

Small Business Initiative on Domestic Violence

Domestic and sexual violence is pervasive and it affects every aspect of our society.

Studies show that at least one in four women is a victim of domestic violence at some point in her life; you almost certainly know someone who is a victim, although you may not be aware of it.

Domestic violence may also already be affecting your workplace.

Even small business owners with limited resources can take simple steps to address the effects of domestic violence in the workplace.

By providing effective support as shown in this brochure you will benefit your employees as well as your bottom line.

The Cost

- › \$3-\$5 billion per year in lost work days and reduced productivity. —*Bureau of National Affairs*
- › \$7.5 billion in economic harm relating to out-of-pocket costs. —*The National Institute of Justice*
- › Businesses lose dedicated employees; studies indicate that 24%-52% of surveyed battered women had lost their jobs, at least in part due to abuse. —*U. S. General Accounting Office*

The Law

In many states and cities, the law provides specific protections for employees so they do not lose their jobs as a result of being a victim of domestic violence. These laws range from requiring employers to give an employee a day off to attend court to making “reasonable accommodations” in the workplace to assist an employee in dealing with the abuse. Victims may also be protected under sex discrimination or other anti-discrimination laws, and they may have a right to time off, accommodations, or other protections under laws addressing injuries, disabilities, or illnesses.

About the Small Business Initiative

The Small Business Initiative is a project of the Safe@Work Coalition. The Coalition was created in 2000 by a group of employers, trade unions, domestic violence advocacy groups, and government organizations. Its mission is to educate employers and unions and to provide guidance on creating an environment where what was traditionally seen as a “private” problem can be openly and effectively addressed. For more information and resources contact our website at: www.safeatworkcoalition.org

The printing of this brochure is made possible through funds from the New York State Department of Labor

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DO YOU THINK THAT...

✗ No one who works for me is a victim of domestic violence.

✗ Domestic violence shouldn't enter the workplace. ✗ It is the victim's fault.

✗ Domestic abuse only happens to “poor people.”

✗ If I help a victim I am exposing myself to liability.

...DON'T BELIEVE IT FOR A MINUTE.

The Myths and the Facts

- Myth** **No one who works for me is a victim of domestic violence.**
- Fact** *At least one in four women in this country has been abused, so chances are one of your employees is or has been a victim of domestic violence.*
- Myth** **It is the victim's fault.**
- Fact** *The only person who can stop the abuse is the person being abusive. People who abuse do so because they need to control a relationship.*
- Myth** **Domestic violence is a private issue that shouldn't enter the workplace.**
- Fact** *Whether or not others in the workplace are aware that a co-worker or employee is a victim of domestic violence, it does enter the workplace. It affects a worker's productivity, attendance and well-being.*
- Myth** **Domestic abuse only happens to "poor people."**
- Fact** *Spouses of affluent, highly regarded businessmen and government officials as well as low-income individuals are victims of domestic abuse. Domestic abuse affects people of all ages, sexual orientation and from all socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, religious and educational backgrounds.*
- Myth** **If I help a victim of domestic violence, I am exposing myself to liability.**
- Fact** *By providing support in the form of referrals to qualified social service organizations and accommodating a victim's needs, you can help a victim address the problem without exposing your business to liability. However, by doing nothing or discriminating against a victim, you may expose your business to liability.*

Providing Effective Support

The most significant form of assistance that an employer can provide to an employee who is experiencing domestic violence is: (1) to provide referrals to the organizations that have staff trained to work with this issue, and (2) to help address the employee's needs in the workplace. The four basic steps for addressing domestic violence are as follows:

- 1 Say what you see.**

Examples: "I've noticed that—
...you seem pretty upset today after that phone call."
...over the last few weeks you seem so tired and shaky."
 - 2 Express concern.**

Examples: "I'm concerned that—
...you are having a difficult time."
...you don't seem yourself lately."
...you're not usually late or absent as much."
...you seem distracted."
 - 3 Provide support.**

Make reasonable accommodations to address the situation.

 - › Change a phone extension if employee is receiving harassing calls.
 - › Keep the employee's home address and phone number confidential.
 - › Allow time off.
 - › Transfer employee to a different desk, department, shift or work site.
 - 4 Respect your employee.**

Dealing effectively with domestic violence is a process that takes time and varies from individual to individual.

It is impossible to know from the outside what the victim should do. You might think that the victim should stop having any contact with the abuser, but that may not be the best or safest way to address the situation. The two might have children together or have other reasons to maintain contact. Or you might think that the couple should stay together and try to work things out in counseling. Again, this may not be the right answer for individuals involved.

The most powerful and effective way you can provide support is to communicate that you will respect the decisions your employee makes and that you will provide reasonable support at work if requested.
- Provide Referrals**
- › Refer employee to appropriate organizations that deal with workplace and domestic violence issues. These hotlines provide confidential and multi-cultural services.
- › **National Domestic Violence Hotline**
1-800-799-SAFE
www.ndvh.org
 - › **Employment Rights for Survivors of Abuse (ERSA)**
1-212-925-6635
www.legalmomentum.org
A national project of Legal Momentum providing free employment-related legal services to individuals, their advocates and employers