



## **Domestic violence doesn't stay at home... it also goes to work**

There are many different definitions of domestic violence, but a common theme is the use of physical, sexual and/or psychological coercion to establish and maintain control over a partner.

It's easy to think of domestic violence as something that only takes place in the home, but the fact is that the effects of domestic violence can also have an impact in the workplace.

When an employee is a victim of domestic violence, the workplace could be impacted by increased sick leave, reduced productivity, increased medical expenses, employee turnover and increased safety risks.

There is also the possibility of violence occurring in the workplace. According to the US Department of Labor, roughly two million people across the country are victims of non-fatal workplace violence every year.

This can take various forms, including robberies, violent acts by clients and customers, violent acts by employees or ex-employees, and domestic incidents that eventually make their way to the workplace.

Employers need to be aware of the realities and issues of domestic violence and develop methods to address these issues when they arise.

## Workplace warning signs

Warning signs may be indicative of various problems, but indicators that an employee may be a victim of domestic violence include:

- Continued absences, sometimes due to “illness” and sometimes due to increasingly improbable excuses.
- Noticeable fluctuations in productivity and in the overall quality of work.
- Extreme emotional outbursts, sensitivity to criticism, lack of concentration and inexplicable mood swings.
- A seeming disregard for personal safety, leading to being accident-prone and taking unjustified risks.
- Obvious disregard for personal hygiene and grooming.
- Signs of drug and/or alcohol abuse.
- An excessive number of loud and emotional personal phone calls.
- Lethargy, bordering on depression and despair.

## Why dont they leave?

This is a question that is frequently asked, but the answer is a complex one.

As we said earlier, domestic violence is about control. Attempting to leave an abusive relationship is a direct threat to that control, and it may be the catalyst for a violent retaliation. The most dangerous time for victims can often be when they leave their abusers.

Other reasons for not leaving an abusive relationship could include:

- The victim may be embarrassed and ashamed to admit they are being abused. They may even feel they deserve it.
- If the victim grew up in a situation where domestic violence was prevalent, they may not even realise that their partner’s behaviour is unacceptable.
- The victim may be aware that their partner is behaving in an abusive way, but the victim may believe it was they who caused the behaviour.

- A reason for staying might be a lack of resources to change the situation. This could be purely financial, or it could be due to the lack of a support network to help them establish a new life outside of the abusive relationship.

## How can your company help?

Establish policies and procedures to address domestic violence. Not only is domestic violence a problem for an individual employee, it can also result in threats to workplace security.

Developing and maintaining a safe and secure workplace is paramount. Steps to achieve this could include:

- Employing an on-site guard/security service.
- Having a designated security/guard service on standby if an incident escalates and an emergency response is advisable.
- A system of ID badges and coded key cards for access.
- Implementing other security measures as deemed appropriate, e.g. metal detectors.

Additional law enforcement assistance may be available from local police departments for emergency situations.

## How can you (as a manager/supervisor) help?

- Participate in training on domestic violence issues and be aware of your company's policies regarding involvement.
- When talking to the victim, express your concern about the potential for the violence to escalate.
- Make the victim aware of the National Domestic Violence Hotline and suggest that they call.
- Promptly inform the relevant authorities about any violent or potentially violent incidents/situations.
- Take an active part in any investigations into of allegations of workplace violence, as requested by the company or outside authorities.
- Attain a level of familiarity with the range of services offered by the Employee Assistance Programme.

Public and private agencies have developed coordinated response networks to help victims of domestic violence. Assistance can include telephone consultations, referrals to culturally and geographically appropriate service providers and shelters, and in-service training.



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