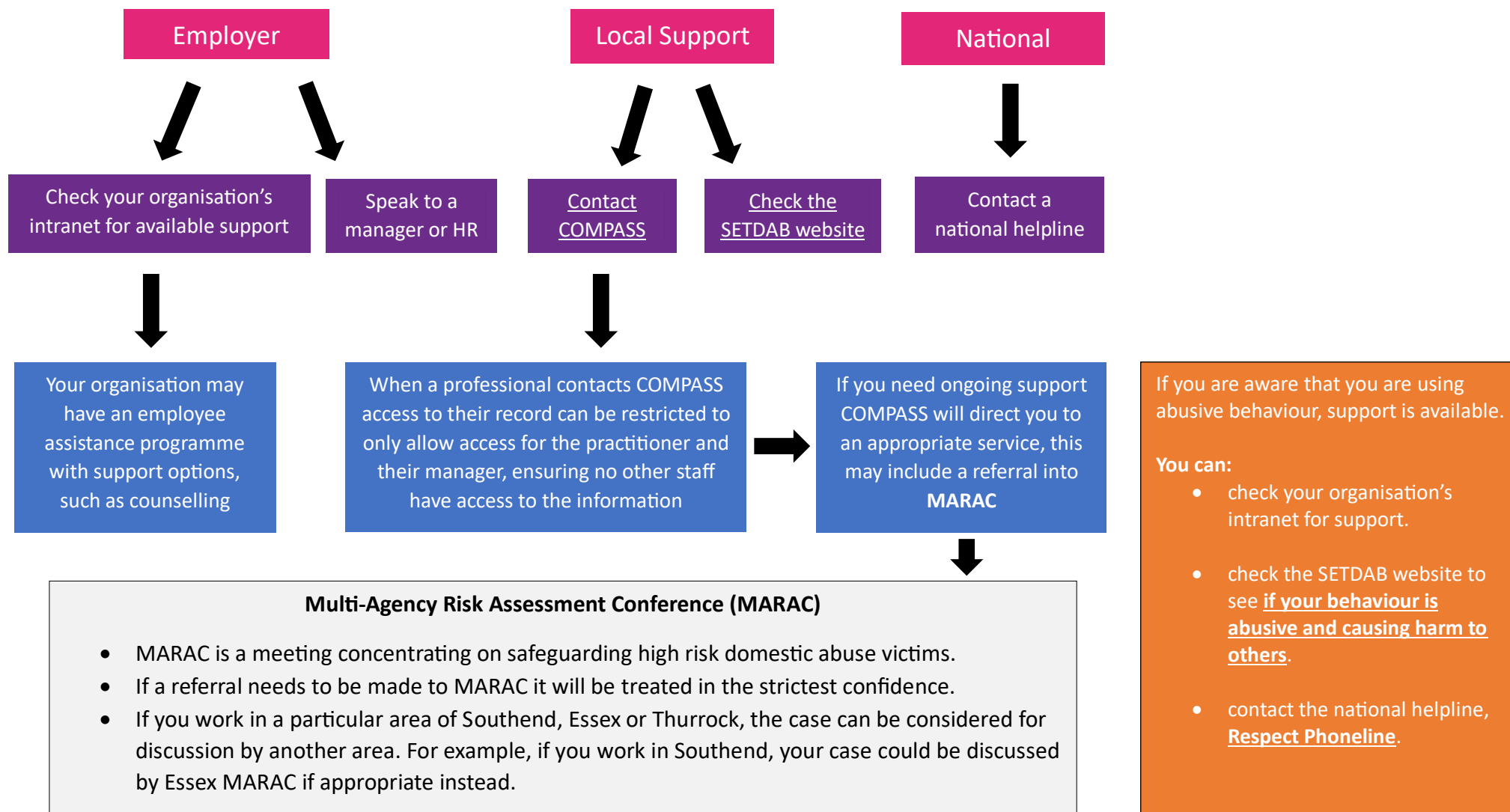
Both abusers and victims can be part of our communities and workplaces, therefore it's important to respond to both. It's important to understand that people who commit domestic abuse may also need help and face challenges in getting it.





Pathways for professionals to access support

There is no single path to accessing support, as there are number of different ways to get the help you need. As a professional, you should not feel ashamed or embarrassed about seeking assistance, your safety is of utmost importance.



A good practice guide – how organisations can support employees experiencing domestic abuse



It is important that employees understand the [different forms of domestic abuse](#) and recognise the signs to signpost to appropriate support and intervention.

Organisations must actively work to challenge stereotypes, fostering a culture that acknowledges and recognises that professionals can be victims of domestic abuse. They should offer clear options and different pathways for employees to seek advice, support, and report incidents and raise awareness of support available (online and physical).

There may be instances where both the individual causing harm and victim are within the same workplace. Being curious and paying attention to who is doing what to whom is essential. Unconscious biases can make it hard for employers to see who is vulnerable, these biases can come from stereotypes, like their job, status, or wealth, which can also add additional barriers to individuals seeking support.

How easy is it for staff to find and access support?

Assess and evaluate the current provision and support mechanisms in place. What resources and assistance does your organisation currently offer? Check your intranet or notice boards for available support options.

Policy

- Create and regularly review a specific policy for domestic abuse that is easily accessible to all employees. Avoid the use of acronyms, or clearly articulate their meaning.
- Conduct anonymous surveys to understand employees' needs and concerns regarding domestic abuse support.
- Establish a steering group, set key priority standards, and hold strategy meetings to address and mitigate barriers.

Training

- Managers to utilise opportunities, such as one-to-one meetings, to check in with employees and know how to plan and sign post to help through mandatory training.

- Include mandatory training on domestic abuse for all employees as part of the organisation's induction process, with refresher courses every two years.
- Organise regular workshops and training sessions focused on domestic abuse awareness and support resources.
- Integrate domestic abuse support into broader wellness programmes that address mental health, stress management, and overall well-being.
- Invite experts and survivors to share their experiences and provide insights at guest speaker events, or promote the [SETDAB free Training Lectures](#).
- Professionals working in your organisation can also be individuals using harmful behaviour. [Learn more about how to identify people who are using harmful behaviour](#).

Digital resources

- Develop a dedicated domestic abuse section on the intranet for employees to access, which includes the support you can offer and how colleagues can support others.
- Implement monitoring processes, such as checking intranet metrics, to track how the domestic abuse pages are being used and accessed.
- Provide an online space for anonymously reporting concerns or sharing information relating to others, knowing the appropriate action will be taken. For example, this could be achieved by implementing a system where individuals are referred to by a case number or pseudonym rather than their name or a recognisable identifier.

Communications

- Send regular updates and reminders about available support services through various communication channels, such as emails, newsletters, and team meetings.
- Leverage social media platforms to raise awareness and share information about support options.
- Place posters and flyers in common areas such as break rooms, toilets, and bulletin boards to ensure visibility.
- Host employee events on awareness days during key times of the year, where employees can learn about different support services and meet representatives from various organisations.
- Share testimonials from employees who have accessed support services.
- Distribute domestic abuse communications and resources from SETDAB and other SET domestic abuse agencies.

Employee assistance programme

- Ensure the availability and promotion of an employee assistance programme as a pathway to support.
- Promote any confidential counselling services.

Workplace domestic abuse champions

- Establish support groups and develop peer support networks where employees can connect with trained peers for support and guidance in a safe environment. An example of this could be appointing Domestic Abuse support champions.

Case study - Ellie's story

“My role involves supporting others experiencing domestic abuse, and I felt like I’d appear incompetent because I was struggling myself.”



Ellie enjoyed and valued her job working for a housing association. However, for over two and a half years, Ellie’s ex-partner Harrison had subjected her to severe emotional and physical abuse, including coercive control and frequent threats to kill. Though arrests had been made, Harrison repeatedly breached conditions, causing Ellie ongoing fear and anxiety. Ellie was concerned Harrison would try to reach her through her workplace and jeopardise her job in the process. Knowing how much she loved her job; he had threatened to do this in the past.

Reaching out for help

Ellie talked to her manager, Scott, disclosing that she was a victim of domestic abuse, and the police were involved in the case.

Ellie explained that while Harrison did not know the exact location of her workplace, he was aware of her employment and her general routine. He had often driven by while she was waiting for her morning bus and knew the approximate times of her commute.

Gaining workplace support

After Ellie’s disclosure, Scott took immediate and proactive steps to ensure her safety both at work and during her commute. A comprehensive safety plan was developed, with Ellie’s input, to mitigate the risks posed by Harrison.

Ellie’s employer arranged for a taxi service to transport her to and from the office. This measure not only removed her from the public bus routes known to Harrison, but also ensured she could commute without fear.

Strict confidentiality measures were put in place to protect her privacy. Relevant staff were discreetly informed of Ellie’s situation and instructed not to share any information about her whereabouts to anyone. A photo of Harrison was circulated internally among staff so they could be on alert should he attempt to follow her to the office or arrive unexpectedly. Staff were briefed on what to do should this happen to ensure safety for all.

A referral for counselling was made to support Ellie’s emotional well-being.

Ellie was fully supportive of these actions and appreciated the swift and sensitive response from her employer.

Ellie says - "I was in a bad place and constantly worrying that my situation would cost me my job. My role involves supporting others experiencing domestic abuse, and I felt like I'd appear incompetent because I was struggling myself. Eventually, I decided to open up to my manager, Scott, because he always checked in on me during our one-to-ones and had noticed I'd been quieter than usual. I was overwhelmed by the support I received; it was beyond what I expected —it really helped ease some of my worries. I still fear Harrison every day, but I feel like I'm finally taking steps toward a better future."

Conclusion

With safety measures in place, Ellie was able to continue working without the fear of losing her job. The combination of enhanced security and emotional support enabled Ellie to focus on rebuilding her life. This case demonstrates the importance of employer support in cases of domestic abuse and highlights how crucial workplace safety can be. Through understanding, collaboration, and prompt action, the organisation created a safer environment for Ellie, demonstrating their commitment to employee welfare.

Case study – Amy’s story

“Being a victim of domestic abuse doesn’t define my ability to do my job.”



Amy, a well-respected support worker, had been in a relationship with Charlie for just over three years. At the start of the relationship Charlie seemed perfect, he was loving, and attentive, with his own property management business and penthouse flat by the river. Their relationship moved quickly, and Amy gave up her flat and moved in with Charlie after three months. However, this is when things changed, Charlie became jealous

of her relationship with family and friends and began monitoring where she went and who she saw. As the months progressed Charlie began to physically attack Amy when things didn’t go his way, manipulating and controlling every aspect of her life.

Seeking support

Feeling overwhelmed, during a one-to-one meeting with her manager, Steph, Amy revealed that following working overtime, Charlie had become suspicious of her whereabouts, which ended in him physically attacking her. Steph could see bruise marks on Amy’s wrists and reported the incident to the police. In their one-to-one meeting Steph also questioned Amy’s professional judgement in light of the incident but did not offer any further help or guidance. This left Amy feeling isolated and unsupported, which only added to her sense of vulnerability.

Accepting help

Following the police report, Amy was contacted by Lucy, an Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA), from an Essex support service. Amy, being a professional working in the domestic abuse sector, was hesitant to engage due to her position and concerns about who would find out. She feared that disclosing her situation could damage her professional reputation and expressed anxiety about being heard at the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC).

Amy also shared that her abusive partner, Charlie, had been threatening to release sensitive personal information and images to her employer. This threat loomed over her, she felt embarrassed, and feared it would ruin her career and professional credibility.

Despite these concerns, Lucy continued to reach out and explained how Amy’s identity could be protected. After several weeks of reassurance and consistent outreach, Amy finally agreed to accept help, revealing the extent of the abuse she had been experiencing. Lucy, recognising the high risk of harm Amy was facing, immediately developed a comprehensive safety plan. Lucy also contacted the MARAC manager to discuss how Amy’s case could be heard in a way that protected her confidentiality.

Lucy provided tailored support to help Amy regain control over her life. This included helping Amy communicate to her manager about her situation and providing a letter to Amy's manager, allowing her to access counselling sessions during work hours without professional repercussions.

Moving forward

Amy continues to receive IDVA support from Lucy and is making good progress, both personally and professionally. She ended her relationship with Charlie, securing her own place to live.

Amy has been able to have open and transparent conversations with her manager. She now feels supported in the workplace and is receiving the appropriate supervision and understanding.

Amy says - "Being a victim of domestic abuse while working as a professional in the domestic abuse sector has been almost as challenging as the abuse itself.

When I reached out to senior staff for help, I was met with silence—no policies in place, no acknowledgment, nothing to support someone trying to leave an abusive relationship.

Everything my abuser told me, like 'no one will take you seriously, they'll question your role, you'll be alone, and you won't get any support,' started to feel true. It made it even harder for me to open up, share my story, or be honest.

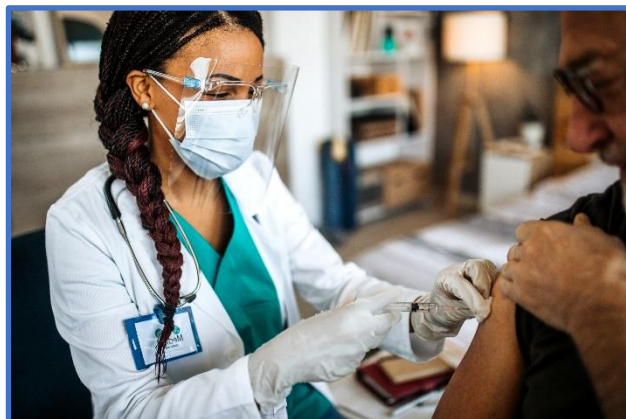
The fear of losing my job became a real factor in why I stayed in the relationship. Things have improved, and I do receive support now, but it's taken so much energy just to prove my worth every single day, to prove that being a victim doesn't define my ability to do my job."

Conclusion

Amy faced both personal and professional challenges. What started as a loving relationship turned into control and abuse, leaving her feeling isolated. Amy's story highlights how tailored and confidential support can make all the difference in helping professionals experiencing domestic abuse find safety, confidence, and a path forward.

Case study – Sarah’s story

“I know that the shame and embarrassment I felt should not have stopped me from seeking help.”



Sarah, a dedicated district nurse working in Essex, had been married to her husband, John, for 25 years. They shared a large home in the Hertfordshire countryside with their two children—an adult child studying away at university and a teenager still living at home.

John had always been controlling, but Sarah had managed to cope, especially since he often worked away. However,

everything changed during the COVID-19 pandemic when John began working from home, John’s controlling and abusive behaviour became worse.

In May 2023, Sarah's life took a pivotal turn

Upon arriving at work with bruises on her face and a noticeable limp, her concerned line manager asked what had happened. Though hesitant, Sarah’s response led to a report being made to the NHS safeguarding team lead for domestic abuse.

Sarah reluctantly agreed to a referral to a domestic abuse service out of her area as she was concerned about being known and her professionalism being questioned. Sarah agreed to speak with Estelle an Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) from a support service located in a different area of Essex from where Sarah worked.

Building trust and taking action

Over the next few months, Estelle began to earn her trust. A thorough risk assessment was conducted, revealing the full extent of the danger Sarah was in. Estelle, recognising the high risk, took swift action, ensuring Sarah’s workplace were made aware and a safety plan implemented. Due to Sarah living in Hertfordshire, it was necessary for Estelle to make a referral to the Hertfordshire Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) with Sarah’s knowledge.

Sarah’s life slowly began to change. Sarah was supported to safely leave her family home; an application was made to the Women’s Aid emergency fund to support Sarah’s deposit for a private rent property. Sarah was also supported in seeking medical treatment for the injuries she had sustained, injuries that included permanent damage to her kidneys and scarring on her body. She had avoided seeking medical support in the past due to the nature of her role as District Nurse and staff knowing her.

Estelle provided Sarah with a safe space to discuss issues with a non-judgemental attitude. In addition to physical support, Sarah was given access to therapeutic services to help her

process the trauma she had endured. She was also introduced to the [Kulpa app](#), which allowed her to document evidence of the abuse, a necessary precaution since her husband had previously deleted similar evidence from her phone.

Moving forward and changing pathways

As Sarah's confidence grew, so did her ability to take control of her life. With the help of Estelle, she received advice on everything from civil orders to potential legal actions and eventually decided to pursue a divorce.

Although Sarah's journey was not without setbacks, Sarah had achieved something she once thought impossible: she had fled the family home, taking her children with her. She began speaking openly about her experiences with those close to her. She understood now that the abuse was not her fault, and the shame she once felt had diminished.

Sarah went on to gain a promotion at work, something John would have previously discouraged or blocked. This promotion not only boosted her confidence but also improved her ability to support herself and her children financially.

Today, Sarah understands the dynamics of abuse, knows her rights, and is empowered to live her life on her own terms.

Sarah says

"I now know that the shame and embarrassment I felt should not have stopped me from seeking help. I feel stronger each day. John sometimes contacts me, it is hard, like over the Christmas period, when I am feeling vulnerable, he tries to take advantage, but I have come too far to ever go back."

Conclusion

Sarah's journey highlights the unique challenges faced by professionals and those working within domestic abuse services when they themselves become victims. The complexities of such cases underline the need for different approaches to domestic abuse intervention. Building trust with victims, especially those who are professionals themselves, requires time, patience, and an understanding of the additional barriers they face.

The fear of being "known," coupled with concerns about professional reputation, can make reaching out for help even more difficult. Through a combination of trust-building, tailored support, and empowerment, Sarah was able to reclaim her life, ensuring a safer and more secure future for herself and her children.

Local Support Services

COMPASS

www.essexcompass.org.uk

0330 333 7 444

Essex domestic abuse helpline – support available for anyone living in Southend, Essex or Thurrock. Available 8am-8pm weekdays and 8am-1pm weekends. Trained staff will provide information, advice and guidance and where appropriate, complete an assessment and ensure contact is made with the most appropriate support service so that the right support is provided at the right time. Community services and specialist accommodation such as refuges, IDVA and outreach work will be delivered by our local domestic abuse service providers.

The Change Hub

www.thechange-project.org

0800 5003006

Offers help to anyone using abusive behaviour to positively change their behaviour. This service is available to anyone living in Southend, Essex or Thurrock.

Synergy Essex (Essex Partnership of Rape Crisis Centre)

www.synergysessex.org.uk

0300 003 7777

Offers a specialist service for victims of rape or sexual abuse.

National Support Services

National Domestic Abuse Helpline (24 hour)

www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk

0808 2000 247

Supports women and children to find safe emergency accommodation in refuges across the UK. The helpline is free and available 24 hours a day.

ManKind Initiative

www.mankind.org.uk

0808 800 1170

Gives support to male victims of domestic abuse.

Men's Advice Line

www.mensadvice.org.uk

0808 801 0327

Confidential helpline for men experiencing domestic abuse.

Respect

www.respectphoneline.org.uk

0808 8024040

Respect is the UK charity stopping perpetrators of domestic abuse.

National Centre for Domestic Violence (NCDV)

www.ncdv.org.uk

0800 970 2070

Offers free legal support to any survivor of domestic violence, by helping individuals get emergency injunctions, usually within 24 hours.

Karma Nirvana

www.karmanirvana.org.uk

0800 5999 247

Supporting victims of honour-based abuse and forced marriage.

LGBT Foundation

www.lgbt.foundation

0345 330 3030

National charity delivering advice, support and information services to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender communities.

Victim Support

www.victimsupport.org.uk/resources/essex/

0808 178 1694

Offers help to anyone affected by crime – victims, witnesses, friends and family. This can include emotional support, information and practical help, either over the phone or face-to-face.