

REAL LIFE SOLUTIONS



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How to Help A Coworker Who Is Experiencing Abuse

Approximately 74% of employed domestic violence victims are contacted or harassed by their abusers while they are at work. Based on this statistic alone, it is possible that you may encounter a co-worker who is experiencing domestic violence.

Domestic violence is a pattern of coercive behavior including emotional, verbal and physical abuse, used by an abuser to gain and maintain power and control over a current or former spouse, intimate partner or dating partner. It knows no boundaries and transcends all socio-economic classes, levels of education, occupations, religions and races.

If someone is experiencing abuse at home, the effects of the abuse are likely to carry over into the work environment as well. You may notice changes in their behavior at work that could indicate that something is wrong. For instance:

- Excessive lateness or unexplained absences
- Frequent use of 'sick time'
- Unexplained injuries or bruising
- Changes in appearance
- Lack of concentration/often preoccupied
- Disruptive phone calls or personal visits from their partner
- Drop in productivity
- Sensitivity about home life or hints of trouble at home

If you feel like you should talk to them about what's going on, approach them in a confidential manner, at a time and place with privacy and without interruptions. When approaching the topic of domestic violence with your co-worker, remember to be nonjudgmental. They may be embarrassed by the situation and you may be the first person they are telling.

Consider starting with a simple comment and question like, "You seem a bit preoccupied/stressed. Do you want to talk about it?" If your co-worker has an obvious injury, ask, "Are you safe?"

Give them the space to tell you what they want to tell you. Don't pressure them. Your role is not to fix the problem for them – sometimes, listening can be the most helpful.

If your co-worker does open up to you about the abuse, listen and refer. Encourage them to talk to human resources or call the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The EAP is a free, confidential service that's available 24 hours a day. EAP counselors can help your co-worker discuss their current situation and refer them to local service providers if needed.

Your supervisor or manager, human resources, or the EAP can assist you if you need further help or have questions.

** If your co-worker is in imminent danger or is requesting immediate assistance, call 911 and company security (if available) immediately, and consult with human resources.

Above all, remember that just supporting your co-worker no matter what can make a difference. Respect their decisions – you may not know all of the factors involved. Your co-worker may not do what you want or expect them to do.

Instead of focusing on being the one to solve the problem for them, focus on being supportive and trustworthy in their time of need.

The National Domestic Violence Hotline 2013

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