

# Protecting victims of domestic violence at work

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The Domestic Violence – Victims’ Protection Act 2018 came into force on 1 April 2019, and protects domestic violence victims at work.

Domestic violence victims who are in paid employment have the right to:

- Take at least 10 days paid Domestic Violence Leave. This is separate and additional to other leave (eg annual, sick, bereavement)
- Request short-term flexible working arrangements for up to two months
- Be treated without discrimination in the workplace because they might have experienced domestic violence

## Domestic violence defined

In New Zealand, the term domestic violence includes physical, sexual and psychological abuse – including intimidation, damage to property, threats of abuse and financial or economic abuse, emotional abuse, playing mind games. It extends to abuse by a partner, another family member or a former partner.

A person affected by domestic violence can be the victim themselves, or someone who lives with a child who is, or has been, the victim of domestic violence.

## Liability vs investment

It’s easy to see this Act as another clinic compliance cost. That was my initial reaction until I started digging deeper.

Yes – it is an added obligation which clinics cannot contract out of. But, when incorporated into a clinic’s values and culture position in a caring and thoughtful way, it becomes an investment.

The PSA Productivity Gains from Workplace Protection of Victims of Domestic Violence report (Kahui, Ku &

Snively, 2014) found domestic violence costs New Zealand employers \$368 million a year.

The Kahui report determined these (hidden) costs could be avoided and/or mitigated by employers through implementing workplace protection initiatives.

Workplace support and protection initiatives increased productivity and saved costs in recruitment, retention, re-training, health and safety. For every employee whose experience of violence is prevented through workplace protection, employers avoided, on average, \$3,371 in annual productivity costs (New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, n.d.)

If you’re reading this and wondering how your clinic is going to afford to offer this additional leave to affected employees, you may be surprised to discover you’re already paying for it. Domestic violence could already be affecting your clinic’s productivity and workplace accident levels.

Those affected employees are already taking time off work, their productivity is already being compromised and other team members are already covering for them (with varying levels of effectiveness and success).

If someone on your team is living with domestic violence of some form, your clinic is already paying the price.

## Domestic violence protection and positive change can start at work

Victims, survivors and perpetrators can be found in any workplace. Any profession. Any suburb. Any veterinary clinic.

Even though most family violence incidents in New Zealand remain unreported, from September 2018 to August 2019 police investigated one incident every four minutes (Help Auckland, n.d). By the time you’ve finished reading this article two women in New Zealand have likely been beaten.

If your clinic has five women, possibly one of them has experienced sexual abuse and/or assault. Approximately 20% of NZ women, one in three girls under 16 years, and

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Julie enjoys matching veterinary clinics and professionals together. She sees recruitment as the perfect way to combine her love of marketing, people and animals. Working nationwide, she’s always up for coffee dates.

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one in seven boys, are sexually abused by adulthood (Gerrard, 2018).

Notwithstanding every employee's life is priceless and cannot be measured, the cost of indifference to domestic violence protection at work shows up on your clinic's bottom line in very real terms.

### Turning a blind eye

It's easy to think we need to mind our own business. To not get involved. That if someone wants help, they'll ask for it. Sadly, that's not true.

Your concern for a colleague could save their life.

Not surprisingly, 2020 has been a horror year – especially for violent crimes – and the year isn't over yet. As at writing, there are still another 10 weeks to run.

Tragically, between Monday 27 April 2020 (when New Zealand came out of its first alert level four lockdown) through to 7 June 2020 – a mere six weeks – 13 people lost their lives as a result of violence (Leask, 2020).

### Signs of domestic violence

Please remain vigilant to the following scenarios at your clinic because maybe, just maybe, domestic violence (physical & psychological) could be taking place at your colleague's home:

- Excuses for injuries (“I tripped”)
- Personality changes (low self-esteem in someone previously confident)
- Constant checking in / checking up by a partner or ex (phone calls, texts, drive-bys at work, ‘spontaneous’ visits to work) justified because they care
- Clothing incongruent with the season (long sleeves in summer covering bruises) or inappropriate dress style to please someone else (overly restrictive or revealing)
- Justification of the significant other's unacceptable behaviour (“is going through a bad patch”, “just been laid off”)
- Increased absenteeism or lateness because they couldn't find their keys, (meds, phone, lunch or something else required during the day), or they got held up at home by something
- Damage to personal property (scratched or dented vehicle, damaged or destroyed phone)

None of these events in isolation is proof of domestic violence. However, several of these events that, once upon

a time would have been considered out of character, could mean there's a problem at home.

New relationships and Tinder-like meetups can be just as unhealthy, violent, controlling or manipulative as long-term ones (remember Grace Millane - may she rest in peace).

### Clinic implementation

The Workplace Policy Builder ([wpb.business.govt.nz](http://wpb.business.govt.nz)) is a good place to start if you haven't yet documented your clinic's policies or are unsure where to begin.

Clinics where true leadership is part of the DNA means there are people who're prepared to go above and beyond the legal minimum. However, if that's not happening at your clinic and/or you're feeling out of your depth with where to start, visit <https://www.dvfree.org.nz/> – they'll be able to point you in the right direction.

The first step – without question – is to make it easy for any of your colleagues to get help if and when they need it. There are many free downloadable workplace posters from <http://www.2shine.org.nz/shop> (phone 0508 744 633).

Wise leaders recognise having a family domestic violence policy at work makes a positive difference to staff morale, their bottom line through lower absenteeism, lower staff turnover and greater productivity.

Take a stand about caring for your colleagues. Introducing the conversation because you genuinely want to make a difference takes guts and courage. Being indifferent, half-hearted or blaming the Act as the reason for starting the conversation is the coward's way out. This type of approach will result in victims dropping further below the radar. No one respects a namer, blamer or shamer.

Courageous leadership engenders respect, loyalty and pride. Start the conversation with your team because you care about them.

Your courage may save a colleague's life!

### References

Gerrard, J. (2018). Every 4 minutes: A discussion paper on preventing family violence in New Zealand. *Office of the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor*. <https://cpb-ap-se2.wpmucdn.com/blogs.auckland.ac.nz/dist/f/688/files/2020/02/Every-4-minutes-A-discussion-paper-on-preventing-family-violence-in-New-Zealand.->

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

[Lambie-report-8.11.18-x43nf4.pdf](#)

Help Auckland. (n.d.) *Sexual Abuse Statistics*. <https://www.helpauckland.org.nz/sexual-abuse-statistics.html>

Kahui, S., Ku, B. & Snively, S. (2014, March 21). *Productivity Gains from Workplace Protection of Victims of Domestic Violence*. PSA. <http://www.psa.org.nz/assets/Reports/Workplace+Productivity+Improvements+for+DV+21+May+2014.pdf>

Leask, A. (2020, June 7) Murderous May: Spike in homicides following Covid-19 lockdown. New Zealand Herald. <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/murderous-may-spike-in-homicides-following-covid-19-lockdown/SR6LSQL6VN7WL5CFUS5LNS6I6Y/>

New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse. (2014, 3 April). *Research evidence costs of domestic violence to employers*. <https://nzfvc.org.nz/news/research-evidences-cost-domestic-violence-employers>

## Resources

Are you okay: <http://areyouok.org.nz/>

Domestic Violence: Victims' Protection Act 2018  
<https://www.employment.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/tools-and-resources/documents/40d89abf29/domestic-violence-victims-protection-act-factsheet.pdf>

Domestic Violence Leave: <https://www.employment.govt.nz/leave-and-holidays/domestic-violence-leave>

DV Free: <https://www.dvfree.org.nz/>

Family Violence Workplace Policy Builder: <https://wpb.business.govt.nz/workplacepolicybuilder/familyViolence/whyWeHaveThisFamilyViolencePolicy>

Shine: [www.2shine.org.nz/shop](http://www.2shine.org.nz/shop)

Wellplace: <https://wellplace.nz/resource-library/businesses-working-to-end-family-violence/>

White Ribbon: <https://whiteribbon.org.nz/workplace-accreditation/>

Womens Refuge: <https://womensrefuge.org.nz/training/responsive-workplaces/>