

Tips for Employers

How to Recognize that an Employee Is Being Abused

A victim may exhibit the following signs:

- Obvious injuries such as bruises, black eyes, broken bones and hearing loss, often attributed to “falls,” “being clumsy” or “accidents”
- Clothing that is inappropriate for the season, such as long sleeves and turtlenecks, as well as wearing sunglasses and heavy makeup
- Uncharacteristic absenteeism or lateness for work
- Change in job performance, including poor concentration, errors, slowness and inconsistent work quality
- Change in appearance and self-esteem
- Need for increased supervision
- Uncharacteristic signs of anxiety and fear
- Requests for special accommodations, such as leaving early
- Unable to travel for work
- Isolation – including unusual quietness or keeping away from others
- Emotional distress, tearfulness, depression and talk of suicide
- Minimization and denial of harassment or injuries
- An unusual number of phone calls, faxes or emails from a current or former partner, strong reactions to those calls, and reluctance to converse or respond to phone messages
- Sensitivity about home life or hints of trouble at home
- Disruptive personal visits to the workplace by current or former partner
- Irrational or unfounded fear about losing her/his job
- The delivery of gifts and flowers after what appears to have been an argument or obvious physical violence

What You Can Do or Say to Help the Victim

- Learn about the resources available through your local domestic violence program and obtain information and hotline numbers for distribution at your workplace.
- Gently and indirectly probe the issue. Plan what you are going to say and describe your observations without judgment.
 - “I’ve noticed you’ve been distracted lately, and you don’t really seem to ‘be yourself.’ I am concerned about you, and am wondering if there is anything I can do to assist you?”
 - “I’ve noticed a change in your work in the past few months. You are not as productive, you are frequently late for work, often leave early, and have missed a few meetings. I am concerned about you, and about your work performance – is there anything I can do to help you improve or get back on track?”
- If abuse is acknowledged, accept her/his reluctance to talk about it. Listening is the first step, and it may take time and several conversations before she/he will verbalize that she/he is being abused. Be there and be patient.
- Show concern and be supportive. Don’t underestimate the danger of the situation.

Let the employee know they are not alone.

“I am concerned for your safety.”

“You are not responsible for what your partner has done to you.”

“You don’t deserve to be verbally, emotionally or physically abused.”

“Without intervention, the abuse will likely get worse.”

“I will support you and your decisions.”

“This affects your children, too.”

- Let her/him know that domestic violence is a crime and that she/he can seek protection from the courts.
- Listen in a non-judgmental way. Encourage the employee to make her/his own decisions but urge her/him to contact the local domestic violence program for help and safety planning.
- Provide information about company and community resources, such as employee assistance program.
- Do not tell the person what you think she/he should do. Respect the person’s ability and responsibility for solving her/his own problems (when connected with appropriate resources).
- Do not try to physically intervene. Call Security or the police.
- Do not go to the person’s home to get their things or have the person stay with you.
- Contact your Human Resources office or Security to apprise them of any suspected domestic violence situation immediately.

How to Recognize that an Employee Is an Abuser

An abuser may exhibit the following signs:

- Checks up on partner frequently
- May use company phone, e-mail, fax or other equipment to do so
- Puts partner down publicly and privately
- Talks about controlling partner
- Exhibits jealous and obsessive behavior
- Blames partner and others for problems and shortcomings

What You Can Do or Say to Help the Abuser

- Learn about the batterer intervention services by contacting your local domestic violence program
- Don’t reinforce the behavior in any way
- Tell him/her you are uncomfortable when he/she insults or puts down partner
- Maintain that there is no excuse for violence
- Indicate that you are concerned for her/his well-being and the well-being of her/his partner or family
- Do not try to physically intervene
- Don’t be judgmental of the person – just their behavior
- Provide information about company and community resources
- Contact your human resources department or security if you suspect that one of your employees is an abuser

Information above adapted from Lix Claiborne, Inc. and the Corporate Alliance to End Partner Violence