

UNISON Welfare Information sheet

Support for members affected by domestic abuse

Introduction

This information sheet is designed to inform branches about the support available through UNISON Welfare the charity and includes some simple steps on supporting members and contacting local organisations that can help.

About domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is widespread in society – it knows no boundaries. It can happen in all types of relationships - between partners, families, children and the elderly and affects both opposite and same sex relationships. It occurs between people of all cultures, religions or classes and is based on one person having or misusing power or control over another.

It can take many forms such as physical, sexual, emotional or financial abuse. It can lead to exclusion, being cut off from your family and friends and is very common.

No one deserves to be assaulted, abused or humiliated by another. It is a chain of events which needs to be broken.

UNISON was the first trade union to recognise domestic abuse as a workplace issue with the Raise the Roof on Domestic Abuse campaign. As the campaign guide stated, one in five of our colleagues – the majority of them women – are affected by domestic violence at some time in their lives.

First steps to getting help

Admitting it's happening

This is the first step and probably the most important. The pattern of abuse can include destructive criticism, undue pressure, disrespect, isolation and harassment. Some abusers say 'sorry' but go on to do more and sometimes worse. Pressure can be put on the victim to 'not tell', with the implication of worse happening. Don't underestimate the effect on children, they are often present when the abuse takes place.

Accept it's not your fault

Often the abused think it's their fault – it's not. The abuser has to change their behaviour and there is no excuse.

Barriers to getting help

There are many barriers to asking or getting help, many emotional - embarrassment, fear of retribution, shame, feeling responsible, feeling powerless. Concerns of how they will manage, issues around children, having to live in temporary accommodation and the disruption and upheaval to routine can also act as barriers to asking for help. Cultural factors may also be important, for example, where reporting domestic abuse goes against cultural norms.

How can I get help?

There are many national and local organisations that can help. Your local police will have someone who can advise your members. This doesn't mean they will automatically take legal action. Their prime concern will be to advise on safety – never be afraid to ask for help.

Local support groups such as Victim Support, the local Council or police will know where you can get access to a refuge in your area and advise you on who to contact and other agencies that can help, such as for claiming benefits and legal advice. You can get details of helpful organisations from your local library or Citizens Advice Bureau but consult the list at the back of this information sheet for some suggestions – and of course there is UNISON Welfare

How UNISON Welfare can help

UNISON Welfare is a charity. We provide a confidential service offering advice and support just for UNISON members and their families. The range of services includes

- Debt advice
- Listening and support
- Financial assistance
- Breaks and holidays
- Personal advice

We recognise the difficulties involved in domestic abuse and can help to alleviate some of the problems facing victims.

Apart from providing advice and referral to other organisations we can give financial help that is specifically targeted towards the needs of those affected.

For example:

- financial help towards the costs associated with escaping a violent relationship such as setting up in a new home.
- help to recover from the stress and trauma of an abusive relationship with a Wellbeing Break – such as a family holiday or get well break.
- emergency grants

A full copy of the criteria can be downloaded from the welfare pages on the website.

How to apply

Our application for financial assistance and wellbeing breaks application forms and guidelines can be printed in printer friendly versions from the website or ordered from communications quoting stock no.s 1955 and 2391 respectively.

Alternatively you can obtain these from UNISON Welfare at national office or your branch welfare officer. Please read the guidelines on how to complete the application forms or again contact us at national office or speak to your branch welfare officer for further assistance.

If you need to discuss a member's needs in confidence, need emergency help or have any questions about our services and how to apply then please contact us at national office and ask to speak to a caseworker. Your branch welfare officer may also be able to help.

Other materials

UNISON's National Women's Committee has produced a full colour A3 poster 'Don't Look the Other Way' with contact details for support from UNISON Welfare. Available from the online catalogue www.unison.org.uk/catalogue.

The poster also highlights UNISON's role in negotiating workplace agreements on domestic abuse. To obtain a model agreement go to www.unison.org.uk/women

CONTACT DETAILS

UNISON Welfare (Reg. Charity No. 1023552)

Contact us on Tel: 020 7551 1620

e-mail: welfare@unison.co.uk or visit our website www.unison.org.uk/welfare

UNISON Welfare Debtline: 0800 389 3302

8am to 9pm Monday – Friday and 9am to 1pm Saturdays

www.debtclinic.co.uk/unison

National and local organisations

Domestic Violence Helpline 0808 2000 247 (Run by Women's Aid and Refuge)

Women's Aid www.womensaid.org.uk

Broken Rainbow - Lesbian, gay, bisexual & transgender forum www.broken-rainbow.org.uk Tel: 07812 644914 Helpline 08452 604460

Local Domestic Abuse Forum – your local council should have contact details

Local Women's Aid Refuge - look in your local directory

Victim Support www.victimsupport.org.uk Tel: 0845 4040 900

The Police - look in your local directory

The Samaritans Tel: 0345 909090

National Child Protection Helpline (NSPCC) Tel: 0800 800500

Careline 0208 5141177

Male Advice Line 0845 0646800

Legal Aid advisers - www.justask.org.uk/index.jsp

Action on Elder Abuse www.elderabuse.org.uk Tel: 0208 7657000

The White Ribbon Campaign UK www.whiteribboncampaign.co.uk

Remember if you are facing an emergency dial 999

UNISON Welfare case stories (names have been changed)

Case story 1

Part-time council employee Zainab Khan's money problems developed after the birth of her second child and the break up with her partner who had gambled money set-aside for bills.

Ms Khan and her new son were also experiencing health problems with frequent visits to hospital. She could ill afford problems with tax credits, which she was also experiencing.

As well as a grant of £672 towards food and household bills we were able to offer a grant of £400 for a 'get well break' for Ms Khan and the children. "I did not know at the time that I really needed a break", said Ms Khan. "I feel so much better and a lot less stressed. My children were very happy and more relaxed."

There are many different problems faced by members and many different ways we can help. Confidential advice is an important part of the service.

Case story 2

When administrator Clara, contacted UNISON Welfare for financial help, she and her two young daughters, aged 7 and 5, were still overcoming a violent marriage.

It wasn't until she eventually found the strength to leave her husband that she discovered he had been subsidising his heavy drinking by not paying bills. Despite the intervention of the police, he caught up with them on numerous occasions leaving Clara's children traumatised.

UNISON Welfare was able to ease the family's situation by making a grant of £500 towards the cost of household items and bills including electricity, school meals, bedding and clothing. The chance of a break was also offered. "Even though you were strangers to me I felt totally uplifted that somebody cared," said Clara. "Clara has regained confidence and seems completely transformed," commented her branch secretary.