



Domestic Violence and the Workplace

This resource helps to empower business leaders, supervisors and human resources professionals with identifying and responding to domestic violence in the workplace, with the goal of creating a safe place for employees and a healthier, thriving community.

**Harbor House 24-Hour Hotline:
815-932-5800**

Information included in this resource comes from ncadv.org; futureswithoutviolence.org; safealliance.org; the Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children; the U.S. Center for Disease Control; and "Free yourself from an abusive relationship: Seven steps to taking back your life" by A. Lissette and R. Kraus (2000).

Domestic violence and its effects on the workplace

Domestic violence is a pattern of behaviors used by one partner to maintain power and control over another partner in an intimate relationship. Anyone – no matter their age, religion, culture, sexual orientation, race, socioeconomic background or geographical location – is a potential victim of domestic violence .

Abuse is a learned and chosen behavior (not caused by alcoholism, drugs, mental health, etc.). Here are some statistics about the prevalence of domestic violence in the U.S.

- Nearly 20 people are physically abused by an intimate partner every 60 seconds. During one year, this equates to more than 10 million women and men (National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey).
- The cost of domestic violence exceeds \$3.6 trillion per year. The cost of domestic violence over a victim's lifetime was \$103,767 for women and \$23,414 for men (American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 2018).
- A 2017 study found that 54% of the 156 mass shootings between 2009 and 2016 were related to domestic violence (Every Town for Gun Safety). This directly affects the safety of every business in every community.

Contrary to its name, domestic violence is not limited to only "domestic" settings like the home. Domestic violence affects every aspect of a victim's life, including the workplace. Some of the effects domestic violence has on the workplace include:

- Impaired, reduced job performance
- Depression or lack of motivation
- Job loss or employee turnover
- Absenteeism, chronic tardiness, needing time off
- Frequent appearances or calls from partner/harasser
- Strained relationships with co-workers
- Use of workplace resources (phone, email, etc.) to threaten, harass or abuse current or former partners
- Direct threats to or intimidation of colleagues
- Safety concerns for the victim and all employees

Despite the negative effects of domestic violence, a workplace may also become a safe haven for a victim and provide a route away from the abuser. Additionally, employment provides survivors of domestic violence with the economic independence to overcome their situation and rebuild their lives.

Signs of abuse

Do you suspect your employee is in an abusive relationship? Watch for these signs. **Call Harbor House's 24-hour hotline at 815-932-5800 at any time to receive support and help.** Following are some common signs that an employee is a victim of domestic violence.

- Change in job performance: poor concentration, errors, slowness, inconsistent work quality.
- An unusual number of phone calls/text messages, strong reactions to those calls/text messages, and/or a reluctance to converse or respond to phone/text messages.
- Co-workers receive insensitive or insulting messages intended for the colleague experiencing abuse.
- Disruptive personal visits to workplace by present or former partner.
- Questions from a current or former partner about whereabouts, company, or activities.
- Absenteeism or lateness for work because the abuser took the car keys as economic abuse, the victim does not feel they can go to work because of obvious injuries from physical abuse, etc.
- Requests for special accommodations, such as requests to leave early or to change schedules.
- Reluctance to leave work.
- Obvious injuries, such as bruises, black eyes, broken bones, hearing loss – often attributed to “falls,” “being clumsy,” or “accidents.”
- Clothing inappropriate for the season, such as long sleeves and turtlenecks, wearing sunglasses or unusually heavy makeup.
- Minimization or denial of harassment or injuries.
- Isolation, unusually quiet, or keeping away from others.
- Emotional distress or flatness, tearfulness, depression, or references to suicide.
- Signs of fear, such as jumpiness, avoiding interactions, or trembling.
- Sensitivity about home life or hints of trouble at home.
- Comments about bad moods, anger, temper, and alcohol or drug abuse at home.

- Fear of job loss.
- Lack of access to money.
- Partner criticizes the employee or is extremely jealous or possessive in front of other people.
- Constantly worries about making partner angry.
- Makes excuses for partner's behavior.
- Unexplained marks or injuries.
- Personality changes, depression, or anxiety.

Types of abuse

Domestic violence is not a one-time occurrence. It consists of one or more of the following types of abuse used by the abuser to maintain power and control over the victim.

- **Physical** abuse: Any intentional and unwanted contact with a person or something close to your body.
 - Scratching, punching, biting, strangling or kicking
 - Using a gun, knife, box cutter, bat, mace or other weapon
 - Food or sleep deprivation
 - Grabbing the victim to prevent him/her from leaving or to force him/her to go somewhere
- **Emotional (or verbal)** abuse: Non-physical behaviors such as threats, insults, constant monitoring or "checking in," excessive texting, humiliation, intimidation.
 - Telling the victim what to do and wear
 - Blaming the victim's actions for the abusive or unhealthy behavior
 - Extreme jealousy
 - Manipulation
 - Neglect
 - Using gaslighting techniques to confuse or manipulate, to make the victim question reality or feel crazy
- **Sexual** abuse: Any action that pressures or coerces a person to do something sexually that they don't want to do.
 - Unwanted kissing or touching
 - Unwanted rough or violent sexual activity
 - Rape or attempted rape (can happen in marriage, too)
 - Refusing to use condoms or restricting someone's access to birth control

- Keeping someone from protecting themselves from sexually transmitted infections
- Using sexual insults toward someone
- **Financial (or economic) abuse:** Restriction and misuse of finances to control or exploit another person.
 - Taking money from working spouse and refusing to share income
 - Restricting access, limiting decision making on jointly held assets, controlling the victim's knowledge of money matters
 - Withholding child support
 - Reckless spending, excessive credit card usage
 - Incurring debt to control the victim
- **Spiritual (or religious) abuse**
 - Restricting or prohibiting a partner's religious or spiritual practices to gain control in a relationship
 - Criticizing beliefs
 - Destroying religious icons
 - Taking religious texts out of context
- **Social abuse:** Any behavior that demeans an individual in the presence of others or that negatively affects an individual's social functioning.
 - Forcing public display of affection
 - Monitoring, controlling or limiting social involvement
 - Isolation
 - Creating problems regarding family, friends and employment
 - Disclosing confidential matters, including sexual practices, preferences, and orientation
 - Manipulating the victim's friends, family and co-workers into criticizing or abandoning the victim

What to do if you suspect domestic violence

Most employers genuinely care about their employees, meaning they would want to address domestic violence and anything affecting the well-being of their employees. Furthermore, all employers care about the bottom-line, so it's critical to consider how domestic violence affects the health of employees. Happy, safe and healthy employees are more productive and efficient.

As a supervisor, business leader or human resources professional, you may see the domestic violence victim more than any other person except the abuser. For that reason, it is key for you to build trust with your employees by doing the following:

- Make sure you're available and open to your team.
- Educate yourself on the dynamics of domestic violence.
- Build rapport with all employees and periodically evaluate your level of rapport with each of them.

If you suspect that an employee is a victim of domestic violence, consider your level of rapport with them and take one or more of the following actions:

- Do not confront the employee immediately. Build trust and keep an eye on them.
- Ensure the employee that you're a safe person whenever you have opportunities.
- Ask about their welfare and show that you care.

When you do decide to approach the employee, do so in a professional and confidential manner. Following are some guidelines for that conversation:

- Explain what you have noticed and that you are concerned ("I'm wondering if things are going okay at home. Do you feel safe there? Is someone hurting you?").
- If the employee denies, don't push the issue.
- Reassure the employee that relationship abuse is common, but not OK nor their fault, and that you are available to talk anytime.

How to respond if an employee discloses domestic violence

If your employee tells you they are in an abusive relationship, that means that they trust you and know that you care. Maintain that level of rapport and be sure you keep everything shared highly confidential for everyone's safety.

Above all, do not try to be a counselor or give advice about how to proceed. The most dangerous time for a victim of domestic violence is when they leave the relationship. Bad advice may increase the danger to your employee exponentially. Encourage the employee to contact Harbor House's 24-hour hotline at 815-932-5800 and speak to a

caring domestic violence professional who will help them explore their options and create a safety plan.

Following are additional steps you need to take as the employer of any victims of domestic violence.

- Believe them. The abuser may have convinced them they are “crazy” and that everything is their fault.
- Actively listen to what they’re saying. Do not cut them off because what they’re telling you may be the first time they’ve ever shared it, which takes great courage.
- Empathize. Let them know you care for them. Express your regret about their situation.
- Refrain from telling them what to do. Remember that they know the abuser best. The most dangerous time for victims is when they leave an abusive relationship.
- Empower them during the conversation. Support *their* decisions. (“How can I support you? What can I do to help you?”)
- Communicate your concerns for their safety. It’s important to ask victims what changes could be made to make them feel safer.
- Affirm that the abuse is NOT their fault and that they do not deserve the abuse.
- Be clear that your role is to try to help and not to judge.
- Discuss Harbor House’s services to help people in abusive relationships. Emphasize that all of these services are free and highly confidential.
 - Give them a Harbor House brochure (if safe to do so) and go to the Harbor House website with them (if safe to do so).
 - Provide a safe place for them to call Harbor House if they choose.

If an employee trusts you enough to confide in you about their abusive relationship, your active listening and care is critical. If you become judgemental or accusatory, you will break the trust and the victim may stay in the relationship for even longer. Following are comments you should not say to the victim.

- “Why do you stay with this person?”
- “You love the drama and attention.”
- “Why do you let this person do this to you?”
- “What are you doing to make this person react this way? What is your ownership in this problem?”
- “It’s your fault.”

Disadvantages for the victim when sharing at work

Even though you suspect domestic violence and even approach the employee about this, the employee may or may not choose to talk with you about this. Some reasons include:

- Jobs may be jeopardized because employers lack understanding or willingness to be involved.
- Some people blame victims for their abuse.
- Some companies are afraid of negative publicity.
- If there is a business connection between the abuser and the victim's workplace, there may be resistance to assisting the victim.
- Some employers may be reluctant to offer help or be otherwise involved. They may also be concerned for the safety of their other employees.

Advantages for the victim when sharing at work

Reasons why employees may choose to disclose their abusive relationship with a boss or colleague include:

- An employer has resources to offer support.
- Needing time off from work to move, obtain protective orders, attend court hearings, etc.
- Work performance may suffer during this time. A supportive boss or company may overlook a temporary drop in performance.
- Safety precautions may be taken by informing co-workers of the situation and enlisting their help so the victim doesn't arrive at work or leave alone or in danger.
- Security or other staff are in place to take direction action to help or to notify the police if an abuser arrives at their place of work.

Workplace safety plans

If an employee has disclosed that they are in an abusive relationship, help them create a safety plan for while they are at work. Encourage the employee to call Harbor House's 24-hour hotline at 815-932-5800 and have a domestic violence professional walk through the safety planning process with them.

A safety plan is critical because the most dangerous time for a victim of domestic violence is when they leave an abusive relationship. When a victim flees the relationship, the one place the abuser knows they'll be is at work, making it a potentially dangerous location.

Consider the following suggestions to make your workplace safer for victims of domestic violence and all your employees.

- If the employee has an order of protection, urge them to keep it with them.
- Give a picture of the employee's abuser to security guards and other employees.
- Describe to security guards any vehicles the abuser may drive or disguises or aliases the abuser may use.
- Offer to have a co-worker or a supervisor screen the victims' calls.
- Do not allow employees who feel endangered to leave work alone after dark or even in the daytime.
- For victims who work in an office alone, consider asking law enforcement to drive by whenever possible. If you believe they are too vulnerable where they are, offer to change their jobs, locations, or positions.
- Make sure victims do not work in locations where they are visible and easily accessible to visitors, such as the front reception desk or near windows with an outside view, if possible.
- Whenever possible, enter and exit work with another person.
- Encourage the victim to alternate their driving routes to work.
- Alternate the employee's work schedule, if possible.
- Be willing to grant transfers to other towns or cities, if possible.
- Check on the employees' safety if they do not show up at work and haven't called.
- Be sure the victim and co-workers know the location of alarms.
- Ensure that victims are able to attend all legal and health appointments related to resolving the abuse.
- Make sure all public records and directories do not include employees' contact information.
- Give victims a new phone number.
- Block the abuser's email from the system.
- Install a panic button in the employee's work area.
- Give the employee a well-lit, priority parking spot near the building.
- Escort the employee to and from their vehicle or public transportation.
- Give the employee a cell phone with a pre-programmed 911 security feature.
- Provide information about the people and resources the employee can turn to in the workplace and community for help and support.

- Ask the employee to document all incidents of abuse in the workplace. Ask them to document how the abusive behavior affects them work. Work with them to address performance issues.
- Develop an escape plan with employees in the event the abuser got into the building and was a viable threat to the safety of employees (i.e. active shooter situation, bomb threat, etc.)
- Ensure security is confirming identities of everyone allowed on the premises.
- Identify opportunities for time away from work to make it easier for victims to get the help they need to rebuild their life.

If both the victim and abuser work at the same workplace, here are ways you as the employer can help.

- **Once the employee has told you about the abuse, make sure there are no negative repercussions for the employee.**
- Make sure that the abuser does not have access to the victim in the workplace.
- Do not schedule both employees to work at the same time. If possible, have them work at different sites.
- Hold the abuser accountable for any unacceptable behavior in the workplace. Use disciplinary procedures to deal with abuse.
- If the abuser engages in violence or other criminal activity, such as stalking or unauthorized electronic monitoring in the workplace, call the police.

About Harbor House

Harbor House empowers individuals, families and communities by providing domestic violence programs, advocacy and prevention. Free, confidential services include:

- Emergency shelter for victims of domestic violence, including women, men, children and a person with a pet
- Transitional housing
- Counseling for adults and youth
- Support groups
- Information and support with the legal system
- Case management
- Referrals and advocacy with other social service agencies
- 24-hour crisis hotline at 815-932-5800 staffed by domestic violence professionals

Harbor House assist employers in the following ways:

- Specialized trainings for business leaders, supervisors, Human Resources professionals, safety teams and/or all employees
- Safety planning
- Referrals and support to your employees experiencing domestic violence
- Policy review and development

Other resources

- Ncadv.org
- myPlan app (myplanapp.org): Helps a victim safely assess if they are in an abusive relationship and what they should consider.
- Workplaces Respond (workplacesrespond.org): Provides resources to companies on how to prevent and respond to domestic violence, sexual violence, and stalking impacting the workplace.
- LiveSave app (LiveSafeMobile.com): Allows employees to confidentially communicate safety concerns.