

Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence in the Workplace



rape and abuse
crisis center

advocacy. counseling. education.

Most employees spend the majority of their waking hours at their place of employment, and they may see their workplace as a place of safety. As an employer, you are uniquely suited to recognize intimate partner and sexual violence and intervene appropriately. By providing education, resources and support, you can ensure a safe work environment. Intimate partner and sexual violence can be prevented.

How You Can Help

You may not realize an employee is a victim, as they are likely to keep it secretive due to embarrassment and fear of losing their job. Here are some suggestions that might help to address the problem of intimate partner or sexual violence with an employee:

Recognize the Warning Signs

Everyone responds to trauma differently. Many people who are experiencing relationship or sexual violence will try to hide their responses out fear, guilt, and shame. Over time symptoms may show up in the workplace. The signs listed below do not necessarily mean an employee is a victim of relationship or sexual violence. When evaluating a situation, consider the big picture. Do you see more than one of these signs? Have several instances occurred over a period of time?

- **Physical**
 - Bruises, cuts, scratches, broken bones, etc.
 - Wearing extra clothing or clothing that seems out of place for the season (attempting to hide physical injuries with heavy sweaters or scarves in the summer)
 - Significant change in outward appearance (how they carry themselves, what they wear, lack of interest or excessive interest in how they look)
 - Indications of pain; remember, some injuries may be in non-visible places
- **Behavioral**
 - Heightened fear, anxiety, worry, or hyper-vigilance
 - Triggers or intense reactions to others or the environment (people being close without permission, sights, sounds, places)
 - Crying after personal calls
 - Fear or anxiety about getting home late
 - Outbursts of anger
 - Anger turned inward (depression, persistent fatigue or lethargy, withdrawal, isolation, seeming distant)
 - Loss of memory
 - Change in appetite with significant weight loss or gain
 - Substance abuse
 - Increased behaviors with unhealthy outcomes (unprotected and/or anonymous sex, gambling, smoking)

- **Job Performance**
 - Increased absences or illnesses
 - Arrives late or leaves early
 - Unexplained absences during the day
 - Receives repetitive or harassing phone calls or visits from partner at work
 - Decreased levels of interest in projects/tasks
 - Difficulty working with others or with a specific gender

Communicate

- Provide an open environment for communication - make sure the workplace is free of victim-blaming attitudes regarding victims of intimate partner and sexual violence
- Find an appropriate place and time to talk with the employee
- Don't assume; only indicate your observations; focus on job-related concerns
- Be supportive; Leave the door open if there is denial; if an employee does disclose relationship or sexual violence, do not judge them, blame them. If they're in an abusive relationship do not pressure them to leave. Leaving is one of the most dangerous times in relationships where violence is involved; it's a process, not a one-time event, and it must be their decision

Support

If an employee discloses relationship or sexual violence, demonstrating support is important. Sometimes it's hard to know how to show support, but the good news is that you don't need to have all the answers. What can you do?

- Let them know it is not their fault
- Refer them to resources available to them:
 - Rape and Abuse Crisis Center
 - All services for clients are free and confidential
 - 24 hour crisis line: 701-293-7273
 - Your HR department – talk with them about considering a change to the following:
 - Contact information – including emergency contacts
 - Beneficiary Information
 - Wage allocation information – eliminate direct deposit to joint checking
 - Change to emergency contact information
- Provide time off for court hearings, medical and counseling appointments, law enforcement investigations, and moving as needed
- Demonstrate understanding – provide clear communication about their job assignments if adjustments need to be made and non-retaliation at future performance evaluations

1. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2006. *Survey of Workplace Violence Prevention, 2005*. Washington, DC. Available at: <http://www.bls.gov/iif/oshwc/osnr0026.pdf>

Protect

- Create organizational policy and protocol to address workplace violence; include an Emergency Response Plan to address violence that may occur on-site
 - More than 70% of U.S. workplaces do not have a formal program/policy that addresses workplace violence¹
 - Visit www.workplacesrespond.org and follow their interactive Workplace Policy Creation Tool to help develop a policy based on your workplace location and size
- Offer on-the-job protection (within reason)
 - Consider developing a safety plan with the employee; this plan needs to be created with the affected employee as they know the higher risk times, the offender's patterns of behavior, and so on
 - If the victim has a specific concern for their safety or if they have an Order for Protection, consider the following:
 - Screening their phone calls and visitors
 - Talking with them about relocating their office and providing an office or desk away from windows and doorways, if needed
 - Providing a photo of the offender to receptionists and security
 - Creating code words
 - Offering safe escorts to car or public transportation
- Consider business-related security measures: limit entrances, install buzzer alarms, keep doors locked to the outside, work with local law enforcement or hire a security firm to develop a security plan

Prevent

Intimate partner and sexual violence can be prevented. How can you help?

Increase Awareness

- Consider annual safety training that includes information about intimate partner and sexual violence
- Contact the Rape and Abuse Crisis Center – we provide education to area schools, businesses, and organizations about the issues

Promote Prevention

Increased knowledge and awareness doesn't necessarily change behaviors or the environmental factors that allow for these issues of violence to occur.

- Create a workplace culture that promotes respect, equality and safety
- Encourage co-workers to volunteer, learn more about the issues, or become active bystanders for preventing violence
- If you'd like additional information, or if you'd like additional consultation around policy related to workplace violence, please call us at 701-293-7273

1. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2006. *Survey of Workplace Violence Prevention*, 2005. Washington, DC. Available at: <http://www.bls.gov/iif/oshwc/osnr0026.pdf>