



rape and abuse crisis center

advocacy. counseling. education.

Helping Victims of Domestic Violence in the Workplace

Dealing with employees who are victims of domestic violence can be very sensitive. How do you approach the person? What do you say? What happens when violence interferes with the job? Statistics show health-related costs of rape, physical assault, stalking, and homicide by intimate partners exceed \$5.8 billion each year. Of this total, nearly \$4.1 billion is for victims requiring direct medical and mental health care services.¹ Lost productivity and earnings due to intimate partner violence accounts for nearly \$1.8 billion each year and domestic violence victims lose nearly eight million days of paid work each year; this is the equivalent of more than 32,000 full-time jobs and nearly 5.6 million days of household productivity.¹

What is Domestic Violence?

Domestic violence is defined as the use of any physical abuse (punching, kicking, slapping, etc.), verbal abuse, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse to control and maintain power over a significant other. While each individual case is different, there are some general concepts in all cases:

- Domestic violence crosses all boundaries—no one is immune from the potential of being a victim.
- Approximately 85% of reported domestic violence victims are female, and in over 75% of all family violence situations, the perpetrator of the violence was male.²
- 25% of all women in the U.S. will experience domestic violence during their lifetime.³
- Domestic violence is a crime, and as with all other crimes, the person who commits the crime is responsible for the consequences of his or her behavior

Domestic Violence not only affects the victim's workplace. A pilot study regarding abusers found:

- 78% of offenders used workplace resources at least once to express remorse or anger, check up on, pressure, or threaten the victim.
- 70% of domestic abuse offenders lost 15,221 hours of work time due to their domestic abuse arrests.
- 48% of offenders had difficulty concentrating at work, with 19% of offenders reporting a workplace accident or near miss from inattentiveness due to pre-occupation with their relationship.
- 42% of offenders were late to work.⁴

24-hour Crisis Line (701)293-7273
www.raccfm.com

07/12

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How You Can Help

A no-tolerance policy for any violence is needed.

Many victims of domestic violence see the workplace as a place of safety. This feeling of safety makes violence at home an on-the-job problem. You may not realize an employee is a victim, as they are likely to keep it secretive due to embarrassment and fear of losing their job. Here are some suggestions that might help to address the problem of domestic violence with an employee:

- Talk to the employee about what is going on in his/her life. Sometimes all it takes is to ask. Make sure the employee knows that the abuse is not her/his fault and you believe them. Let the employee know that there is counseling available in the community. Allow the victim to use work time (within reason) to attend counseling sessions, court dates, or plan the process of relocating. Make sure the victim knows what is said to you will remain confidential.
- Offer on-the-job protection (within reason). If the victim has an Order for Protection, make sure you screen their phone calls and visitors, and don't be afraid to contact security.
- Provide an open environment for communication. This is the difference between healthy and unhealthy environments.
- Have a harassment policy in place and enforce it. This means fostering an environment that does not tolerate offensive jokes or behavior.
- Make a connection with the Rape and Abuse Crisis Center. The Center provides crisis intervention, counseling, and advocacy services to all victims free of charge. Invite someone from the agency to present a program on domestic violence to all employees. Post information in break rooms and bathrooms.
- Make sure the workplace is free of victim-blaming attitudes regarding victims of domestic violence. The abuse is the choice of the abuser, not the victim.

Remember, you are the victim's employer, not a therapist. Sometimes the best thing you can do is make sure the victim knows about available counseling services. Reassure the victim that no one deserves to be abused. If you have questions regarding domestic violence, please call the Rape and Abuse Crisis Center at 701-293-7273.

References:

1. American Institute on Domestic Violence:
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3. National Coalition Against Domestic Violence:
<http://www.ncadv.org/images/sexualassaultstatistics.pdf>
4. Impact of Domestic Violence Offenders on Occupational Safety and Health-Pilot Study:
http://www.ncdsv.org/images/MDLandFamilyCrisisServices_ImpactofDVOffenders_2-04.pdf