

How to Help Coworkers Experiencing Relationship Abuse

Suggestive signs at work of an abusive home relationship:

- Bruises or injuries without explanation or no feasible explanation
- Excessive tardiness
- Frequent phone calls from partner
- Unexplained absences/use of sick time
- Changes in appearance – disheveled, etc
- Seems fearful, anxious or depressed
- Intense startle reaction
- Eating or sleeping problems
- Chronic, vague medical complaints
- Preoccupation/lack of concentration
- Difficulty making decisions

How to approach coworker

- Approach in a private and confidential manner.
- Explain what you have noticed and that you are concerned – “I’m wondering if things are going ok at home – if maybe someone is hurting you.”
- “No one deserves to be hurt or controlled by someone else.”
- If s/he denies, don’t push the issue.
- Let her/him know you felt you needed to ask, since domestic abuse is so common, and that you are available to talk anytime.

How to be supportive

- See “[How to Respond](#)” if s/he says yes
- Be patient, be a good listener
- Recognize that s/he is the expert about her/his situation: don’t tell her/him what to do
- Encourage her/him to seek help from social services or hotlines
- Help her/him speak with supervisors and security about the situation
- Help her/him make a [safety plan](#)
- Assist in whatever way s/he finds most helpful – screening calls, accompanying her/him out to lunch, etc.
- Maintain confidentiality
- Respect your coworker's decisions - this is a complex issue, and you cannot know all of the factors involved

Adapted from “Employee Domestic Violence Policy and Procedure”

http://www.endabuse.org/section/programs/workplace/dv_workplace_policies

How to Respond

Remember – you may be the first person your coworker has ever had the courage to tell about past or present abuse. How you respond can be very important for her/his future ability to trust others and move on with her/his life.

Be non-judgmental and supportive as you respond. Here are a few suggestions to try out:

- Thank you for telling me – I know it was difficult to do.
- I'm very glad you told me. I'm concerned about the health and safety of you and your children.
- I believe you.
- You are not alone.
- There are people who can help you.
- I'm sorry you have been hurt.
- It wasn't your fault. You are not to blame.
- No one deserves to be treated this way.
- I understand how difficult it is to be in this situation. It may take some time to figure out what to do.
- I will support you no matter what you decide to do.

Employees and Abuse

What Can You Do at Work?

If you are in an abusive relationship, or are being stalked:

- Make copies of e-mails
- Record voice messages
- Transfer harassing phone calls to security
- Keep a list of harassing events
- Bring a copy of restraining order to medical center security, along with abuser's picture
- Ask security for escort to and from parking lot

The above information is courtesy of:

<http://domesticabuse.stanford.edu/coworkers.html>

Employer Actions

- Distribute the perpetrator's photo to security guards/receptionists
- Change the employee's work shift or relocate the employee's workspace to a more secure area or another site
- Give the employee a cell phone to use in case her attacker finds her alone
- Ensure that hallways, elevators, parking lots and offices are well-lit
- Arrange for the survivor to have priority parking near the building
- Install security mirrors or emergency panic buttons
- Develop procedures so that security or employees can accompany one another to their cars or to public transportation, particularly after dark
- Have calls screened, transferring harassing calls to security-or have the employee's name removed from automated phone directories
- Limit information about employees disclosed by phone. Information that would help locate a survivor or indicates a time of return should not be provided
- The employer should have trained EAP professionals or external professionals to assist the employee with development of a safety plan