

Recognizing and Responding to Domestic Violence in the Workplace

Domestic violence is not just limited to the home. Supervisors are often among the first people in the workplace to become aware that an employee may be facing domestic violence. If you think an employee may be abused, the next step is to make referrals to either in-house resources, such as an Employee Assistance Program, or external services such as a community domestic violence program.

SIGNS OF ABUSE

Does your employee:

- have unexplained bruises or explanations that don't seem to fit the injuries?
- 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?
- have a high absenteeism rate?

TALKING ABOUT ABUSE

If you think an employee may be abused, talk about the problem with her.

1. Let the employee know what you have observed;
2. Express concern that the employee might be abused;
3. Make a statement of support;
4. If an employee that you supervise voluntarily discloses to you that she is struggling with domestic violence, let her know you are concerned and that you will support her. Keep the information confidential, telling only those who need to know, such as Security if there is a direct threat of violence at work. Work with her to adjust her schedule or workload to increase her safety, if needed.
5. If the employee chooses to not disclose, no further questions or speculations should be made. If there are performance issues that result from the abuse, such as reduced productivity or excessive absences, you may offer help to her by focusing on the performance problems in an empathetic and caring manner, and refer her to appropriate company and community resources.

THE WORKPLACE SAFETY PLAN

Assisting an employee to develop a workplace and personal safety plan can reduce the risk of a violent situation on the job.

At work, an employee dealing with abuse may want to:

1. Obtain a restraining order and make sure that it is current and on hand at all times. Include the workplace on the order. Consider providing a copy to the police, her supervisor, Human Resources, the reception area, the Legal department, and Security.
2. Save any threatening emails or voicemail messages. She can use these to take legal action in the future, if she chooses to. If she already has a restraining order, the messages can serve as evidence in court that the order was violated.
3. Review the safety of her parking arrangements. Have Security escort her to her car, and obtain a parking space close to the entrance of the building.
4. Have her calls screened, transfer harassing calls to Security, and remove her name and number from automated phone directories.
5. Relocate her work space to a more secure area.
6. Change and/or have unpredictable rotations of her work schedule, work site, or work assignment if such a change is possible and would increase her safety at work