

## Health Care Provider

### Employee Domestic Violence Policy and Procedure Guidelines for Increasing Safety and Providing Support

**Purpose:** To assure that employees of the Health Care Provider who are or may become victims of domestic violence are appropriately identified and served.

**Statement** Health Care Provider promotes the identification, evaluation treatment and safe disposition of all persons who are or may be victims of domestic violence. Health Care Provider recognizes that employees may be victims of domestic violence themselves and that living in such a relationship can interfere with work efficiency, attendance and job retention. We are committed to creating a supportive workplace environment in which employees feel safe and comfortable seeking assistance for domestic violence concerns.

**Definition:** Domestic Violence (DV) is a pattern of coercive control of an intimate partner founded in violence. This can include physical, sexual, and psychological emotional or economic abuse. Each form places the victim at risk of injury- including death. The intent of these actions is to gain control by making the partner feel subordinate, incompetent, worthless and fearful.

**Background:** Domestic violence is the number one public health concern and the most common cause of injury for women in the United States. It occurs in all racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, age and religious groups. It occurs in both homosexual and heterosexual relationships and either male or female can be victim or perpetrator.

**Eligibility:** all employees

**Procedure:** Managers and supervisors Health Care Provider shall be sensitive to and respectful of the needs, expectations and choices of persons who are or may be victims of domestic violence.

The following information is provided to help supervisors interact with employees of the Health Care Provider who are victims of domestic violence and to help those employees obtain the services they desire. It is important to understand that a woman may not be ready to admit that she has been injured by a partner or family member and may choose not to discuss the topic. Supervisors should respect this decision, but should impart information about available resources in the community.

#### **Guiding Principles:**

1. Treat employees with dignity, respect, and compassion and with sensitivity to age, culture, ethnicity and sexual orientation, while recognizing that domestic violence is unacceptable in any relationship.

2. Recognize that the process of leaving a violent relationship is often a long and gradual one.
3. Regard the safety of victims and their children as priority.
4. As with any other personal concern of an employee's, we must take great care to treat domestic violence with this same confidentiality

## **I. Domestic Violence Guidelines for Managers and Supervisors**

### **Be aware of possible signs of domestic violence:**

Bruises, especially if frequent or in various stages  
Bruises or injuries that are unexplained or come with explanations that just don't add up  
Excessive tardiness  
Flashbacks  
Decreased job performance  
Unkempt, disheveled appearance  
Suicidal or homicidal thoughts  
Fear, anxiety, depression,  
Difficulty making decisions alone  
Nightmares Intense startle reactions  
Flowers and other gifts sent to the employee at the workplace for no apparent special occasion  
Chronic headaches, abdominal pains or pelvic pain  
Recurrent muscle aches  
Recurrent bladder or vaginal infections as reported by the employee  
Increased use of sick time/ unexplained absences  
Increased use of drugs and alcohol  
Eating or sleeping disorders  
Vague, nonspecific medical complaints  
Significant other calls or comes by workplace frequently  
Harassing phone calls to the workplace  
Changes in behavior and work performance  
Preoccupation/lack of concentration

## **II. What To Do If You Suspect An Employee May Be Being Abused**

Knowing what to say to an employee and how to say it in a way that is respectful of her privacy is one of the most challenging aspects of domestic violence. It is always appropriate for a supervisor to show concern for an employee who seems distressed, and to support the employee in getting professional help. You should not try to diagnose the employee's problem; make it clear that it is her choice whether or not to confide in you

These are only examples; each person should find phrasing in their own words with which they are comfortable in order to get the same message of concern across.

1. Let them know what you have observed, “I noticed the bruises you had last week and you look terribly upset and worried today...”
2. Express concern that the employee might be abused “I thought it was possible someone might be hurting you”
3. Make a statement of support “No one deserves to be hit by someone”
4. If the employee refuses to disclose do not press the issue. Reaffirm a statement of support. “That’s good that you are ok, Domestic violence is so common that I felt I shouldn’t ignore my concerns”. This tells her if she is in violent relationship, that when she is ready to disclose she has your support. A referral for assistance can still be given at the end of the conversation

### **III. Guidelines for Supervisor If An Employee Self Discloses Abuse**

- A. Communicate your concerns for her safety and the safety of her children. Ask her is she is safe in her home.  
“This concerns me that you and the children may not be safe at home, do you think you are in danger?”
- B. Acknowledge injustice: “There is no excuse for domestic violence”, “this is not your fault, the abuser is responsible for his behavior”.
- C. Resist temptation to dictate the employee's safety; she is the best judge about what will keep her safe and there are risks on the path to safety.
- D. Encourage her to seek help through...
  - a. **Employee Assistance Program 1800-XXX-XXXX**
  - b. National Domestic Violence Hotline 1-800-799-SAFE
  - c. **Local Victims of Crime Services XXX-XXX-XXXX**
  - d. **Rape Crisis Hotline XXX-XXX-XXXX**
  - e. “Responding to Domestic Violence; Where Federal Employees can find help”  
[www.opm.gov/ehs/workplac/html/domestic.html](http://www.opm.gov/ehs/workplac/html/domestic.html)
- E. Let the employee know that you will keep what she has disclosed confidential, but in the case of a clear threat to the workplace, you, and anyone else who knows, are obliged to seek help.
- F. Most important, **do not ignore the situation**. If workplace intervention is appropriate, either at the employee's request or to respond to a threat to the workplace, early intervention can provide advantages. In many cases, early intervention can prevent an incident of violence that could devastate the entire workplace. Work may be the only resource an employee has left.

- G. Assist her in making a safety plan for the workplace
- H. Encourage her to document acute events with her health care provider, advocacy programs or police services
- I. Follow up to see how the employee is doing. Ask generic Questions such as “how are you doing?”
- J. Maintain your relationship as her supervisor not the role of counselor. Any discussions about performance related to domestic violence should be balanced, supportive and consider the employees right to privacy.
- K. Respect her privacy and boundaries, even if you don’t agree with her decisions regarding her relationship. She must make decisions regarding ending the relationship in her own time. Remember...it takes an average of 12 times leaving for a woman to end an abusive relationship. In many cases leaving must be carefully planned. It may be a long and difficult process. Don’t take it personally if she goes back and don’t show your frustration.

L. **Don’t ...**

- Ask...why don’t you just leave?
- Ask... what did you do to make him so mad?
- Ask... why did you wait so long to seek help?
- Ask... questions that might be interpreted as blaming
- Label her as a “battered” woman Suggest marriage counseling
- Don’t make ending the relationship a stipulation of continued employment.

M. Other Resources for Supervisors

Helpful Hints For Supervisors

Responding To Domestic Violence:

<http://www.workplacesrespond.org/resource-library/supervisors-can-make-difference/>

#### **IV. Consider Workplace Flexibilities**

Employees threatened by domestic violence may need time off to go to court, find a new place to live, or recover from injuries. They may need a different workspace or different schedule to keep the abusers from tracking them down on the job. They may need their phone calls screened, a workstation that is not conspicuous to visitors, or additional security at their worksites. Some employees may appreciate a temporary adjustment to their work responsibilities.

Supervisors should first contact the personnel office when considering the use of personnel flexibilities.

## **A. Time Off**

1. First Consider Paid Leave Options- A concerned supervisor, backed by expert consultants, can use Federal Personnel flexibilities as tools for managing a dangerous situation
  - a. Annual Leave- A manager provides an invaluable form of assistance by granting annual leave while an employee initiates a transition to safety.
  - b. Sick Leave- Federal employees have the right to use their accrued sick leave when they are incapacitated for the performance of their duties due to illness, injury, or to get medical care. .
  - c. Leave Transfer- Federal employees voluntarily donate annual leave to other Federal employees who have personal or family medical emergencies and who have exhausted their own leave
  - d. Advanced Sick or Annual Leave- If an employee's sick or annual leave balance is depleted; the supervisor may have the discretion to grant advanced sick or annual leave.
2. Unpaid Leave Options are Available
  - a) Family and Medical Leave Act- The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) the option to use up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave during any 12-month period for specified family and medical needs
  - b) Leave Without Pay- Another leave option is Leave Without Pay (LWOP). Since LWOP is considered an approved absence, employees must request it. The granting of LWOP is at the discretion of the agency in most cases.

## **B. Alternative Worksite Arrangements**

1. Telecommuting/Temporary Assignment Telecommuting allows an employee to work at home or at a "satellite" for all or part of the work week. Telecommuting, if appropriate for the circumstances, may be possible to arrange with your Computer Support Team to protect the employee's safety and to protect the safety of the workplace.
2. In situations where telecommuting cannot be arranged, consider a temporary assignment to place the employee in a different location for the necessary time to achieve safety. This might include a less conspicuous area of the facility or an undisclosed office space. C.

## **C. Schedule Flexibilities**

1. Flex Schedule- Adjusts when the work day begins and ends
2. A compressed work schedule allows employees to work longer days and complete an 80-hour pay period in less than ten days.

3. Part-time employment
4. Job sharing. Job sharing is a form of part-time employment where two part-time employees share the duties of a single full-time position.

#### **D. Resources Available at the Workplace**

If there is a threat to the workplace, call security personnel right away. Remember that even in cases where a workplace threat exists, the manager needs to maintain the confidentiality of the employee and inform only those with a "need to know."

1. Security Department
  - a. Suggest the employee contact Security. Do not alert security yourself unless the employee requests this kind of help or there is a clear threat to the workplace.
  - b. Providing security and reception areas with the abuser's name and photograph.
  - c. If the employee is being stalked provide security with the make, color, and tag number of the abuser's car.
  - d. If an order of restraining order is in place provide security with a copy of the court order.
2. The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) may provide assistance to a victim of domestic violence who wants to increase her safety. The EAP serves as a comprehensive referral source for many kinds of help. Victims of domestic violence may need a range of services -- advocacy, child care, health care, social services, legal aid, emergency shelters, counseling services, hotlines, and support groups. With the written consent of the employee, the EAP practitioner can act as a liaison with outside agencies providing services to the employee, advocating on her behalf when requested, to assure she receives appropriate services. Since the EAP counselors may have specialized training in domestic violence, they may offer insight in developing a safety plan at work and can be a source of guidance for the manager who wants to be supportive.