

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Protect your employees from the impact of intimate partner violence, which can affect productivity, absenteeism and workplace safety.



A Guide for Employers

The health-related
costs of intimate
partner violence
annually exceed
\$5.8 BILLION





Of which nearly
\$1.8 BILLION
are for the
indirect costs
of lost productivity
or wages.¹



Domestic Violence is a pattern of coercive behavior that enables one person in a relationship to gain power and control over the other person.

This coercive behavior can include physical, sexual, emotional, psychological or financial abuse. Victims of abuse may suffer from physical violence, intimidation, name calling, isolation from family and friends, deprivation of financial and physical resources, and extreme jealousy and dominance at the hands of their abuser. Often, it is the mere threat of violence that keeps the abuser in control of his or her victim.

Statistics bear out the seriousness of the problem: According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), nearly 5.3 million incidents of intimate partner violence occur each year among U.S. women ages 18 and older, and 3.2 million incidents occur among men.² According to a Commonwealth

Fund survey, one in three women will become a victim of domestic violence in her lifetime.³

Domestic violence knows no boundaries and is a significant concern in today's society. Domestic violence permeates all walks of life regardless of socioeconomic status, educational level, geographical level, or racial, ethnic and sexual orientation. While its name implies that domestic violence is a problem only within the home, this is untrue. The impact of domestic violence spills over into all aspects of society, including the workplace.

This guide is designed to provide you with some crucial information regarding domestic violence and its impact on the workplace. Specifically, it proposes suggestions for providing assistance to employees who are experiencing domestic violence, while also offering strategies to keep the workplace safe for all employees.

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How Does Domestic Violence Impact the Workplace?

Beyond its tragic human dimension, domestic violence places a measurable economic strain on U.S. businesses. In addition to direct medical and legal costs related to domestic violence, employers are also impacted by indirect costs attributed to lost productivity from both absenteeism and presenteeism. (Presenteeism refers to the loss of productivity that occurs when associates show up for work but perform below par due to any kind of illness or life distraction.) CDC figures indicate that intimate partner violence victims lose nearly 8 million days of paid work – the equivalent of more than 32,000 full-time jobs – as a result of the violence.⁴ The CDC also estimates the annual cost of lost productivity due to domestic violence at \$727.8 million.⁵

Furthermore, when a perpetrator succeeds in committing domestic violence in the workplace itself (as, for example, when an abusive partner follows the victim to work and attacks there), employers can be held legally responsible. According to the Family Violence Prevention Fund, jury awards in 2003 for inadequate workplace security suits averaged \$1.2 million nationwide and settlements averaged \$600,000 per award.⁶

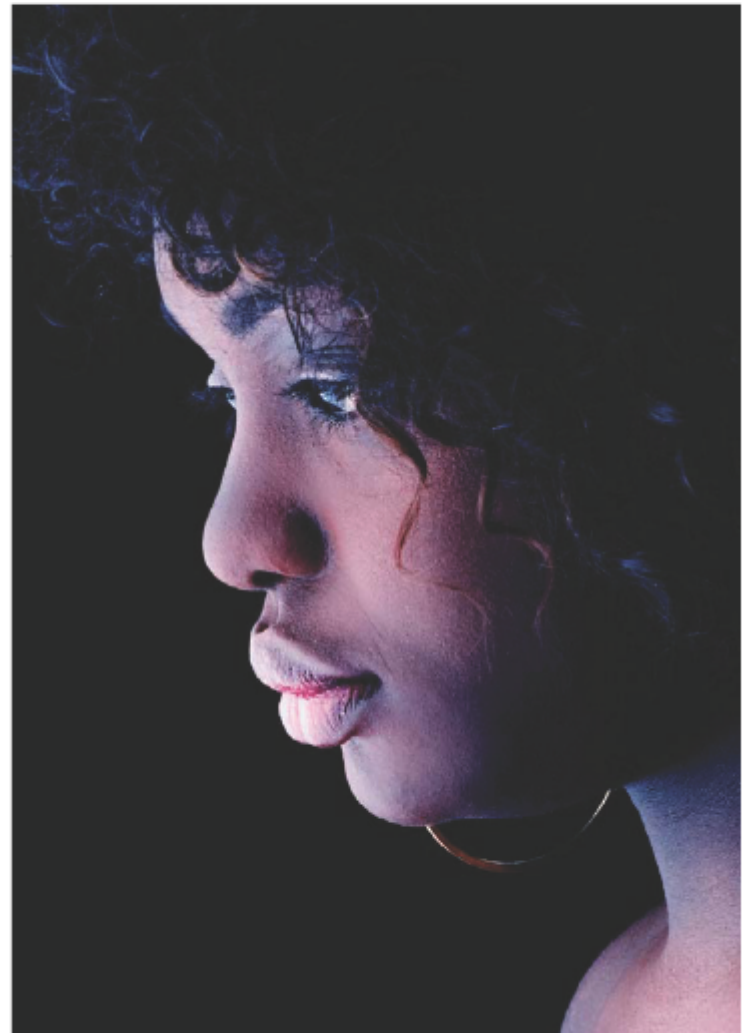
It is important to remember that employers can make a difference in raising the awareness of domestic violence and can provide assistance to those who are impacted by it, including both victims and their colleagues. Domestic Violence incidents range from emotional baggage carrying into the victim's workday, to harassing phone calls from the abuser, to actual physical confrontations in the workplace. Such incidents affect the safety of all employees and can result in a measurable loss of productivity and performance.

Having a plan to address Domestic Violence demonstrates employer responsibility as well as a commitment to providing a healthy work environment for employees. MHN can help by providing training and resources for managers as well as their employees, 24/7 management consultation resources, telephonic clinical counseling for victims and a variety of other tips and tools outlined in this guide.

Your Duties as an Employer

When Domestic Violence actually or potentially impacts an associate, the workplace or other employees at the work site, it is the company's responsibility to respond. This duty is based on legal, ethical and business considerations, including the following:

- » **Binding laws, guidelines and regulations** impose an obligation on employers to keep employees safe. For example, the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Act mandates that an employer "shall furnish to each of his employees employment and a place of employment which are free from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm to his employees." (This is called the General Duty Clause.) Not responding to evidence of threats and violent behavior is grounds for an OSHA citation and fines, especially if the perpetrator follows through on his/her threats.
- » **Employers have an ethical obligation** to provide a safe environment because employees have a moral right to a safe place in which to work.
- » **It makes good business sense** to maintain a secure workplace. Workers are more productive and committed when they feel secure. Taking steps to identify and respond to threatened or actual violence can save financial costs, reputation costs, emotional costs and legal expenses. Most important, preventative safety measures can save lives.



*ts of society,
e workplace.”*

Estimated cost of lost productivity due to domestic violence:



How Can I Recognize Possible Domestic Violence?

It's important to remember that associates rarely approach their managers about the issue – often because victims often tend to feel embarrassed, ashamed or afraid. However, the effects of domestic violence may become evident to you, or they may be reported to you by concerned colleagues of the victim.

Here are some possible indications:

- » **Physical Signs** – Unexplained or irrationally explained bruises, scratches or handprints; excessive clothing or makeup designed to hide injuries; burns; loose or broken teeth; broken bones
- » **Behavioral Signs** – Apparent fear of partner or ex-partner; unusually frequent use of health services; signs of depression or low self-esteem; talk of an abused "friend"; personality changes; lack of funds; a frequent, urgent need to return home or answer the phone immediately; reluctance to socialize with colleagues
- » **Job Performance Issues** – Frequent (often visibly upsetting) calls from partner, requests to leave early, fluctuations in job performance (particularly with a quality employee), inability to concentrate and focus, increased absence, reduced productivity, frequent tardiness
- » **Perpetrator Behavior** – Frequent (often visibly upsetting) visits from partner, attempts by partner to sabotage victim's job by disrupting child care, transportation, visitation, etc., frequent calls to monitor what their partner is doing, waiting and watching outside of work to monitor partner's activities throughout the day

How Can or Should I Take Action?

There are several steps you can take to address the impact of Domestic Violence on the workplace, including developing guidelines, educating and training employees and implementing safety procedures with a security plan.

DEVELOPING A SECURITY PLAN

- » **Assemble a team.** Pull together resources from inside and outside the company to help determine risks and define appropriate steps to lessen the threat. Consider including representatives from Human Resources, senior management, Legal, and law enforcement.
- » **Assess the work environment.** Consider such elements as lighting, accessibility, natural hiding/lurking places such as bushes and dark vestibules, and the existence of surveillance equipment. Consult a security firm that specialize in violence prevention risk assessments and premises security.
- » **Develop an emergency response plan.** Decide how you will react if perpetrators come to the workplace. How will you spot them? How will you distribute descriptions to security? Can you lock down the premises while securing an escape route? What is the most effective way to warn the targeted victim? Develop a strategy for effectively communicating with staff and management during a crisis. Remember that Security – not a receptionist – should be tasked with being on the lookout.
- » **Take additional measures as appropriate.** Obtain a copy of restraining orders in effect, if possible. Consider initiating harassment charges if a perpetrator is continuously disrupting the workplace with visits or phone calls. If necessary, change the victim's phone extension, move her or his workstation away from doors or windows, and assign her/him a safe parking spot. Consider requesting help from law enforcement or private security firms.

Strategies for Providing Support to Domestic Violence Victims

- » **Approach the employee with sensitivity and compassion.** Find an appropriate time and place. (The victim may be particularly open to a show of concern following a violent or upsetting incident.) Share your observations and concerns without immediately concluding that Domestic Violence has taken place. If the associate denies the suspicions, do not persist. If the victim acknowledges the Domestic Violence, listen and show empathy for the situation. If you are unsure of how to approach and employee, call MHN for a domestic violence management consultation.
- » **Avoid typical mistakes.** Do not be judgmental. Do not ask "Why don't you just leave?"; severing or leaving an abusive relationship can be extremely complicated and seem completely impossible. Do not push the associate to take action they feel is unsafe, such as getting a restraining order or pressing charges. Rather than pressuring the employee to take any particular step, present the employee with options and allow them to be in charge of their decisions. For a better understanding of these options, consult a community services provider or MHN's Management Consultation line.
- » **Provide resources for a personal plan.** Provide the employee with MHN's Safety Tip Sheet and Safety Plan Template. Do not offer to develop a plan with the associate, as this can incur liability for your company. Rather, ensure that the associate understands it is her or his responsibility to develop a personal plan, and that you will try to help furnish some of the resources that she or he needs in order to do so.
- » **Refer the associate to the MHN EAP benefit.** Remind the employee that telephonic consultations and/or face-to-face counseling sessions (depending on your plan) are available.



MHN offers a wealth of services that can help you deal with troubled employees and difficult workplace situations including management consultations and critical incident stress debriefings (CISDs).

To learn more about MHN's services, please visit www.mhn.com, or call us at **(800) XXX-XXXX**.

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REFERENCES

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Costs of intimate partner violence against women in the United States. Atlanta (GA): CDC, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control; 2003.

² Ibid.

³ Collins, K., Schoen, C., Joseph, S, Duchon, L. Simantov, E. & Yellowitz, M. (1999). Health Concerns Across A Woman's Lifespan: The Commonwealth Fund. 1998 Survey of Women's Health.

⁴ CDC, 2003.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Perry, P. (1994). Assault in the workplace. Law, May 1, 41.