



An Employer and HR Professionals' Guide

Supporting an Employee Through Separation or Divorce

For employers, HR professionals, managers, workplace consultants and business owners

Purpose of this guide

This guide is for employers, HR professionals and managers who may be supporting an employee affected by relationship breakdown, separation or divorce.

Separation can affect emotional wellbeing, concentration, attendance, communication, decision-making, parenting arrangements, financial stability and working relationships. It may also involve legal appointments, housing issues, childcare disruption or conflict with a former partner.

The role of the workplace is not to manage the separation itself. The role is to respond with care, clarity and appropriate boundaries where separation begins to affect the employee's working life.

This guide is not legal, HR, occupational health, safeguarding or clinical advice. It is intended to help managers and HR professionals think clearly about support, boundaries and signposting.

Who this guide is for

This guide may be useful for:

- employers and business owners;
- HR professionals;
- line managers;
- workplace consultants;
- employee wellbeing leads;
- professional advisers supporting employers;
- organisations considering how to respond when separation affects an employee's working life.



You may be supporting someone who is distressed, distracted, emotionally overwhelmed, involved in legal or financial discussions, managing new parenting arrangements, or trying to remain functional at work while significant personal decisions are being made.

Why separation may show up at work

Relationship breakdown can place an employee under significant emotional and practical strain.

An employee may be dealing with:

- shock, grief, anger, anxiety or uncertainty;
- conflict with a former partner;
- legal correspondence or appointments;
- financial pressure;
- housing disruption;
- changes to childcare or school routines;
- co-parenting arrangements;
- reduced sleep;
- loss of concentration;
- worries about privacy, reputation or judgement.

For some employees, work may be a stabilising environment. For others, work may become harder to manage for a period of time.

A calm and bounded response from the workplace can help prevent unnecessary escalation while preserving appropriate professional limits.

What managers or HR may notice

Separation may present at work in different ways.

You may notice:

- increased absence or lateness;



- reduced concentration;
- uncharacteristic errors;
- emotional distress or withdrawal;
- irritability or conflict with colleagues;
- frequent phone calls or messages;
- urgent requests for flexibility;
- difficulty making decisions;
- reduced resilience under normal workplace pressure;
- changes linked to childcare or parenting logistics;
- concern about a former partner contacting the workplace.

None of these signs confirms what is happening. They are simply possible indicators that a private life event may be affecting work.

The safest starting point is usually to name the work-related concern, not to make assumptions about the employee's personal circumstances.

Opening a conversation

A manager does not need to know the full personal story in order to respond appropriately.

A useful opening might be:

"I've noticed that things seem difficult at the moment and that it may be affecting work. Is there anything you would like me to be aware of, or anything practical we need to consider from a work point of view?"

The conversation should be:

- private;
- non-judgmental;
- non-intrusive;
- focused on work impact and support;
- clear about confidentiality and its limits;



- clear about what the manager can and cannot do.

The employee should not be pressed to disclose personal details they do not wish to share.

What may help

Depending on the role, organisation and circumstances, helpful workplace responses may include:

- a private and respectful conversation;
- temporary flexibility where possible;
- signposting to HR, occupational health, EAP or external support;
- clarity about leave, absence and workplace expectations;
- a short-term review arrangement;
- agreement about preferred communication if the employee is distressed;
- practical planning around childcare or appointment-related disruption;
- ensuring the employee knows who to contact if the situation changes.

The aim is not to remove all workplace expectations. The aim is to support the employee to remain as stable and functional as possible while keeping boundaries clear.

What to avoid

Managers and HR professionals should avoid:

- becoming the employee's counsellor;
- giving legal, financial or relationship advice;
- taking sides in the separation;
- asking unnecessary personal questions;
- contacting the employee's partner or former partner;
- encouraging direct confrontation where there may be risk;
- making assumptions about who is "right" or "wrong";



- promising absolute confidentiality;
- ignoring safeguarding or workplace risk concerns;
- treating separation solely as a performance issue without context.

A supportive workplace response should not become an informal therapy process, legal strategy session or investigation into the employee's private life.

Confidentiality, consent and boundaries

Information about an employee's separation should be handled carefully.

As a general principle:

- only necessary information should be recorded or shared;
- sharing should usually be limited to those who need to know;
- the employee should be told what information may need to be shared and why;
- consent should be sought where appropriate;
- confidentiality should not be promised absolutely where there are risk, safeguarding, legal or workplace safety concerns.

Where the situation is complex, managers should involve HR or seek appropriate professional guidance rather than trying to manage it alone.

Practical workplace support

Practical support may be more useful than extensive discussion.

Depending on the situation, possible adjustments may include:

- temporary flexibility around start or finish times;
- agreed time for legal, financial, court, school or housing appointments;
- temporary changes to workload or deadlines where feasible;
- a quiet space for urgent calls where appropriate;
- clarity around remote or in-person working expectations;
- a short-term check-in plan;



- signposting to internal or external support;
- workplace safety planning where there is concern about unwanted contact.

Any support should be proportionate, time-limited where appropriate, and consistent with the organisation's policies and operational needs.

Risk, domestic abuse and safeguarding

Some separations involve risk, domestic abuse, coercive control, harassment, stalking, threats, child safeguarding concerns or urgent legal protection issues.

Where there are concerns about immediate risk or safety, the workplace should not treat the matter as a routine wellbeing issue.

Possible warning signs may include:

- fear of a partner or former partner;
- repeated unwanted contact;
- threats or intimidation;
- the former partner attending or contacting the workplace;
- concern about children's safety;
- the employee appearing monitored or controlled;
- sudden escalation in distress or risk.

In these circumstances, managers should involve HR, safeguarding leads, workplace safety processes, legal advice, specialist domestic abuse services or emergency services as appropriate.

Mediation is not appropriate where safety, coercion or immediate protection issues make a structured voluntary process unsafe.

When specialist separation support may be helpful

Specialist support may be appropriate where an employee is:

- emotionally overwhelmed by separation;
- struggling to stabilise while making important decisions;



- finding legal or financial advice hard to use because of distress;
- facing recurring conflict with a former partner;
- trying to make sense of parenting or co-parenting arrangements;
- unsure what kind of support they need;
- in need of confidential one-to-one support outside the workplace.

Where both parties are willing and it is safe and appropriate, mediation may also help separating couples have structured conversations about practical arrangements.

The workplace should not pressure an employee into counselling or mediation. Signposting should preserve the employee's choice and independence.

What The Separation Specialist provides

The Separation Specialist offers two distinct pathways.

Individual Counselling

Confidential one-to-one support for an individual navigating the emotional, relational and practical impact of separation.

Couples Mediation

Impartial, structured mediation for separating couples who need to discuss children, co-parenting, communication, finances, property, practical arrangements or future agreements.

These pathways are separate. The same practitioner does not provide individual counselling to one party and then act as mediator for both parties.

Clear boundaries protect the client, the professional relationship and the integrity of any mediation process.

What the service does not provide

The Separation Specialist does not provide:

- legal advice;
- financial advice, mortgage advice, pension advice, tax or accountancy advice;



- HR advice;
- occupational health advice;
- workplace investigation;
- safeguarding assessment for an organisation;
- emergency or crisis response;
- advice to an employer about managing an employee;
- advice on whether a client should accept or reject proposals or a settlement;
- therapy to one party while mediating for both parties.

Where specialist advice is required, clients are encouraged to seek support from the appropriate professional.

How signposting can work

Signposting should be simple and boundaried.

Employee-led contact

The employer, manager or HR professional may give the employee the website details and allow them to make direct contact if they choose.

This is often the cleanest route.

Professional enquiry

An employer, HR professional or workplace consultant may make a general enquiry to understand whether The Separation Specialist may be a useful resource for an organisation, employee or professional network.

Any professional enquiry should be limited to the broad context and should not include unnecessary personal, confidential, sensitive or identifying information about another person unless there is appropriate consent.

Internal support alongside external support

The employee may still need appropriate workplace support, HR guidance, occupational health input, legal advice, financial advice, safeguarding support or specialist domestic abuse support depending on the circumstances.

The Separation Specialist does not replace those roles.



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A note for employees reading this guide

If you are an employee reading this guide, your employer's role is not to manage your separation for you.

However, where separation is affecting your working life, it may be appropriate to speak to your manager, HR department or another trusted workplace contact about practical support.

You may also choose to seek confidential support outside the workplace.

The Separation Specialist provides confidential one-to-one counselling or impartial couples mediation, depending on what is appropriate. These are separate pathways.

Professional enquiries

Employers, HR professionals, workplace consultants and other professional referrers are welcome to make contact where they wish to understand whether The Separation Specialist may be a useful resource.

Website: [The Separation Specialist](#)

Professional Hub: [For Employers & Professionals](#)

Professional Enquiries: [Professional Enquiry Form](#)

The Separation Specialist helps people navigate separation with the right professional support around them — providing confidential counselling or impartial mediation while preserving clear boundaries with legal, financial, HR and other professional advice.