

Faculty and Employee Assistance Program

Newsletter

Working to End Domestic Violence: American Workplaces Respond to an Epidemic

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Over the past two decades, the American workplace has changed dramatically. Until fairly recently, it has been a place that focused almost exclusively on "getting the job done," where workers were expected to leave their problems and personal lives at home - or risked losing their jobs.

More and more, employers today recognize that personal, "real life" problems affect job performance, and job performance affects the bottom line. Because of this change, employers now routinely offer employees a full spectrum of assistance programs to help them deal with issues such as drug addiction, family problems and AIDS - finding that doing so is ultimately more cost-effective than leaving employees to solve these problems on their own. Increasingly, employers across the U.S. are addressing domestic violence by implementing programs and policies that respond to and help prevent abuse and treat it as a preventable health problem and bottom-line business issue.

Domestic Violence: Today, It's a Workplace Issue

- One in three American women report that they have been physically abused by a husband or boyfriend at some point in their lives;

- Sixty-six percent of Fortune 1000 senior executives surveyed say they believe their company's financial performance would benefit from addressing domestic violence among their employees. Forty-seven percent say domestic violence has a harmful effect on the company's productivity, and 44% say that it increases health care costs;
- Domestic violence results in hundreds of millions of dollars in health care costs in the U.S., much of which is paid for by employer benefits;
- American employees miss 175,000 days per year of paid work due to domestic violence.

Agenda for the Future: Model Workplace Practices

Recognizing that responding to domestic violence is "good business," companies increasingly are implementing policies that help employees who are facing domestic violence. By working to mitigate the economic, legal, and productivity risks related to domestic violence, businesses create a workplace that is safer for victims.

Model practices for companies of the future include:

Manager Training: about how to recognize the signs of domestic violence in their staff and how to discuss the workplace policies around the issue - can raise awareness and increase sensitivity.

Security: Security can play a critical role in protecting an employee at work. Employees can provide security personnel with a photograph of a batterer in case he comes to the workplace. Additional best practices include: special training in domestic violence, relocating an employee to a safer workspace, installing a panic button or other security device at an employee's workstation, escorts to parked cars, installing extra lighting in the parking lot, and priority parking near the building for employees who fear an attack at work.

Counseling and Referrals: The Faculty and Employee Assistance Program (FEAP) is trained to deal with Domestic Violence and can help employees, managers, and human resource professionals as they deal with Domestic Violence in the workplace. FEAP provides free, confidential short-term counseling, assessment and referral for employees and family members. FEAP is aware of local resources for Domestic Violence victims and can connect employees to appropriate resources. ***Call (434) 243-2643 for more information or to schedule an appointment to talk with a FEAP counselor. Visit our website for further information on Domestic Violence Resources at <http://www.healthsystem.virginia.edu/internet/feap/>***

Leave and Benefit Policies: Employers can accommodate employees' needs for flexibility in their schedules by not penalizing them if they need to attend court proceedings, meet with a counselor or relocate to a shelter.

Education: Employee training, brown bag seminars, newsletter articles, and brochures on domestic violence are all ways that an employer can create an environment where it is safe to talk about domestic violence.

Disciplining Abusers: Companies can have policies in place that discipline abusive employees who are violent at work, including those who use workplace phones, faxes or email to harass their intimate partners.

Facing Domestic Violence: It is a good idea for people facing violence at home to create a safety plan, both for home and for work.

Here are some suggestions for dealing with abuse:

Talk with someone at your workplace you trust, such as your supervisor, human resources manager or employee assistance counselor.

Notify Security of your safety concerns, if your company has security staff. Provide a picture of the batterer and a copy of protective orders to security, supervisors, and reception area staff.

Have your calls screened, transfer harassing calls to security, or remove your name and number from automated phone directories.

Review the safety of your parking arrangements. Have security escort you to your car, and obtain a parking space near the building entrance.

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 child-care arrangements. Give a picture of your batterer and a copy of your protective order to the day care provider. If necessary, consider selecting a new day care site.

If you are in an abusive relationship and need help, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline 1-800-799-SAFE (7233). (TTY 1-800-787-3224 for the hearing impaired).

The local Shelter for Charlottesville and surrounding area is the Shelter for Help in Emergency (SHE) 434-293-8509. Collect calls are accepted.

Information from Family Violence Prevention Fund website:

www.endabuse.org;
<http://www.endabuse.org/press/papers/workbrief.php3>
T, "Working to End Domestic Violence American Workplaces Respond to an Epidemic."

