



# Supervisor NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program  
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## When Domestic Violence Shows Up at Work

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**Domestic violence is the leading cause of injury to women—more than car accidents, muggings, and rapes combined. Reports indicate that in the U.S., a woman is beaten every nine seconds, and three are murdered daily by a current or former male partner. Furthermore, domestic violence (DV) victims lose nearly 8 million days of paid work per year in the U.S. alone—the equivalent of 32,000 full-time jobs.**

While the majority of DV survivors are women, men do not go unharmed. A recent report revealed that one in seven men will be victims of “severe” violence at the hands of an intimate partner. In the LGBT community, 21.5% of gay men and 35.4% of lesbians surveyed reported having experienced intimate-partner physical violence in their lifetimes, according to a National Violence Against Women report. In another survey, transgender respondents reported a lifetime rate of 34.6% for intimate-partner physical violence.

### The Cycle of Abuse

At its heart, domestic violence (including date violence) is a dynamic of power and control one partner exerts over the other. This behavior includes intimidation, threats, and emotional, mental, physical, and sexual abuse.

Initially, DV can be seen in jealousy and is often confused by the abuser as a deep love for the partner. However, the control tactics can escalate with an abuser isolating a survivor from friends and

family, forbidding one to leave home except for work, demanding scheduled phone “check-ins” to confirm whereabouts, forcing a survivor to rely on an abuser for all transportation and money, and withholding access to a phone.

The abuse can contribute to self-loathing in the survivor, and a sense that the person somehow “deserves it.” This often leads to hopelessness and tolerance of abuse for years. In fact, The National Domestic Violence Hotline reports that on average it takes seven attempts for a survivor to permanently leave an abusive partner. Another study points to financial abuse as the primary obstacle survivors face in leaving—without financial resources, they have no way to escape their nightmare.

### The Impact at Work

The devastation of domestic violence doesn't only damage survivors at home—it follows them to work. While DV is a personal tragedy, its capacity for inflicting damage outside the home also has a devastating impact on businesses. One report in the U.S. stated that work absences due to violence at home equals about 32,000 full-time jobs. In terms of dollars, the effects of DV are staggering. One U.S.-based study estimated yearly losses at nearly \$1.8 billion in productivity, and over \$4.1 billion spent in direct health care services. Domestic violence can affect other co-workers with issues of morale, anxiety and concern for the survivor, work disruptions, and uncertainty of their own safety in the workplace.

### Red Flags

As a supervisor, it can be difficult to know that an employee is suffering domestic violence at home. You may hear it directly from the employee, from a co-worker, or you may see these warning signs hinting that something is just not right:

- Bruises or injuries not easily explained

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- Declining work performance
- Increased unexcused absences or late arrivals to work
- Crying or showing other intense uncharacteristic emotions
- Hesitance or avoidance to go home after work
- Frequent harassing calls or visits from partner at work
- Easily startled
- Appears depressed or anxious
- Self-discloses abuse to co-workers or supervisor

### How Managers Can Help

Start by consulting your confidentiality policy and legal team. It will be important to understand the confidentiality and employment law constraints that limit what you can ask an employee directly. One has to be very careful in asking employees if they are in a domestic violence situation. In most cases, this is something that you likely can't ask. However, your observed behavioral or work-related concerns are definitely appropriate to address. Respect the person's privacy rights and choice to deny there is a problem. That said, if you suspect there is an immediate risk of harm to the employee, others in the workplace, or other people, call the police or your security staff. If the employee admits to being abused and asks for help, consider the following:

- Provide emotional support—Listen empathetically without judgement. If you or the employee needs extra support during your conversations, contact the EAP and ask to speak with an EAP counselor right then. At this point, you can hand the phone to the employee and leave the room. Remind the employee that the EAP offers 24/7 telephonic support and referrals for face-to-face counseling.
- Assess the current risk—Is the person feeling unsafe to return home? Have death threats been made? Is there concern that the abuser may come to work? Is there a restraining order in place? Has the abusive behavior just begun or has it been going on for a long time? Are there children at home who are vulnerable? Knowing the current circumstances can help you determine next steps with the survivor. Know that your EAP is here to assist you and your employee brainstorm options and resources and the next steps to take.
- Make sure that HR is aware of your concerns and are a part of any plan moving forward
- Discuss the situation with your attorney to help discuss risk to the employee and to the workplace and the next steps to insure safety to both
- Organizational Accommodation—Does the Company have a policy for paid or unpaid leave for domestic abuse survivors to allow for doctor's appointments or meetings with attorneys or DV advocates?
- DV Resources—Provide the National Domestic Violence Hotline (1-800-799-SAFE) to the employee as a resource for DV advocacy, confidential emergency shelter, and help with safety planning strategies.
- Safeguard strategies—develop safety strategies and emergency protocols. Consider the following:
  - *Secure entries by establishing a visitor sign-in policy*
  - *Provide security/reception with a photo of the abuser*
  - *Arrange for someone to escort the employee to and from transportation*
  - *Move the employee's workspace to a more secure area*
  - *If possible, consider alternate work hours or location*
  - *Remove the employee's name from automated phone directories*
  - *If a restraining order is in place, discuss with the company's security, legal, HR, and the police for steps to take if it's violated by the abuser*
  - *Speak with local police about workplace safety measures they might suggest*
  - *Consult with your security team and develop a crisis plan*
  - *Post the phone number for the National Domestic Violence Hotline on the premises*

Though domestic violence happens at home, its brutal impact can reverberate throughout a workplace as well. If you suspect an employee is being harmed and are unsure of what to do, please know you can call First Choice Health EAP to discuss ways through this frightening situation to protect your employee and workplace alike.

#### Sources:

<https://domesticviolencestatistics.org/domestic-violence-statistics/>

<https://www.dosomething.org/us/facts/11-facts-about-domestic-and-dating-violence>