

When You're a Victim of Domestic Violence

Battered employees often hide the pain at work. They may be embarrassed or afraid of losing their job. Do you or a coworker have bruises to hide, fears you can't talk about? Most victims of domestic violence are women—wives or significant others, who deny what's happening.



Scope of the Problem

Do you or a coworker come in late, leave early, or miss work altogether, always with an excuse? Is domestic abuse the reason? Of the 5.3 million women abused each year, 1,232 are eventually killed by their partners, male or female. Recognition and intervention are critical to break the cycle of abuse. Abused workers are preoccupied, tense, and hyper-vigilant. This costs them, and their employer. Everyone loses.

What Is Domestic Violence?

Domestic abuse can be physical, sexual, economic, or emotional.

- Does your partner threaten or humiliate you, often in front of others?
- Does he put the blame on you? "You make me drink." "I have to do drugs to put up with you."
- Are you often isolated, restrained, or under continual surveillance?
- Are you pressured to have unwanted sex?
- Does your partner withhold praise or affection?
- Have you been pushed, slapped, or beaten?
- Do you feel there's no safe way out of this relationship?

Answering "yes" to any of these questions means it's time to get help.

Why Victims Stay

Many victims of domestic abuse stay because they need the financial support and shelter provided by the abuser. They may still love him or her and hope for change. They may feel responsible for the abuse. "If only I cooked better, was more attractive, made more money, was better in bed." Abuse can begin with a shove and eventually turn into severe beatings. The sooner the abuse is recognized, the safer the exit can be. Leaving should be carefully considered, and if planned, done in a way that ensures your safety.

Counseling: Will It Work?

You may desperately want your partner in professional counseling, and acceptance of help may follow a crisis, but ask: Is the abuser an alcoholic or drug addict? If so, chronic disease will sabotage professional counseling, so treating it first must be the starting point. Regular attendance at a 12-step program is one indication that change is possible and should be concurrent with other counseling. If drinking or drug use continues, during counseling or afterwards, another violent incident may not be far behind. Your safety will continue to be at risk.

Helping a Coworker

Myths abound about domestic violence. Coworkers may think, "It could-

n't be that bad or she would leave." Don't accept excuses if a friend can't explain injuries. Say, "I'm concerned about you. How did you really get hurt?" Offer to find help. If you cannot offer your own home as a safe place, connect your coworker with one of the domestic violence hotlines.

Planning an Escape Route

A victim of abuse has a right to protect herself and her children. Use domestic violence experts to help you plan ahead. If a potentially dangerous outburst is coming while you are home—like a fire emergency—have the ability to get out safely and arrange in advance to have the resources you need lined up.

Taking Legal Action

If you have decided to leave, you may need a Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) to keep the abuser away from you, your home, your workplace, and the children's school. The police will enforce the order when alerted, but you should educate yourself about how they work. Report any violations promptly. Make teachers aware of the TRO and discuss safe behaviors with your children. Let your employer know it, and alert security guards and coworkers. About 75% of abuse victims are harassed at work.

The EAP stands ready to help you troubleshoot problems, examine options, deal with hard choices, and face the future.