

Domestic Violence at Work

Domestic Violence is a business issue that cannot be ignored. The National Institute for the Prevention of Workplace Violence found that more than 5,900 people have died as the result of homicide in the workplace over the past decade. In fact, homicide is the third leading cause of death for people at work, with an average of 590 incidents a year.¹

The financial impact of domestic violence on our economy is significant. According to the Corporate Alliance to End Partner Violence, the cost of domestic violence to the U.S. economy is more than \$8.3 billion. This includes the cost of health care services and lost productivity. The health related costs of rape, physical assault, stalking, and homicide account for more than \$5.8 billion per year.

In 2010, Delaware Governor Jack Markell signed into law legislation establishing a Domestic Violence Workplace Policy for all state employees. This law will ensure that workers are better protected while performing their state jobs.

Whether they are at work in the public or the private sector, it is indisputable that more Americans are putting in more hours on the job. And that places a greater obligation on employers to ensure that their staffs are safe from domestic violence while performing their duties. It is important that we all know how to define domestic violence in the workplace, and how to address it respectfully and effectively.\.

[Learn about DCADV workplace domestic violence prevention efforts \[link to What We Do/Economic Justice\]](#)

What is Domestic Violence in the Workplace?

- Behavior that occurs on and off the worksite.
- Behavior that interferes with the capability to safely and securely perform one's duties at work.
- Harassing or repeated phone calls, text messages, e-mails, or faxes at work, unarmed and armed "show-ups", homicide.
- Sleep deprivation and physical injury that impacts the ability to perform job. e.g. (breaking fingers)

Signs of Abuse

Supervisors and union representatives are often among the first people in the workplace to become aware that an employee may be a victim of domestic violence. Below are possible indicators that someone may be abused:

- Unexplained bruises.
- Unusually quiet/withdrawn.
- Frequent absences from work.
- Lack of concentration.
- Wearing concealing clothes even in warm weather.
- Frequently breaks appointments with friends/family.
- Depression & anxiety.
- Change in performance/attitude.
- Receipt of harassing phone calls.

Employer Response to Victims

If an employee chooses to disclose his or her situation, the next step is to make referrals to either internal sources of assistance or external resources, such as a community domestic violence program. It is inappropriate to inquire about possible abuse since it may be perceived as a threatening intrusion into an employee's personal life. Talking about domestic violence is an emotionally charged event for both the person being abused and the confidante, and needs to be handled with sensitivity. Gently encourage employee to disclose without forcing disclosure. **The following steps may help:**

1. Let the employee know what you had observed: "I noticed the bruises you had last week and you look upset and worried today."
2. Express concern that the employee might be abused: "I thought it was possible that you are being hurt by someone and I am concerned about you."
3. Make a statement of support: "No one deserves to be hit by someone else."
4. If the employee still chooses not to disclose, no further questions or speculations should be made. A referral for assistance should be given at the end of the conversation.

How to Talk to an Employee Who is a Perpetrator of Abuse

With four million women battered every year, it is inevitable that some employees in any medium or large sized company will be batterers. The batterer needs to be challenged to recognize his or her own behavior and needs support and assistance in addressing it.

Abusers tend to minimize their behavior. Holding an employee accountable for his or her actions is the first step to ending the violence. Below are some suggestions for supervisors when talking to an employee who has been identified as a perpetrator of domestic violence.

- Discuss the problem with him if it comes to your knowledge or is observed. If it is based on a suspicion you have, 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, e.g. making frequent calls to threaten or harass someone can have an impact on productivity.
- Let him know that you care about him, but you will not condone his violent or harassing behavior.
- Refer the employee to batterer's treatment counseling.

What To Do at Work

Employees who find themselves in abusive situations are encouraged to let someone know. Your employer may have policies that can help you to be safer at work, keep your job, or take time off to go to court or recover from injuries caused by the abuser without losing your job. Check if your employer or union gave you an employee handbook or policy manual when you started work.

There may be changes you or your employer can make to your job that will improve your safety at work. These changes may help prevent a violent incident from occurring, may reduce the frequency of harassment by the abuser at work, or may help you feel safer so that you can worry less about harassment or violence. Below are suggested changes to consider:

- Change your phone number or extension.
- Route your calls through the office receptionist.
- Keep your home address and telephone number confidential.

- Request a transfer to a different desk, department, shift, or worksite.
- Have a security guard or other co-worker escort you to your car or to the nearest public transportation stop.
- Lock the door to your office or department .
- Register your protective order with the security department or security personnel.
- Post a picture of the abuser at the security desk and inform the security guards not to allow him/her into the building.
- Ask your employer to get a restraining order against the abuser for you in addition to your own restraining order.
- Review the safety of your childcare arrangements, whether onsite or off site

Domestic Violence Workplace Policy

Many employers now recognize the toll domestic violence has on job performance, productivity and consequently the organization's bottom line. In response to this problem, several employers across the US have implemented new programs and policies. There are several policies and practices an organization can adopt to support victims and send the message that domestic violence is not tolerated. **Below are some suggestions:**

- Create an open/supportive workplace that encourages disclosure.
- Publicize domestic violence programs in company newsletters, etc.
- Display posters with anti-domestic violence messages.
- Offer training on issues of domestic violence at all levels.
- Establish protocols for domestic violence situations. Many best practices can be found at The Corporate Alliance to End Domestic Violence ([link](#)) and the National Institute for the Prevention of Workplace Violence ([link](#)),
- Establish attendance and leave policies that accommodate an employee's need to address personal safety issues.
- Modify job assignments/schedules so employees can take steps to increase their safety.
- Consider the impact of domestic violence on employee performance during evaluations.
- Establish policies for employees who are abusers.
- Train security personnel to respond to domestic violence situations.
- Set policies that ensure employee domestic violence history does not affect future promotions.
- Offer benefit options that may assist victims.
- Change discriminatory practices by company or insurers.
- Build domestic violence training into new employee orientation programs.
- Train all departmental levels. (CEOs, EAP, supervisors, managers, security).
- Establish yearly refresher domestic violence courses.

View DCADV's [Model Domestic Violence Policy](#) [[link to ModelDVPolicy pdf](#)]

ⁱ National Institute for Domestic Violence News Release, *Report Finds Workplace Violence Still a High Risk, but Awareness Growing*. May, 2011.