



Fernwood Fitness: Conversation Guide for Team Leaders

What is Domestic and Family Violence (DFV)?

DFV occurs when one person in a relationship uses violence and abuse to maintain power and control over the other person. This can include behaviour that is physically, sexually, emotionally, psychologically or economically abusive, threatening, coercive or aimed at controlling or dominating the other person through fear.

DFV can affect people of all cultures, religions, ages, genders, sexual orientations, educational backgrounds and income levels.

Some groups are more vulnerable to domestic and family violence, e.g. women, culturally and linguistically diverse, LGBTIQ+, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and people with a disability.

Why is DFV a workplace issue?

DFV can impact a person's safety, wellbeing, attendance, and performance at work. When DFV extends from the home into the workplace, it increases the risk of harm for the affected employees and other employees. The person experiencing violence may be harassed with phone calls or emails, or may be visited in the workplace by the person who uses or may be using violence and abuse.

Signs of DFV

An employee experiencing DFV may show the following signs:

- Late to work or must leave work early
- Cancels meetings at the last minute
- Seems afraid of, or is always anxious not to upset their partner or someone else close to them
- Describes their partner as controlling (e.g. monitoring their movements or expenses, constantly phoning, messaging or texting)
- Has physical injuries and gives unlikely explanations, or wears baggy clothes or excessive make-up to hide the injuries
- Receives disruptive phone calls or emails
- Appears distracted, tired or unwell
- Feels fearful, anxious, depressed or shows a loss of confidence
- Stressed or distressed (e.g. crying).

This is not an exhaustive list of behaviours, and may be the result of several issues for an employee. It should trigger you to check on the welfare of an employee. If you notice an employee displaying any of these signs regularly, it is important to have a conversation with them, while not making a direct judgement that relates to DFV.

If you suspect that behaviours or physical injuries relate to DFV, your initial approach to an employee is very important and can make a real difference. If an affected employee feels supported, they are more likely to explore their options and seek professional support.

Remember you may be the first person they have told about their experiences. If they make a disclosure, how you respond can be very important.

All managers should be familiar with the [Fernwood Fitness DFV Policy](#) to ensure you understand the support options available to affected employees, in case a disclosure is made.

Start a conversation

The initial conversation can be difficult. A controlling partner often blames the victim for the violence, so an abused person may be afraid of judgement and become defensive.

Ask the person if they would like to talk further with you. If it's not appropriate timing for them, make another time when there are no disruptions. If the person does not want to talk, express your concern for them anyway and reassure them that you are here for them, when they are ready to talk.

You could use any of the following to help you start the conversation in a sensitive and respectful way:

1. I've noticed (outline what you have been noticing in terms of behaviours, physical appearance)
 - Ask them if they want to talk about what is happening/has been happening?
 - How are things going for you?
2. I am trying to understand/get a clearer understanding of what is going on.
3. I am concerned about (outline your concerns) ... do you want to talk about it?
 - You do not seem yourself....
 - I'm worried about you
 - Do you have anyone to support you? [OBJ]

Responding to disclosures

It is important to listen to what they say without interrupting. You may be the first person they have ever told. Let them know they are not responsible for the other person's abusive behaviour. It is also critical to believe what they are saying. It may only be the tip of the iceberg as to what is actually happening. You are not expected to be the person's counsellor, but rather listen to them and refer them onto the appropriate support services.

Acknowledge their fear in talking with you and assure them their concerns are serious and will remain confidential. Confidentiality is of paramount importance throughout this process. People should feel they can come forward and seek support and help without fear of their information or situation being divulged to others. There are situations where you may need to breach confidentiality, due to risks to the person or others. Tell the individual if this is the case.

Ask them how safe they are feeling in their current situation, if they are in immediate danger, and how we can help them feel safe at work. Where the employee feels they are in danger, refer them to a DFV helpline (1800 Respect) or suggest contacting the police to arrange a Domestic Violence Order, or other orders to assist them in protecting their safety and welfare.

It is important to remind them in the event of an emergency, they should call the police on triple zero (000).

If an employee discloses that Fernwood Fitness also employs the person that they allege is using violence and abuse, do not approach the other party as this may be a breach of confidentiality.

If the alleged behaviour has occurred or is continuing to occur at work or during work hours, information must be escalated to the manager to contact the Franchisee for advice. The individual risk assessment and safety plan will provide guidance as how to manage the situation if the two parties are in the same workplace.

It is important to be aware of how comfortable you are feeling during the conversation and try to find a way of being supportive that does not abandon the employee.

Referral and support services

Ask the employee if they are aware of support services available to them. If they are not aware, tell them of the support services available through:

- 1800Respect – 1800 737 732
- Lifeline – 13 11 14
- Relationships Australia – 1300 364 277

[Click here for the Fernwood DFV Policy](#)

You can also provide the employee with other possible support resources including White Ribbon or Our Watch. It is also important to ask them about the support they have available outside of work (e.g., family, friends or relatives, and accommodation assistance).

End the conversation

Do not pressure the employee to make any decisions

They need to make the decisions that are best for them and their family. Remind the employee that your door is always open, and Fernwood Fitness has several support options available.

Use statements such as...

- Thank you for trusting me – I understand this must have been difficult for you.
- I'm concerned about the health and safety of you and your children.
- I believe you.
- It's not your fault.
- I appreciate how difficult it is to change the situation, it may take you some time to figure out what to do.
- I will support you no matter what you decide to do.

Ask them to check back with you within an agreed timeframe.

Conversations tips and examples

- Non-judgemental and careful listening is critical during any conversations – this can be empowering for the affected employee.
- Do not tell them what to do – help them explore options available.
- Communicate belief in what you are told – 'that must have been frightening for you...'
- Validate the experience of abuse – 'it must have been difficult for you to talk about this...'
- Affirm that violence is an unacceptable behaviour – 'violence is unacceptable, you don't deserve to be treated in this way...'
- Focus on their safety and the safety of their children (if any) by saying things like – 'I'm really afraid for your safety.' Always recommend they call the police on triple zero (000) if they believe their life (or others) is in immediate danger.
- Respect the person's right to make his or her own decisions. When the employee is ready to talk, it is important to listen to them without judgement and to take the issue seriously. It is also important to respect the decisions they make and help find ways for them to become stronger and safer. Even if you do not agree, you should respect their right to make their own decisions.
- Remember that confidentiality is paramount – the employee has trusted you in having this conversation.

Topics to avoid

There are some things to avoid when talking to an affected employee. You do not want them to feel judged or criticised, or too afraid or ashamed to talk about the abusive relationship.

Avoid making negative comments about the person using violence and abuse. It is understandable that you may feel anger and disgust towards the person using violence and abuse. However, if you share any negative comments about them, this may make your employee want to defend and make excuses for them, especially if this is their partner. It is more helpful to focus on supporting them.

It is equally important not to ask questions, such as:

- Why don't you leave?
- What could you have done to avoid this situation?
- Why did they hit/hurt you?

Looking after yourself

Supporting affected employees can be difficult. If you are supporting someone, you should:

- Get support for yourself – your personal welfare is also important in this process.
- Talk to a counsellor at 1800Respect
- Be clear with yourself and the affected employee about how much and what type of support you can give
- Remember your support, whether you realise it or not, is valuable.

More information

For further guidance, view our DFV Policy, or talk to your Club Franchise Owner.