



Workplace Response to Family Violence

Document control

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Background

This policy outlines the workplace support available to employees who are experiencing family violence, with the aim of assisting them to progress toward a life free from violence and its effect.

Objectives

The purpose of this policy is to:

1. Promote a supportive workplace in which employees experiencing family violence can safely come forward for help and support; and
2. Guide the response of managers / supervisors to employees who report experiencing family violence.

Scope

This policy applies to all employees of the Institute who are experiencing or who have experienced family violence.

Definitions and abbreviations

Employee

The term 'employee' in this policy is a reference to employees and students (scientific, trainee, work experience, visiting and the like).

Family violence

Family violence is a crime under the Victorian Government's *Family Violence Protection Act 2008*. Family violence is defined as behaviour by a person toward a family member which:

- is physically or sexually abusive; or
- is emotionally or psychologically abusive; or
- is economically abusive; or
- is threatening; or
- is coercive; or
- in any other way controls or dominates family members and causes family members to fear for their safety, or the safety other family members.

Family violence can occur within any intimate relationship, age and ethnicity and in both heterosexual and same-sex relationships. While it can be perpetuated by any member of a family against another, it is more likely to be perpetrated by men (predominately by a woman's current or ex-partner) against women and children – in 95% of

reported incidents, the perpetrator was male. Aboriginal / Torres Strait Islander women, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and disabled women are more at risk of family violence.

Family violence is a workplace issue

Recent research indicates that a significant proportion of both male and female workers in Australia are subjected to family violence at any given time, with women experiencing the most severe and ongoing forms of abuse.

If an employee is experiencing violence at home, it doesn't just affect their personal life. Many people experiencing family violence need support at work as they may experience:

- the perpetrator stalking them or attempting to contact them at work, making them feel unsafe
- a loss of concentration, low self-esteem and anxiety which impacts on their work performance and general wellbeing
- disruption to their home life (being made homeless or having to move to a shelter with children are examples) making it hard to physically get to work and maintain regular work hours
- physical or mental injuries and/or disabilities as a result of the abuse which mean they can't work, even if they don't have enough sick leave to cover the time they need off.

In addition, perpetrators of family violence may also harass and threaten other employees, placing them at risk.

Family violence support organisations advise that staying in employment is critical to reducing the effects of the violence. By supporting victims to remain in paid employment, workplaces can assist victims on their pathway out of violence and keep the whole workplace safer.

Employees experiencing family violence should know that:

- they are not alone
- a variety of workplace support is available for them to access
- letting the Institute know of their circumstances will not have any adverse consequences for them or their employment.

Policy

The Institute will offer, where requested, appropriate assistance to employees experiencing family violence. This assistance recognises:

- the prevalence of family violence
- the impact of this violence on the health and wellbeing on those experiencing it
- the effect of this impact in the workplace.

Assistance offered to employees will work toward an outcome that:

- ensures the safety of the employee while at work
- ensures the employment stability of the employee and the impact on their workload and performance
- manages the impact on the employee's colleagues
- supports the employee through a time of transition.

Workplace support

Where an employee discloses that they are experiencing family violence, the following support can be made available.

Leave

Employees experiencing family violence may require time off work to:

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- access medical, legal or counselling services
- make arrangements to ensure their safety and that of other family members
- secure alternative safe accommodation and to relocate
- or any other reason associated with the experience of family violence.

In these circumstances, the Institute will provide the employee with access to:

- up to 2 weeks paid family violence leave
- paid Personal/Carer's Leave (if available)
- paid Annual Leave (if available)
- additional unpaid family violence leave if required.

Leave associated with family violence may be taken as a fraction of a day, single day, or consecutive days.

Changed working arrangements

Employees experiencing family violence are particularly vulnerable in relation to work due to the predictability of their location and hours. Managers and employees can consider the following strategies to improve the safety of the employee at work:

- changed and flexible working arrangements e.g. changes to start and finish times
- changing work role/locations to improve safety
- changing internal telephone number or email address to avoid harassing contact
- screening incoming calls to the employee.

Counselling and support services

Employees or their families requiring support in dealing with personal issues that may be affecting them are encouraged to contact the Institute's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provider to arrange an appointment on 1300 360 364.

Other family violence support services:

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| • 1800 Respect national helpline: | - 1800 737 732 |
| • Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention & Legal Service (Vic): | - 1300 105 303 |
| • Safe Steps Family Violence Resource Centre: | - 1800 015 188 |
| • Men's Referral Service: | - 1300 766 491 |
| • Lifeline (24 hour crisis line): | - 131 114 |
| • Relationships Australia: | - 1300 364 277 |
| • Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria | - www.glhv.org.au |
| • WIRE Women's Information | - 1300 134 130 |
| • Emergency accommodation | - housing.vic.gov.au |

The **Workplace Response to Family Violence Procedure** contains more information on options available to support the employee in circumstances of family violence. In the majority of cases, where an employee has disclosed that they are experiencing family violence, the manager / supervisor should contact a representative from both People & Culture and Security to discuss the situation and how the best support the employee and ensure workplace safety.

Confidentiality

An employee who discloses they are experiencing family violence to their manager / supervisor, People & Culture or to Security is assured their information will be kept strictly confidential. There may be times, however, when there is an inherent safety risk to either the affected employee or other employees (for example, there is a risk the

perpetrator might come into the workplace). In these instances disclosure of the situation will be kept to a minimum and on a 'needs to know' for the purpose of maintaining safety in the workplace.

Roles and responsibilities

Employees experiencing family violence are encouraged to seek support and assistance by raising the matter with their manager / supervisor, or People & Culture representative.

Managers / supervisors are required to:

- provide a sensitive and non-judgmental approach
- read the Institute's Workplace Response to Family Violence Procedure for guidance
- contact a People & Culture and Security representative for advice and assistance
- discuss measures to prioritise safety in the workplace and make all reasonable efforts to ensure a safe work environment for the employee
- encourage the employee to access to the EAP for support
- work with the employee to grant reasonable leave and adjust work schedules or location, if required.

Employees experiencing family violence are encouraged to consider:

- seeking support from the Institute's EAP
- seeking support from their manager / supervisor
- seeking advice from People & Culture
- completing a Personal/Carers Leave request through ESS and submit it to their Manager/Supervisor for approval, if required.

Anti-Discrimination

The institute will not discriminate against anyone who has been subjected to family violence, in terms of their existing employment or career development.

Associated documents

Workplace Response to Family Violence Procedure

Leave and Holidays Policy.

Flexible Working Arrangements Policy.