

Domestic Violence

A Supervisor's Guide

Domestic violence affects the workplace when an abuser harasses an employee who is on the job, when a victim is absent because of injuries or less productive due to stress, or when violence occurs at the worksite. Employers need to be concerned about their responsibility to maintain safe work sites.

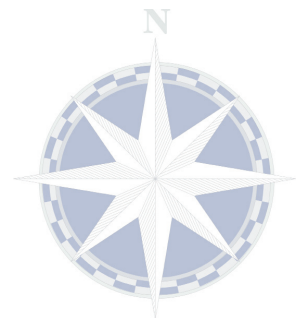
Today, as the lines between work and home are becoming increasingly blurred, domestic violence can and does easily spill into the workplace and can turn into incidents of workplace violence.

It is important to be aware that domestic violence is perpetrated by, and on, both men and women, and occurs in same-sex and opposite-sex relationships. Male victims of domestic violence many times find it difficult to locate adequate help and support. Unfortunately there is still a belief among some that men simply cannot be victims of domestic violence. This can make it even more difficult for male victims to confide in anyone about what is happening; which can lead to depression, despair, low self esteem, a feeling of hopelessness and isolation. There are resources out there for male victims of domestic violence who can offer support, understanding, information, advice, and help.

Victims and perpetrators of domestic violence impact the workplace in many ways. In addition to the increased risk for workplace violence, domestic violence also results in decreased productivity, increased absenteeism, increased stress, increased health care costs, and increased turnover rates. The victim of domestic often has to flee his/her home in an effort to escape an abusive relationship. Escape from the home often includes abruptly leaving the workplace as well.

There are two primary reasons that domestic violence comes to work:

1. **Domestic violence is about control** – the victim's job represents independence and while the victim is at work, she/he is not under the abuser's immediate control.
2. **The victim is vulnerable at work** because his/her work hours, parking arrangements, and geographical location are predictable. The abuser knows where and when he/she can find the employee.



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As a supervisor, how would I know if an employee is being affected by domestic violence?

A supervisor should *not* try to diagnose the employee's problem, but *should* approach the employee in a non-threatening way about observed changes in performance or conduct. It is important to show your concern and offer appropriate help, but you should also take great care that you treat Domestic Violence as you treat all employees' personal problems. When you suspect that an employee is a victim of violence, or has any other personal problem, you should focus on the job performance and suggest that they get help from a professional who has expertise in treating that particular problem.

It is important to understand that an employee may not be ready to admit that she or he has been injured by a partner or family member and may choose not to discuss the topic. Managers and Supervisors should respect this decision, but should give information about available resources.

Take precautions not to get overly involved; it will not be helpful to the employee, and may possibly put you, the employee, and the workplace at risk.

Signs and Symptoms of a Victim of Domestic Violence

(Look for a pattern rather than one sign/symptom.)

- Repeated discussion of marital/relationship problems
- Employee or co-workers' reports of the employee being injured by a domestic partner
- Employee shows feelings of fear and social withdrawal
- Intermittent crying and/or outbursts of anger while talking with a domestic partner on the telephone or in person at the workplace.
- Bruises, chronic headaches, abdominal pains, muscle aches
- Intense startle reactions
- Difficulty in making decisions alone or lack of concentration
- Pronounced disturbance of mood (e.g., frequent and prolonged periods of depression, irritability, anxiety, and apathetic withdrawal), tension around receiving repeated personal phone calls
- Tardiness, or very early arrival at work
- Increased absenteeism or reduced productivity
- Decrease in job performance
- Unkempt or disheveled appearance



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If you suspect that an employee may be in an abusive relationship, but the employee has not disclosed this to you, focus on any job performance changes and consult the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). If the employee has disclosed, use the following guidelines to support the employee.

1. Communicate your concerns for the employee's safety.
2. Be understanding, approachable, and non-judgmental.
3. Encourage the employee to use available resources. Tell the employee that the EAP can help with safety planning, has expertise in counseling employees who are living with domestic violence, and has knowledge about the services available. Let them know the EAP will work with the employee based on the wishes and needs of the employee.
4. Be clear that your role is to try to help and not to judge. The employee needs to know that someone cares, will listen and can help her/him find the right resources.
5. Discuss concerns about the employee's situation confidentially with the EAP for consultation and support as needed.

What Not to Say...

- Why don't you just leave?
- What did you do to provoke your partner?
- Why did you wait so long to tell someone?
- Don't use labels such as "battered" or "abused."
- Don't tell the employee what she/he must do.



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What to do...

- If possible, rework the employee's work assignment or schedule to decrease stress.
- Follow up to see how the employee is doing.
- Ask general questions such as, "How are you doing?" or "How are things going?"
- Respect the employee's privacy, even if you think she/he is still in an abusive relationship.
- Maintain your relationship as manager/supervisor, not as counselor.
- In order to avoid arousing an abuser's suspicion, an employee may want to seek help during the workday. If possible, rearrange the work schedule so that there is time during lunch or breaks.
- A victim may choose to stay in or return to an abusive relationship out of fears for safety, economic survival, religious convictions, or out of shame. As managers and supervisors you shouldn't counsel the employee or express frustration, but rather refer to helpful resources and then only if the employee is willing.

If you believe the employee and/or co-workers may be in imminent danger at work, contact Human Resources and the EAP immediately. They can help assess the potential seriousness and devise a plan of action.

