

Domestic Violence and the Workplace: Protecting Your Employees and Your Bottom Line in Six Steps



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TOGETHER WE CAN END DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & SEXUAL ASSAULT

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What do your employees bring through the door when they walk into work? In a national survey of full time employed adults by the Corporate Alliance to End Partner Violence (CAEPV) 21% indicated they were victims of domestic violence – and 64% percent indicated their ability to work was significantly impacted.

According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), intimate partner violence victims lose a total of nearly 8.0 million days of paid work a year—the equivalent of more than 32,000 full-time jobs—and nearly 5.6 million days of household productivity as a result of the violence. The CDC also reports that the cost of domestic violence to the US economy is more than \$8.3 billion. This cost includes medical care, mental health services and lost productivity (e.g., time away from work).

So – what can employers do to proactively keep their workplaces productive and safe?

Step 1:

Develop a domestic violence and the workplace policy and program

- Involve relevant stakeholders such as senior management, human resources, security, legal, communications, media relations, employee assistance programs (EAPs), medical, health or safety programs. This group becomes the “multi-disciplinary domestic violence response team” which is key to the process.
- Ensure EAP providers are trained in domestic violence identification and response, and are able to appropriately refer to domestic violence services.
- Seek expertise externally from domestic violence specialists.
- Ensure that senior management sign off on this process and champion the outcomes.

Step 2:

Develop a policy addressing domestic violence containing:

- A clear definition of domestic violence, with examples/case histories of how this affects the workplace. A clear statement that domestic violence is unacceptable at home and in the workplace.
- A clear statement that no violence or threats of violence should take place on workplace grounds or while an employee is on duty or acting in the interests of the employer. Include potential consequences of such actions. (Perpetrators of domestic violence may use workplace resources such as telephone, fax or email to threaten, harass or abuse their current or former partners. In addition to being a misuse of organizational resources, this behavior may be in breach of a current protection order or constitute a criminal offence, such as stalking.)
- A clear statement of the employer's commitment to addressing domestic violence as a workplace issue and examples of workplace accommodations and assistance available.
- A clear indication of where and how staff can access assistance regarding domestic violence and the workplace.

Step 3:

Develop procedures for implementing the program, ensuring they include:

- Details of the first point of contact for employees needing support.
- The role of key personnel in liaison with domestic violence specialists.
- The security measures, plans and procedures provided in the workplace to protect against domestic violence.
- An assurance of an employee's right to confidentiality and support when they disclose domestic violence.
- Guidance about how managers and employees should handle disclosures of domestic violence.

Step 4:

Distribute the policy

- Produce a compact, easy to read version of the policy and provide to all staff.
- Include the policy in the workplace intranet and orientation materials
- Ensure that operating units within the workplace vital to the success of the program are fully engaged and prepared before the policy and procedures are widely shared (two examples would be security and human resources.)

Step 5:

Provide training

- Train managers to recognize signs of violence for potential victims and perpetrators. Local domestic violence service providers often can assist with this training at little or no cost.
- Because managers must be careful to address concerns in the context of employment (unless the employee self-discloses), managers should understand how to respond—to appropriately address changes in behavior that is affecting performance.
- Train managers to refer—how to access internal and external resources for an employee. Managers should not give personal advice or counseling- this type of help should be left to the experts.
- Employee education should include a basic understanding of domestic violence, possible warning signs, and how to respond sensitively and confidentially to an abused co-worker. As in the case of managers, co-workers are not counselors, but facilitators in helping co-workers seeking assistance.
- Utilize the documentary “Telling Amy’s Story” to educate employees and managers regarding domestic violence. “Telling Amy’s Story” follows the timeline of a domestic violence homicide that occurred on November 8, 2001. The victim’s parents and co-workers, law enforcement officers, and court personnel share their perspectives on what happened to Amy in the weeks, months, and years leading up to her death.

The documentary is available in DVD format from:

http://www.caepv.org/about/program_detail.php?refID=72

Step 6:

Build awareness through workplace communication

- Display public education materials about domestic violence in accessible areas such as lunch rooms, restrooms, and on the organization's website.
- Provide details of where victims and abusers can get help locally or an anonymous help line.
- Organize regular awareness training and education in all levels of the organization about domestic violence.
- Incorporate information about awareness of domestic violence into employee orientation programs, handbooks, and intranet-based human resources information. For best effect, educational and awareness programs on domestic violence should be intertwined with other complimentary programs. Employee wellness fairs, workplace safety programs, town hall meetings, and family issues seminars are effective venues for sharing information about domestic violence.

State and municipal laws vary greatly with reference to domestic violence and workplace issues (unemployment insurance, non-discrimination laws, etc). Employers should work directly with their legal departments to develop policies and programs.

Employers who take on the challenge of addressing intimate partner violence as a workplace issue are true leaders. They are choosing enlightened self-interest in an effort to save lives—and change society.

You can find more information on these steps – including a sample policy -- at www.caepv.org in our Take Action/Starting a Workplace Program Section.



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