

FEAP NEWSLETTER

A Series of Educational Articles from your Faculty and Employee Assistance Program

Did You Know That October is Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Awareness Month?

Nearly one third of American women (31 percent) report being physically or sexually abused by a husband or a boyfriend at some point in their lives, according to a 1998 Commonwealth Fund survey. "Every workplace is affected by abuse in some way, and employers can play a critical role educating employees about domestic violence and supporting victims of abuse," said FVPF Executive Director Esta Soler. "The workplace is also an effective place to educate people about domestic violence, and create a climate in which everyone sends the message that abuse is unacceptable and will not be tolerated." You can also visit the following website for information on domestic violence:

The violence began within the first week of Karen's marriage, when her husband pressed his hands against her mouth and nose attempting to smother her. After this incident, her husband became violent almost nightly, often for no apparent reason. He controlled his violence directing it to hidden areas of her body so the injuries would not be visible to co-workers and friends.

Karen was lucky. She got out of her dangerous marriage, with the help and support of friends, family and her co-workers and supervisors. Her job gave her time off from work while she was in a shelter. Security staff kept a photograph of her husband in case he violated a restraining order and came to her workplace. They were also present in the parking lot when she walked to her car at the end of the day. "When I finally left, " Karen says, "the response I received from my office was one of incredible support. I want to stress how terribly important the role was that my co-workers played. It had a great impact on me."

What is Domestic Violence?

It is the recurring physical, sexual or psychological abuse of one partner by the other. Abuse can range from humiliation and threats to attacks resulting in death. Unless the victim seeks help, the abuse usually happens more frequently and becomes more violent. Domestic Violence cuts across all types of families, regardless of income, education, race or religion. (Shelter for Help in Emergency) *No one deserves to be abused.*

If You are Being Abused, You Have Options

Domestic Violence is a crime and you can seek protection from police or courts. You can file criminal charges or get a protective order.

If you stay with the abuser:

- Make a safety plan, call police if abused
- Attend battered women's support group

If you decide to leave, your local domestic violence shelter is an available resource. It is important to plan for your safety carefully. Often, the most dangerous time is when a woman attempts to leave or has left the abuser.

Safety Plan

Try to do the following:

- Hide money
- Hide extra set of house/car keys and extra bag of clothing
- Establish code with family/friends
- Ask neighbor to call police if violence begins
- Remove weapons
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Have available:

- Social Security numbers (his, yours, children's)
- Rent and utility receipts
- Birth certificates, drivers license (yours and children's)
- Bank account number(s)
- Insurance policies and numbers
- Important phone number(s)

Work to End Domestic Violence
94% of corporate security directors surveyed rank domestic violence as a high security problem at their company.

Is Domestic Violence a Workplace Issue?

Domestic Violence affects the workplace through an increase in absenteeism, turnover, health care, lost productivity and security risks.

Homicide is by far the most frequent manner in which women workers are fatally injured at work. A recent US Department of Labor study shows that 17% of these homicides, the alleged assailants were current or former husbands or boyfriends.

How do you Know Something is Wrong?

Your employee/co-workers may be in an abusive relationship if:

- She/he has unexplained bruises
- She/he has explanations that just don't add up
- She/he is distracted, has trouble concentrating, misses work often
- She/he receives repeated, upsetting telephone calls during the workday
- She/he appears anxious, upset or depressed
- The quality of her/his work fluctuates for no apparent reason
- She/he has a high absenteeism rate, due to frequent medical

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problems and fears about leaving children at home alone with the abuser.

Talking About Domestic Violence: The Challenge of Supervisors

As supervisor, we may notice signs of domestic violence but are unsure of what to do next. We must respect the employee's privacy. Unless the employee reveals abuse to the supervisor, you should not make direct inquiries about known/suspected abuse.

However, you can create a working environment where employees feel safe to talk about domestic violence by educating employees about domestic violence and displaying materials condemning domestic violence. Additionally, supervisors should address performance-related issues that may arise due to domestic violence, and in doing so can make appropriate referrals to services that may assist the employee. If the employer/co-workers approaches you regarding abuse, here are supportive messages that you can share:

1. "I am concerned for your safety."
2. "It will only get worse over time."
3. "I am here for you when you need help."
4. "You don't deserve to be abused."
5. "There are resources in the company/organization and in the community that can help you."

While your role is not to be a counselor, you can refer her/him to the EAP and local domestic violence agencies that can help.

Help to make a safety plan, both for the workplace and for home.

- Save any threatening mail or voice mail messages.
- Park close to the entrance of the building.
- Talk with security or the police.
- Have calls screened, transfer harassing calls to security, or

remove their name/number from the automated directories.

- Think about flexible or alternate work hours.
- Relocate workspace to a more secure area.

Guidelines for Coworkers

How you can lend a hand:

- Establish rapport with the employee if you don't already have one.
- Listen, without judging. Often a battered woman believes her abuser's negative messages.
- Let the employee know you care about them.
- Tell the employee that she/he is not responsible for the abuse.
- Emphasize that when they are ready for help, it is available.
- Explain that domestic violence is a crime and the police, courts, and a domestic violence program call all help. Provide referral phone numbers, give written materials.

If you want to talk with someone yourself to get advice, contact the FEAP or a local domestic violence program.

What is the Employee Decides to Remain in the Relationship?

Many women remain in the relationship, and try to get help for the abusers. Realize that often the most dangerous time for a woman is when she threatens the batterer's control by attempting to leave.

Suggest that the employee's physician or nurse be told about the abuse. Encourage the employee to call a **domestic violence hotline (800-799-7233**

or FEAP (434-243-2643 or 800 847-9355 after hours)

RESOURCES

**Faculty and Employee Assistance Program
(434) 243 2643**

**Shelter for Help in Emergency
Charlottesville/Albemarle Area
(434) 293-8509**

**Women's Place
(434) 982-3847**

**Women's Center
(434) 982-2361**

