

# Be A Change Maker: Action Guide

## Recognizing And Responding To Domestic Violence As An Employer



### At Work, You Are Uniquely Positioned To Help

There are many different signs that someone may be experiencing domestic violence. Though no two experiences of intimate partner violence are exactly alike, there are some signs that can often show up at work. Experiencing domestic violence can have a huge impact on a person's ability to be present at work; supervisors and coworkers can play an important role in supporting survivors.

### Recognizing Signs Of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a pattern of behaviors used by one partner to maintain power and control over another partner in an intimate relationship. Abuse may include any combination of physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, reproductive, spiritual, and financial abuse or control. Some abusive relationships never include physical violence, but the effect on survivors/victims can be as or more severe. Here are some signs you can look out for as a coworker or supervisor who wants to help create a safe and supportive environment:

- Constant contact – calls, texts, and social media messages or “checking up” on the employee to be sure they’re in a specific place
- Jealousy of all kinds, of work relationships; accusations of affairs
- Partner showing up to workplace or threats to come to workplace
- Coercing, forcing, or guiltting their partner into quitting their job
- Increased absenteeism and/or frequently coming in late and/or leaving early
- Long breaks or unexplained disappearances during the day
- Distracted or difficulty concentrating
- Seems depressed, irritable, fatigued, or moody
- Tasks done poorly, late, or not done at all
- Hypervigilant or overly attentive to their phone
- Stops accepting invitations to socialize with colleagues
- Bruises or other unexplained marks or injuries
- Wearing clothing not appropriate to weather to hide injuries
- Chronic illness and fatigue
- Weight gain or loss, appetite changes

### Starting The Conversation

It can be embarrassing, shameful, and at times unsafe to confide in someone about abuse you’re experiencing. It is every survivor’s/victim’s right to decide who they want to tell and when. Even if they do not take up an offer for support, the impact of knowing people care can be life changing.

#### **If an employee or coworker has not disclosed abuse:**

- Be sure to approach them with care and in privacy. If they do not want to discuss, do not push for disclosure.
- Be nonjudgmental and emphasize concern for employee first, job performance second (if that’s an issue).
- Offer support, accommodations, and information.
- Leave the door open for future conversations. Offer a listening ear to the extent you are comfortable.

#### **If An Employee Or Coworker Discloses Abuse:**

- First and foremost, listen! Ask open-ended questions, and remember that in some cases, a supportive listening ear is all that is needed to help a survivor/victim in the workplace.

- While you may feel uncomfortable or nervous, do your best to show humanity and non-judgement to them as a person first, employee second.
- Respond with nonjudgmental support like: “I’m so glad you told me this, I’m so sorry this is happening. No one deserves this.” “I believe you. This is not your fault,” or “Thank you for sharing this with me. Is there any support from me that would be helpful?”
- It is always better to ask what you can do to help, rather than to impose your own assumptions on how to help another person. Approach the conversation as an opportunity to provide resources and empowerment, rather than to make a plan for another person’s life.

## Example Scripts

### **Tailor To Your Style And The Situation.**

1. “I’ve noticed that you’re having to step away more than usual. How are you doing?”
2. “You seem sort of down lately and I wanted to check in with you. How are you doing?”
3. “I noticed you are getting a lot of messages and you seem frightened. I’m concerned for your safety. Do you feel unsafe?”

## Additional Information For Supervisors

- Be empathetic to the ongoing challenges the employee is facing and remain open to hearing their needs.
- Offer resources and/or referrals to local domestic violence service agencies. If a survivor/victim is in crisis or their health and safety is at risk, an immediate response may be the most appropriate.
- Determine what accommodations are needed and offer them. The priority is always empowering the employee to advocate for what they need. They are the experts of their own experience.
- Maintain confidentiality. Confidentiality is of utmost importance to the safety of and respect for the survivor/victim. Consider who within the organization might need to know and when. For instance, without disclosing which employee is experiencing abuse, make a plan with the building manager in the event the employee fears an abusive partner might show up at the place of work. Make these considerations with the employee preemptively so that you can avoid as much as possible disclosing someone else’s experience of abuse to others within the organization without their permission.
- Implement preventative and responsive policies. Organizational policies go a long way for both supporting employees as well as improving staff retention and workplace satisfaction. These include, but are not limited to: flexible scheduling; generous paid leave options like paid family leave, sick leave, safe leave, and compassionate leave; comprehensive health benefits, including mental health; and fair and equitable wages.

**To view the resources referenced in this guide and to connect with your agencies, please visit <https://nccadv.coalitionmanager.org/resourcemanager/resourcefile/details/689> or scan the QR code below.**

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