



**uniting  
church**  
in Australia,  
Synod of NSW & ACT

# Domestic and Family Violence Assistance Policy

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Assistance Policy  
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## 1. Overview

The Synod of NSW and ACT ('Synod') recognises the devastating impact domestic and family violence ('**DFV**') can have on the lives, work and financial security of those who experience it. The Synod seeks to create a supportive environment where individuals can feel safe requesting support for DFV related concerns.

DFV can be complicated. It's a sad reality that DFV can happen to just about anyone. We know that sometimes guilt, fear or shame can stop us from coming forward and asking for help. We understand and we want to help.

Paid work can play a critical role in providing the financial stability that supports individuals in leaving abusive relationships and recovering from abuse. In this regard, we see that we have a key role to play in supporting individuals through flexibility and support.

## 2. Purpose of Policy

The aim of this policy is to detail how individuals experiencing or escaping DFV can be supported.

Individuals who are experiencing or escaping DFV are encouraged to advise their People Manager or a member of the People and Culture team so that appropriate support is provided wherever possible.

## 3. Applicability (scope)

This policy applies to all employees (whether permanent, fixed term or casual employees), volunteers and Ministers ('**individuals**') of the Synod. Those individuals engaged on a casual, ad hoc, temporary or contractor basis who are experiencing or escaping from DFV should speak with a representative from the People and Culture Team.

## 4. Definitions

Domestic Family Violence ('**DFV**'), for the purposes of this policy, includes physical, sexual, financial, verbal, psychological, spiritual, or emotional abuse of an individual by someone they have, or have had, a personal or close relationship with. A central element of DFV is an ongoing pattern of behaviour aimed at obtaining power and control over an individual through fear.

## 5. Responsibilities

**The Director, People and Culture** owns this policy and is responsible for:

- ▶ Implementing, communicating and monitoring the effectiveness of this policy;
- ▶ Supporting employees experiencing or escaping from DFV or supporting another who is experiencing DFV; and
- ▶ Maintaining confidentiality of information received except as required by law or as consented to by the individual experienced DFV.

**People Managers** are responsible for:

- ▶ Supporting employees who may require assistance as a result of experiencing the effects of DFV;
- ▶ Reminding employees about the Employee Assistance Program (EAP);
- ▶ Seeking advice from the EAP, so as to best support employees who need help as a result of experiencing the effects of DFV;

- ▶ Seeking advice and input as necessary from the People and Culture Team;
- ▶ Approving the employee's leave applications;
- ▶ Insofar as is practicable, ensuring the safety of other team members;
- ▶ Maintaining confidentiality of any and all information pertaining to an employee's circumstances except insofar as is necessary to seek further advice or input such as People and Culture and the EAP.

**Individuals** are responsible for:

- ▶ Considering seeking support from the EAP;
- ▶ Notifying their People Manager and/or People and Culture if they believe there is a risk to their own safety or the safety of others within the workplace;
- ▶ Seeking support from their People Manager as appropriate;
- ▶ Seeking advice from People and Culture as appropriate;
- ▶ Completing a special leave application form and submitting it to their People Manager for approval; and
- ▶ Keeping their People Manager informed of changes to their situation or safety.

## 6. Confidentiality

An individual experiencing DVF may raise the issue with their People Manager or their People and Culture Business Partner. The People Manager may seek advice, as appropriate, from People and Culture. All personal information concerning DFV will be kept confidential.

The Synod will work collaboratively with the individual to develop protocols to restrict access to the individual's personal information and contact details.

There may be times, however, when there is an inherent safety risk to either the affected individual or other individuals (for example, if 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 'need to know' for the purpose of maintaining safety in the workplace. Such disclosure may include, but not be limited to, notification to the police.

## 7. Leave and Flexible Working Conditions

The Synod recognises that individuals affected by DFV may be impacted in relation to their attendance or performance at work. The Synod is committed to providing leave and other support to individuals who experience DFV and provides:

- ▶ For all permanent and fixed-term employees, up to five days paid DFV leave per annum (non-cumulative); and
- ▶ For all casual employees and volunteers, up to five days of unpaid leave per annum,

for the purposes of attending to:

- ▶ Medical appointments;
- ▶ Legal proceedings;
- ▶ Accommodation matters including relocation;
- ▶ Child care and education matters;

- ▶ Counselling; and/or,
- ▶ To make other safety arrangements related to DFV.

Leave is non-cumulative and, to give maximum flexibility, may be taken in units of one hour, half days, and full days.

In addition to DFV Leave, individuals can make an application for unpaid or other leave. The amount and type of leave provided will be determined by the individual's situation through consultation between the employee, their People Manager and the Director of People and Culture as appropriate.

People Managers and/or People and Culture are also available to discuss options for flexible working arrangements that may assist the individual in addressing health or personal matters related to their experience of DFV.

Examples of flexible working arrangements may include:

- ▶ Hours of work, such as working staggered start, finish or lunch times;
- ▶ Patterns of work, such as split shifts or job sharing;
- ▶ Locations of work, such as working away from the office; and
- ▶ Duties such as moving to non-public facing roles or temporary work assignments.

At all times in considering requests, we will consider the safety and the circumstances of the individual.

If for any reason an individual is uncomfortable speaking to their People Manager about their reasons for applying for leave, they may speak to their People and Culture Business Partner.

When returning to work after DFV leave, individuals are encouraged to talk to their People Manager or their People and Culture Business Partner regarding any ongoing safety concerns they may have. This may also be important for the protection of other individuals who work for or represent the Synod.

## 8. Leave for employees supporting a person experiencing DFV

An employee who provides support to a person experiencing DFV is entitled to access DFV leave for the purpose of:

- ▶ accompanying that person to legal proceedings, counselling or appointments with a medical or legal practitioner;
- ▶ assisting with relocations or other safety arrangements; or
- ▶ other activities associated with the DFV including caring for children. Leave may be taken in units of one hour, half days, and full days. Full time employees are eligible for up to 5 days per annum and part-time employees are eligible for up to 3 days per annum. DFV is non-cumulative.

## 9. Notice and Notification

While notice is not strictly required prior to taking DFV leave, employees should notify their People Manager as soon as reasonably practicable of their intention to take or remain on DFV or other leave. In circumstances where the individual has not disclosed, or feels unable to disclose, the reason for their absence, they may notify their People Manager of their absence in the same way that they would notify their People Manager of personal leave. Our primary concern is that where time off is needed quickly, the individual feels they can access it immediately without having to go into an explanation that may cause them some distress.

Proof of DFV may be sought and can include a document issued by the Police Service, a Court, a Doctor, a Domestic and Family Violence Support Service or Lawyer, or a statutory declaration. To protect individual's confidentiality, where such proof is sought, the Synod will retain the information in a locked file with access limited to the Director of People and Culture.

To apply for DFV Leave, requests must be in writing (it is strongly recommended that a discussion takes place first). These requests may include a request for flexible working arrangements.

## 10. Other Means of Support for Individuals

Whilst the Employee Assistance Program ('EAP') can be accessed for a variety of circumstances, it can also help employees (or individuals) experiencing, or supporting another who is experiencing, DFV. The EAP provides confidential counselling and support, including supporting you in how to have a discussion with your People Manager or your People and Culture Business Partner.

The EAP can also assist with referral to other professionals or agencies if longer term support is needed.

Contact details for the EAP can be found on the intranet <https://nswact.uca.org.au/staff-intranet/employee-assistance-program-eap/>

Other means of support are listed below:

### National

1800RESPECT

1800 737 732

<https://www.1800respect.org.au>

1800RESPECT is Australia's national sexual assault, domestic and family violence support service. The service provides information, referrals and counselling to those in need 24 hours per day, every day of the year.

### Safesteps Family Violence Response Centre

1800 015 188 (24 hr service)

<https://www.safesteps.org.au>

This crisis response centre connects women and their children to specialist support workers who can help them explore their options, develop a safety plan and access supports.

**Lifeline:** 131 114

**Kids helpline:** 1800 55 1800

If you are concerned for the immediate safety of yourself or someone else, please call **000** for emergency assistance.

### New South Wales

Victims Services

1800 633 063 (weekdays from 8.00 am to 6.00 pm).

### Australian Capital Territory

Domestic Violence Crisis Service

(02) 6280 0900

Domestic Violence and Protection Order Unit (Legal Aid)  
(02) 6217 4299