

# Working from home isn't safe when home isn't safe:

*How to respond to family & domestic  
violence in home-based workplaces.*



*Brought to your workplace by the Australian Services Union NSW & ACT (Services) Branch  
and its commitment to ending domestic violence*



By your side

WORKING FROM HOME ISN'T SAFE WHEN HOME ISN'T SAFE:  
HOW TO RESPOND TO FAMILY & DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN HOME-BASED WORKPLACES

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[www.asumembers.org.au](http://www.asumembers.org.au)

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Over the last year Australia has experienced bushfires, floods and the COVID-19 pandemic. These natural disasters have changed traditional work patterns and workplaces. Technology has provided an alternative to traditional ways of working for many businesses, workers and organisations. Working from home has become the new workplace for many workers.

As well as changing how many people work COVID-19 has led to increased physical isolation, financial stress, higher levels of unemployment, under employment, increased workload with no extra pay, increased alcohol and drug use and an increase in domestic and family violence.

## WORKING FROM HOME, THE 2020S WORKPLACE?

The cultural shift to working from home has not reduced the importance of work health and safety (WHS) principles and obligations. Under WHS laws employers have a duty to ensure the health and safety of workers, minimize risks and consult with workers when workers are working from home. The vital role of workplaces in preventing and responding to family and domestic violence is just as important when workers are working from home. Domestic violence remains a workplace issue.

## WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

Domestic and family violence is behaviour and conduct that is violent, threatening, coercive, controlling or intended to cause the family or household member to be fearful. It is usually part of a pattern of behaviour that creates fear. It is always about gaining and maintaining power over another.

The terms domestic violence, family violence and gendered violence are often used interchangeably. More detailed definitions and descriptions of these terms, can be found in the *ASU Workplace Guide to Preventing & Responding to Domestic Violence*.



## SIGNS OF FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Just as in a traditional workplace, when a worker is working from home there can be signs that a worker is experiencing domestic violence. Those signs are likely to be different to the signs you would recognize in a traditional workplace. Remote working often means less face to face contact. Interactions with workers is more commonly through online meetings, email and phone conversations, document sharing and text messages. In-person meetings can become infrequent.

## POSSIBLE WARNING SIGNS OR CUES COULD INCLUDE:

### Online meetings:

- Background noises that purposely causes disruption or interruption
- Inappropriate, offensive or abusive comments in the background
- Person moving in and out of conversation or screen
- Video always or mostly turned off
- Leaving online meetings abruptly, before meeting has ended or uncharacteristically wanting to 'wrap up'
- A feeling that someone else is observing, eg tentative off-screen glances by the worker

### Emails:

- Does not respond to emails in a timely manner – avoids or delays responding
- You may notice that the worker sends emails at the same time each day - late at night when the person is asleep, or at a time each day that coincides with the person being at work or out of the house.

### Phone Conversations:

- Background noises that cause disruption or interruption
- Inappropriate, offensive or abusive comments in the background
- Conversations ended abruptly
- The worker's responses are uncharacteristically short, non-conversational, or stilted

### Text messages:

- Messages that are out of character
- Sentence structure, use of English is not consistent with the worker's normal messages
- Messages that indicate a lack of information that you know the worker knows
- Messages cancelling meetings at short notice
- Messages reporting in sick frequently

### Avoiding face to face meetings:

- Regularly finds excuses not to come into the office
- Comes to the office with clear intention to leave quickly or does not want to leave.

### Avoiding working from home:

- Very anxious to get back to workplace or not work from home but wants you to make that decision

It will be rare that all of the above will occur. Some behaviours may be for very good reasons that are not related to domestic or family violence. The main thing is to recognise out of character behaviour, or behaviour that may indicate they are being monitored, or that someone in their home is being disrespectful toward their work.

## HOW TO RESPOND

If you think there are warning signs use the signs to begin a conversation. Don't jump to conclusions, inquire sensitively about the worker's well-being.

We suggest you approach in the following ways:

- Be aware that all of the worker's communications may be monitored. The worker may not be able to speak freely and your questions could increase risk for them. Ask the worker to let you know a convenient time as you need to have an important conversation with them. Let them know it can be by phone, email, message or other mutually convenient way. People who are living with violence are often very good at managing their own safety. If you are not sure you can say you need them to come into the office for a meeting.
- Approach the topic sensitively, non-judgmentally and privately. It will be important that they feel as safe as possible.
- Explain that you have noticed out of character signs and express your concern for them. If they do not want to talk, express your concern for them anyway. Let them know they can always come and talk with you, or someone else in the workplace, or their Union.

If they confirm they are unsafe:

- Tell them that domestic and family violence is never okay and they have done nothing to deserve or cause it. Let them know that you believe them and how you can support them. Especially talk about safety.



- Assure them that they can talk to you confidentially, that you will listen and, except in extreme circumstances you will not do anything without their agreement.
- Have agreed 'safe words'. When the worker uses one of the words, they are letting you know the perpetrator is monitoring the communication. A different agreed safe word will let you know the worker wants you to call the Police or take some other agreed action.
- Inform them that paid domestic violence leave is available to them.
- Tell them that specialist domestic violence services are available to support them and that you can assist them to access those services.
- Offer to help them contact police or support services.
- Offer to help them speak with a domestic violence counsellor, you can call Rape & Domestic Violence Services Australia on 1800 943 539 and 'warm transfer' the worker to immediately speak to a counsellor.

## ORGANISATIONAL RESPONSE

- Provide paid domestic violence leave to workers experiencing domestic violence.
- Develop, implement and consult all staff on family and domestic violence policies and procedures for your organisation or business. FDV workplace policies should include:
  - workplace and personal safety plans (See the ASU's A Workplace Guide to Preventing & Responding to Domestic Violence pg 11).
  - appointing a 'contact person' for workers experiencing FDV to contact
  - mechanisms to change email addresses, phone numbers, working hours or location for workers who discloses that they are living with violence
  - flexible working arrangements in addition to paid domestic violence leave
  - mechanisms for co-workers to report concerns about FDV to a 'contact person'
  - ensuring confidentiality of workers disclosing or reporting FDV is protected
- Provide training and ongoing support for an appropriate person or group of people in your organisation who is prepared to become the 'contact person'.
- Be aware of the impacts of vicarious trauma and support the employee who has been responding to the worker. Inform them of the Rape & Domestic Violence Services Australia debriefing service where they can speak with a professional counsellor.



# Family and Domestic Violence Support Services to refer to:

## **Rape and Domestic Violence Services Australia (RDVSA)**

**1800 943 539**

Provides 24-hour phone and online counselling and support service to people who have experienced sexual, domestic or family violence. Face to face counselling at NSW Women's Health Centres also available.

## **1800 Respect**

**1800 737 732**

National 24-hour phone and online counselling and referral service.

## **Women's Legal Services NSW**

**1800 801 501 or (02) 8745 6988**

Free confidential legal information, advice and referrals for women in NSW with a focus on family law, domestic violence, sexual assault and discrimination. Open Monday and Thursday: 9:30am - 12:30pm, and Tuesday: 1:30pm - 4:30pm.

## **Indigenous Women's legal contact line**

**1800 639 784 or (02) 8745 6977**

Free confidential legal information, advice and referrals for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in NSW with a focus on domestic violence, sexual assault, parenting issues, family law, discrimination and victim's support.

## **The Immigration Advice and Rights Centre (IARC)**

**(02) 8234 0700**

Provides a dedicated domestic and family violence service including assisting workers experiencing domestic and family violence with their visa status.

## **Domestic Violence Legal Service**

**1800 810 784 or (02) 8745 6999**

Provides free confidential legal information, advice and referrals about domestic violence and Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders (ADVOs). Open Monday and Thursday: 1:30pm - 4:30pm, and Tuesday and Friday: 9:30am - 12:30pm

## **LGBTIQ+ support**

**1800 497 212**

ACON supported 24-hour phone and online counselling for people from the LGBTIQ+ community who have experienced sexual, domestic and/or family violence.

# Family and Domestic Violence Training with Rape and Domestic Violence Services Australia:

## **Introduction to Vicarious Trauma** (e-learning)

60 minute online interactive workshop for anyone who is working with those who have experienced trauma. The workshop supports individuals to understand the concept of vicarious trauma and provides an overview of strategies for managing the impacts of vicarious trauma.

## **Responding with Compassion** (e-learning)

60 minute online interactive workshop. This workshop supports individuals to form a framework to provide a compassionate and supportive response to survivors of trauma.

**Workplace Responses** is a 4 hours program which can be provided face to face or by video conference.

- Provides practical and proactive skills for leadership staff who are responding to disclosures of domestic and family violence or sexual assault and supporting staff toward recovery.
- Aimed at team leaders, delegates, managers, human resources / people & culture.

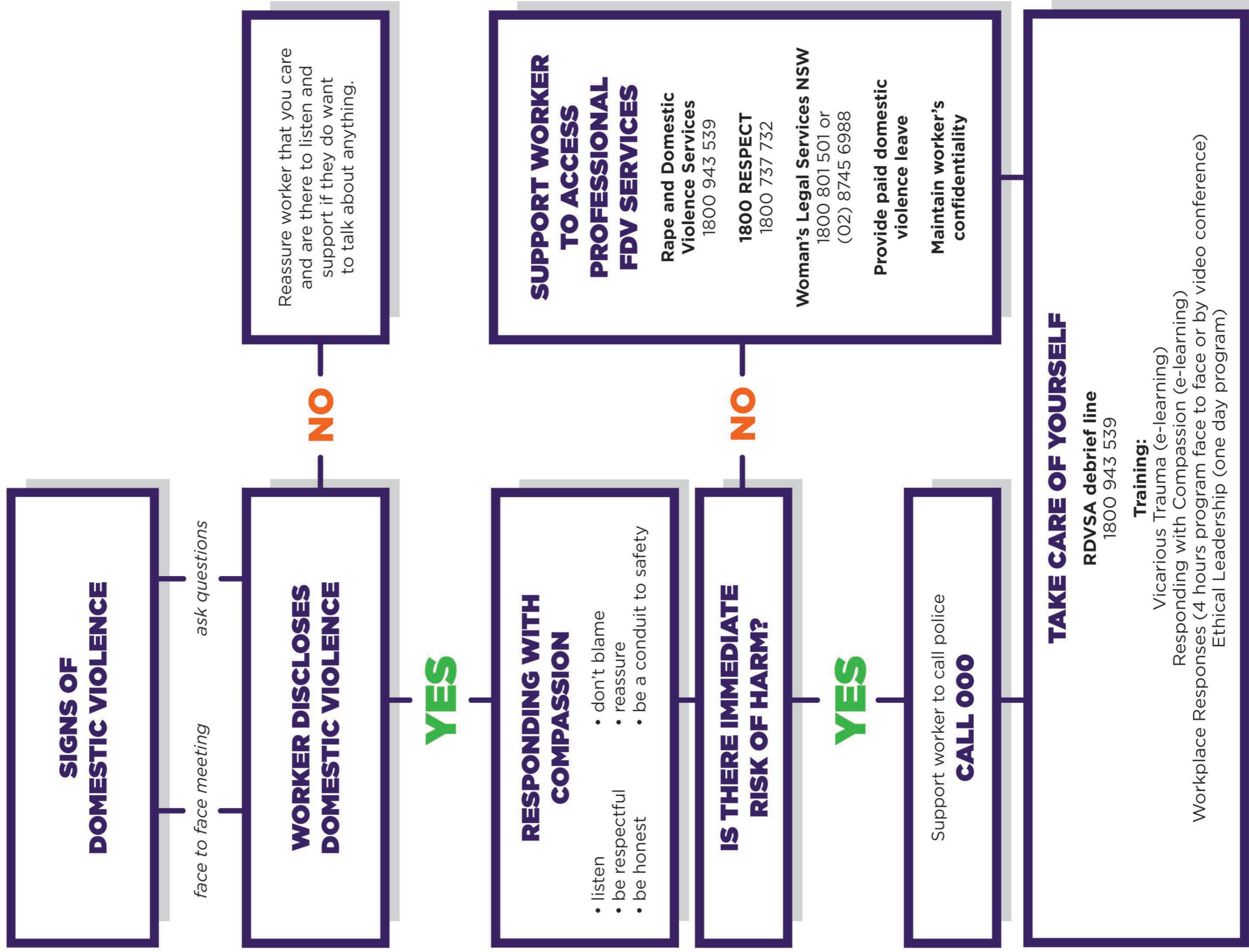
**Ethical Leadership** is a one day program

- Increase understanding of gendered violence, gender inequality and the misuse of power
- Understand the drivers of gendered violence
- Understanding the methods of primary prevention
- Critically reflect on driving and fostering cultural change in the workplace





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