

OCTOBER DESIGNATED DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS AND PREVENTION MONTH

October is designated Domestic Violence Prevention and Awareness month. Most people do not realize that an act of domestic violence occurs every 12 seconds in the United States. Each year between 600,000 and 6 million Americans will be the victim of domestic violence. When you look at the gap between those numbers, it is important to realize that domestic violence is one of the most unreported crimes in United States.

Domestic violence is a pattern of abuse by one partner against the other for the purpose of maintaining power and control. Domestic violence does not always include physical abuse, rather, it may be in some other recognized form, including:

- sexual abuse
- verbal abuse
- isolation or restrictions from friends family and other support systems
- destruction of property
- financial exploitation
- jealousy and possessiveness stalking
- monitoring of the other person's behavior

As you can see, it goes well beyond physical battering. And sadly, often the offender does not even realize that his/her behavior constitutes domestic violence; yet to the victim, the pain and injuries go much deeper than just the skin.

According to the National Institute of Justice, one in four women will experience domestic violence against her during her lifetime. And keep in mind, domestic violence is not just a crime against women. Over 850,000 men are victims of domestic violence each year, but few report the crime, as many feel it compromises their masculinity, and "men don't tell".

As employers, we have a fiduciary obligation to protect our employees in the workplace, including those who are subjected to acts of domestic violence against them. Domestic violence does not necessarily stop at the front door of our buildings simply because our employees have arrived at work. Sadly, there are many documented cases where victims of domestic violence or injured or killed in the workplace at the hands of the aggressive partners. At SWA, we have worked with several companies after an incident of domestic occurs (including one fatal incident), and we have seen firsthand the catastrophic impact it has on employees, and on future business.

So what can we advise our employees to do? At work, employees should take the following precautions:

For the employee experiencing domestic violence:

- Notify your supervisor about circumstances of your situation so that you can be safe in the workplace
- Discuss options available to you, such a scheduling changes, safety precautions, special parking arrangements escorts into and out of the building etc.
- Obtain an Order of Protection if you're being physically abused
- Submit a recent photo of the perpetrator to Security or Human Resources so that person may be recognized if he or she enters the building
- Contact human resources for confidential help and advice, and for access to the EAP for additional assistance

For coworkers of someone experiencing domestic violence:

- If you suspect a coworker is suffering abuse, do not directly confront him or her since it is important for an individual to self-disclose, for his or her own safety, well-being and privacy
- Express concern and willingness to listen and be supportive if needed
- Offer support and listening; when the individual is ready, they will confide
- Suggest the individual contact the Human Resource Department or the EAP for confidential help and advice if there's a problem
- If you witnessed an incident at work, notify Security and/or Human Resources right away. Make sure the incident is documented

If you are the supervisor or manager of an employee who is experiencing domestic violence:

- Be aware of unusual absences or behaviors and take note of any physical signs or any emotional distress
- Offer your support and listening; let the employee know that you're available should they decide to discuss the problem
- Do not try to diagnose or help solve the problem
- If the employee has disclosed the situation to you, you may contact the EAP or the Human Resources Department to discuss resources available to the employee
- Assist the employee in documenting all incidents which occurred in the workplace
- Encouraging the employee to seek help

- Do not discuss the situation with anyone without employee's knowledge and permission. This is very important.
- If the employee's job performance is suffering as a result of a personal problem, use regular, administrative remedies to deal with those issues. Avoid lumping personal problems in with job performance issues.

Domestic violence is a crime that crosses all barriers. It is not limited to any race, religious denomination, financial class, social groups or any other category. Any and every person can be a victim, and others around the person may not even be aware. One thing we can be sure of is that it is occurring in our organizations, and that it puts every person in the building at risk!

Please contact me if we can be of any assistance.

ONLINE RESOURCES

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (www.ncadv.org)