

How Domestic Violence Impacts the Workplace

October is domestic violence awareness month



What happens at home affects the employee at work, which is why domestic violence can and does impact the working environment. Employees who are victims of domestic violence typically have higher stress levels, need to take more time off work, have reduced productivity, and may even be fearful for their lives or their family's lives while at work. Because of this, it's important for all employees and employers to be aware of the reality of domestic violence and how to prevent it from negatively impacting the workplace.

Recognizing Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is behavior someone uses to control a spouse, partner, date, or elderly relative through fear and intimidation. It can involve emotional, sexual, and physical abuse, as well as threats and isolation. In most cases, men are the abusers.

According to the National Domestic Violence Hotline, abuse can show itself in the following ways:

- **Physical battering.** The attacks can range from bruising to punching to life-threatening choking or use of weapons. A problem often

begins with threats, name-calling, and/or harm to objects or pets, but escalates into more serious attacks.

- **Sexual abuse.** A person is forced to have sexual intercourse with the abuser or take part in unwanted sexual activity.
- **Psychological battering.** Psychological violence can include constant verbal abuse, harassment, excessive possessiveness, isolating the victim from friends and family, withholding money, destruction of personal property, and stalking. The person may accuse the victim of being stupid, ugly, unfaithful, or having another fault, the American Bar Association (ABA) says.

(This section was excerpted from Krames Staywell.)

Using a Workplace Safety Plan to Prevent Domestic Violence

If domestic violence has touched you or one of your coworkers, the following tips will help you create a safety plan to protect your workplace from potential harm done by an abuser:

- Talk to supervisors about the situation. Make sure that security, reception, and management know of and have pictures of the abuser.
- Make sure the victim knows not to walk to the car alone, work alone, or go to lunch alone. Changes to the victim's work schedule may be appropriate.
- Have the victim inform coworkers and supervisors of the name and number of an emergency contact person.
- If there are legal restrictions against the abuser, there should be copies of the legal records at work (and given to security, management, and reception).

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- Have security or management screen calls to the victim. Make sure the victim knows to save and document any threatening e-mails, phone calls, faxes, etc., that appear at work.
- Talk to the employer about any other resources available that may help the abused and ways to make the workplace safer for the victim and his or her coworkers.



Why Victims Stay in Abusive Relationships

It may be difficult to understand why a victim would stay with the abuser. Here are some of the reasons why an abused individual would continue to stay with a batterer:

- **Fear.** Victims of abuse may fear additional violence to themselves, families, or friends if they leave the relationship.
- **Children.** Some victims may not want to leave because they want to keep the family intact. They may believe it is better for children to have both parents present in the household, regardless of the abuse.
- **Desire to stay in a long-term relationship.** Victims may not believe in divorce or separation because of cultural, religious, or personal reasons.

- **Love.** A victim may not want to leave a relationship out of love for the abuser. The abused individual may want to be in the relationship, but wish that the abuse would stop.

- **Self-esteem.** When a victim is repeatedly abused, whether verbally, physically, or emotionally, his or her self-esteem can be whittled away. The victim may start to think that he or she deserves the abuse or doesn't think that he or she could find another partner.

- **Support.** The batterer may provide financial or emotional support for the victim and his or her family. The battered may fear that he or she wouldn't be able to make an adequate income or be able to support his or her family.

- **Belief that the abuser will change.** Oftentimes, abusers promise that the abuse won't happen again so the victim will stay. But typically, the violence does happen again.

- **Doesn't know where to go or what to do.** The abused may not know where to go. Family and friends may be too scared to let the abused individual stay with them, or the abused may not know about victims' shelters or different community programs that help victims and their families.

It's not easy to end any relationship, whether abuse is involved or not. However, there is support available when and if the abused choose to leave. If you or someone you know is being abused, connect with the domestic violence shelters and prevention programs in your community. Your EAP may also have additional resources to help.