



HARBOR LIGHTS

FALL 2007

MISSION

To lead a community-wide partnership in the awareness and prevention of domestic violence and abuse and to offer safety and support to diverse families in crisis.

Keeping the Workplace Safe for a Victim of Domestic Violence



What affects employees affects their employers. With nearly one in three women reporting abuse at some time in their lives, domestic violence is likely to affect almost every workplace. The good news is that employers who address it can provide real help to victims *and* reduce the associated risks.

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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. Helping employees who are experiencing abuse can be a real challenge for human resource professionals and managers – but it is a challenge worth meeting. Just as employers deal with substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, disability and sexual harassment, they can address domestic violence. Doing so begins with a strategic plan and written policies and procedures – and with a real commitment to offer support and resources to those in need.

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Layout with permission from Sojourner Truth House*

"For many of us, (the work to end men's violence) has a strong hold on parts of our souls, and certainly our hearts. For most of us, it is much more than a job because we care so deeply, it sometimes makes us difficult to work with. We have been described as cranky. I want to be clear that I am acknowledging this, not apologizing for it. It has been our impatience for change that has brought about the tremendous shifts in societal attitudes and systems response over these past 30 years."

**Anne Menard, Director,
National Resource Center
on Domestic
Violence**

Harbor House Domestic Abuse Programs is leading the efforts to address workplace responses to violence.

If your company or organization is interested in receiving the training Domestic Violence in the Workplace-It's Your Business, please contact Kathy Flores at Harbor House at 920-832-1667 or email at kathyf@harborhousedap.org. This 3-4 hour training session is geared toward human resource departments, managers, and team leaders working with people.

PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE! www.harborhouseonline.org

What Can an Employer do?

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Recognizing a victim:

If you see these signs in your employee, she may be struggling with abuse at home. Does your employee....

- Have unexplained bruises or injuries that don't seem logical?
- Seem distracted or have trouble concentrating?
- Miss work often?
- Receive repeated, upsetting telephone calls during the day?
- Appear anxious, upset or depressed?
- Fluctuate in the quality of her work for no apparent reason?

Domestic Violence Laws in the Workplace

Although a victim may leave the home and go to a shelter or change her address, the abuser usually knows where the victim works. Not only do abusers harass their partners at work, domestic violence can lead to missed days of work because of injuries or court appearances. Federal and state legislation has recently been amended so that victims of domestic violence are not penalized by employers for missed work.

At the Federal level, Labor Law Section 593 (1) states that when a victim of domestic violence voluntarily terminates his or her job, he or she is eligible for unemployment benefits.

Occupational Safety and Health Laws

State and federal occupational safety and health laws require employers to maintain a safe work environment. The federal Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) has a "general duty" clause that requires employers to provide a safe and secure workplace free from recognized hazards. There is a corresponding similar state law provision.

Source: family.findlaw.com

How to help a victim:

While companies work to mitigate the economic, legal, and productivity risks related to domestic violence, they can also create a workplace that is safer for victims.

Considerations should include:

- Security to protect an employee at work is the number one priority. Best practices include: relocating an employee to a safer workspace, installing a panic button at an employee's desk or work area, escorting employees to parked cars, extra lighting in the parking lot, and priority parking near the building for employees who fear an attack.
- Training to raise awareness of workplace policies and increase sensitivity, especially of managers, required to recognize the signs of domestic violence.
- Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) or other counseling services for victims of domestic violence. Companies without EAPs can maintain lists of resources in the community that specialize in domestic violence.
- Schedule flexibility and leave-and-benefit policies to allow for attendance at court proceedings, meetings with a counselor, or relocation to a shelter.
- Education-including employee training, brown bag seminars, newsletter articles, and brochures on domestic violence—to foster an environment where it is safe to talk about and deal with domestic violence.
- Financial support in the form of drives to collect clothes, toys, furniture, or money for a local domestic violence program or shelter. Some companies are creating emergence funds for employees in crisis situations.
- Compliance issues—dictated by federal, state and local anti-discrimination, family and medical leave, and disability laws—that mandate certain acts and policies on the part of the employer and reduce the risk of employer liability for harm that may come to an employee from domestic violence.
- Disciplining abusive employees who are violent at work, including those who use workplace phones, faxes or e-mail to harass their intimate partners.

What Can an Employee do?

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Create a safety plan...

It is a good idea for women facing violence at home to create a safety plan, both for home and for work. Here are some suggestions:

- ◆ Make the issue known: talk with someone at your workplace you trust, such as your supervisor, human resources manager or employee assistance counselor.
- ◆ Notify security, supervisors and reception staff of your safety concerns. Provide a picture of the batterer and a copy of protective orders.
- ◆ Remove your name and number from automated phone directories, have your calls screened, and transfer harassing calls to security.
- ◆ Review the safety of your parking arrangements.
- ◆ Ask co-workers to call the police if your partner threatens or harasses you at work.
- ◆ Ask about flexible or alternate work hours.
- ◆ Ask to relocate your workspace to a more secure area.
- ◆ Review the safety of your childcare arrangements. Give a protective order to the day care provider. If necessary, consider selecting a new day care site.

The Bottom Line

- In a 1997 national survey, 24% of women between the ages of 18 and 65 had experienced domestic violence.
- Moreover 37% of women who experienced domestic violence report this abuse had an impact on their work performance in the form of lateness, missed work, keeping a job or career promotions.
- A study of survivors of domestic violence found that abusive husbands and partners harassed 74% of employed battered women at work. Domestic violence caused 56% of them to be late for work at least five times a month, 28% to leave early at least five days a month, and 54% to miss at least three full days of work a month. They said that abuse also affected their ability to keep a job.
- American employees miss 175,000 days per year of paid work due to domestic violence.
- The total health care costs of family violence are estimated in the hundreds of millions each year, much of which is paid for by the employer.
- A large majority of EAP providers surveyed have dealt with specific partner abuse scenarios in the past year, including an employee being stalked at work by a current or former partner (71%).
- The workplace is where many women facing domestic violence spend at least eight hours a day. It's also an ideal place for them to get help and support.
- Batterers also may be less productive or miss work because of violence, incarceration, or legal proceedings resulting from the violence.

FACT

When employers face domestic violence as it affects the workplace, they have the power to save money—and save lives.

Fortune 1000 executives say...

- ◆ 66% of Fortune 1000 senior executives surveyed say they believe their company's financial performance would benefit from addressing domestic violence among their employees
- ◆ 47% say domestic violence has a harmful effect on the company's productivity
- ◆ 44% say that it increases health care costs.

If you are in an abusive relationship and need help, call Harbor House at 920-832-1666 (Fox Cities), 920-849-7819 (Chilton/Calumet Cty), 800-970-1171 (Toll Free)



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Supervising employees who have perpetrators of abuse:

With millions of women battered every year in this country, it is inevitable that some employees in any medium or large-sized company will be batterers. Here are some suggestions for supervisors when talking to an employee who has been identified as a perpetrator of domestic violence:

- ◆ If the violence has been disclosed, discuss the problem with the employee. If it has not been disclosed but the supervisor suspects that it may be a problem, the supervisor may bring up any job performance problems that may be related to the abuse.
- ◆ Maintain the confidentiality of the employee
- ◆ Explain how domestic violence affects work performance. For example, making frequent calls to threaten or harass someone can have an impact on productivity.
- ◆ Refer the employee to batterer's treatment counseling.
- ◆ Be clear that the company does not tolerate domestic violence. Let the employee know what the policies are that apply to domestic violence, violence in general, and any other affected work area relating to the problem. Refer the employee to the Employee Assistance Program to get help.
- ◆ Call the police if the employee violates a restraining order or is violent at work.

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