

The Advisor

Resources for Supervisors, Managers, and Human Resources Personnel

1-800-367-7474

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Domestic Violence: How LifeMatters® by Empathia Can Help

Recent high profile incidents have brought more attention to domestic violence and its destructive impact, not just on the individuals and families involved, but on the community as a whole.

However, domestic violence rarely begins with an incident that makes headlines. In an intimate relationship, the cycle of violence that occurs when one partner attempts to control another typically begins in gradual fashion and escalates over time. Common forms of domestic violence include:

- Threats
- Isolation
- Financial control
- Destruction of property
- Physical, sexual, verbal, or emotional abuse

While the majority of domestic violence is perpetrated on women, men can also be victims of abuse by their intimate partner. The problem is not limited to one specific group — people of all ages, races, and economic strata are subject to domestic violence, with many instances going unreported.

The workplace impact of domestic violence is substantial. Research indicates that each year it accounts for billions of dollars in lost workdays, reduced productivity, and employee turnover. Other costly effects of domestic violence on the workplace include:

- Increased errors
- Higher health care costs
- Greater need for security



- Operational costs, such as the need to change email addresses or phone numbers or transfer an employee due to safety concerns
- Increased legal liability for the company

While it is not unusual for people who are victims of domestic violence to keep this information private, managers may begin to suspect that an employee in this situation is having difficulties. This may occur because the manager notices signs of an abusive situation, such as:

- Frequently coming to work with injuries, either explained or unexplained
- Increasing absenteeism or tardiness issues, such as coming to work early or needing to leave early, staying at work later to avoid

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going home, or being late or absent while waiting for injuries to heal

- Receiving upsetting personal phone calls, emails, or visits
- Wearing unseasonable clothing to conceal injuries
- A marked decrease in job performance without any obvious explanation

In some instances, an employee will self-disclose that she or he is in an abusive relationship (see “How Do I Say That” for suggestions on how to handle this revelation). In other instances, the workplace may not learn of the employee’s issues unless an incident occurs, either on or off site. For this reason, it is useful to have an action plan in place that will provide support to

Facts About Domestic Violence

- Domestic violence accounted for 21% of all violent crime between 2003-2012.
- Domestic violence is committed on females 76% of the time and on males 24% of the time. The majority of female victims have suffered prior abuse by the same offender.
- One in four women and one in seven men 18 or older have experienced severe violence at the hands of an intimate partner.
- Each year, an estimated 12 million people experience physical violence, rape, or stalking by an intimate partner.
- One in three women who are murdered each year are killed by their current or former partner.
- A large percentage of domestic violence incidents go unreported.



employees with domestic violence issues while also protecting the safety of the workplace. There are several measures that HR and management can take to ensure this occurs:

- Be aware of your company policy on domestic violence. This policy often includes steps on how to respond when an employee discloses an abusive situation. In addition, it may provide guidance on how to respond if an employee is discovered using company resources to perpetrate acts of domestic violence, such as making threatening phone calls or sending hostile emails on company time.
- Post domestic violence awareness materials in places where employees can access them without being seen, such as the restroom, cafeteria, or break rooms. It may also be useful to put these materials in your company newsletter or post them on your Intranet.
- Develop an office safety plan in advance of any reported domestic violence situations. Key elements of a safety plan include:

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How Do I Say That

If an employee discloses that she or he is in an abusive relationship, consider these steps:

- **Listen.** It may be difficult for an employee to tell you about the abuse. The employee may be frightened or feel ashamed by the admission. It is important to be compassionate and to express concern about the employee's welfare.
- **Protect privacy.** Ask the employee for permission to notify company resources. Assure the employee that this information will only be disclosed when it is necessary to protect the safety of the workplace.
- **Make a referral to LifeMatters® by Empathia.** LifeMatters can assist employees who are affected by domestic violence in numerous ways, including:
 - Assessing the level of severity and risk to the employee, her or his children or immediate family members, and the workplace
 - Educating the employee on the cycle of domestic violence
 - Developing a safety plan both at home and at work (if one is not already in place) and determining who should be notified about these measures
 - Referring to supportive resources, such as legal assistance, shelters, advocacy groups, and relocation resources
 - Providing financial consultation, which can help with repairing damage to credit, addressing debt issues, and budgeting on a single income
- **Consult with HR and other company resources.** HR can review company policy, notify security and/or employee health, and provide information on any resources the company can provide. The LifeMatters Management Consultation Service is also available to provide guidance and assistance.
- **Schedule a private meeting with the employee.** Let the employee know what company resources are available to provide assistance (include representatives from other departments as appropriate). If security recommends that the employee's workstation be moved to a different area because of a threat by the abuser, explain why the person is being moved and any changes to her or his duties that may occur as a result. Make it clear that these changes are not a demotion, but a temporary measure to protect both the employee and the workplace as a whole.
- **Follow up.** Check in with the employee periodically to see how she or he is doing. While it is important to show compassion, be careful not to become overly involved in the situation. Your role is to help the employee stay focused and productive at work, which may be a huge help to him or her in breaking out of the cycle of abuse and reestablishing financial and emotional independence.

The LifeMatters by Empathia Management Consultation Service can provide assistance with a domestic violence situation. Call anytime.



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- Enforce all known court orders, including restraining orders.
- Post a photograph of the abuser with security and reception with instructions not to let him or her in the building. Obtain the employee's permission before taking this step.
- If the employee is receiving harassing phone calls or emails, change her or his extension or email address.
- When possible, approve the employee's requests for time off to deal with court dates.
- Have security escort the employee to and from her or his car before and after work.
- If the abuser is also an employee,

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arrange for one or both parties to be transferred to different shifts, departments, or work sites (if possible).

- If the employee has not given permission to inform staff of a threat, provide a general warning, such as: "We have been notified of a threat against an employee from an outside person. If you see anyone out of place in the building or in the parking lot, please notify security or your manager immediately and be vigilant with your own safety."

It is important to be compassionate and understanding when helping an employee who is dealing with domestic violence. Make certain to use non-threatening language and to keep the lines of communication open. While it can be difficult to see someone struggling, it is important to avoid becoming overly involved in employees' personal issues. Keep in mind that a person experiencing abuse is at most risk when she or he leaves the abuser, and that she or he may return to the abuser one or more times. Providing supportive resources and following company policy is the best way to help an employee who is experiencing domestic violence.

Editor:

Denise Delvis

Design Team:

Philip Chard
Carol Wilson
Maribeth Kalmer

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