



You are not alone

Guidelines for Co-Workers

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You must always be sensitive and respect the privacy of colleagues who may be experiencing domestic/intimate partner violence. There are ways you can be supportive of your co-worker, who may be in an emotionally or physically abusive relationship.

But I'm not the boss, I'm just a co-worker.

What can I do?

As a co-worker, you may recognize the warning signs. Your role is to be supportive and to focus on safety.

Opening a conversation with someone you think might be experiencing domestic/intimate partner violence is an important first step.

Always remember that safety is the priority at all times. If there is a clear threat to the workplace or an incident of workplace domestic/intimate partner violence, you must tell the appropriate authorities, such as the police and workplace security.

Before approaching a person you suspect is being abused, learn about the policies and procedures in your workplace, as well as community resources that are available. Identify an appropriate person in management that the person could talk to if he/she chooses to disclose further.

Always remember...

- All discussions must occur in private – this is essential to build trust and ensure safety
- Always acknowledge the person's feelings
- Know the resources in your community
- Respect the person's right to make decisions in his/her own life, when he/she is ready

Recognize Warning Signs and Symptoms

You may instinctively believe that a colleague may be experiencing domestic violence. To assist you in determining whether you should approach your colleague, see the “How to Recognize Domestic/Intimate Partner Violence in the Workplace” page on this site.

If you decide to approach your colleague, be aware that there are certain things that are appropriate to say in these circumstances and certain things that should not be said.

You can ask...

- Is someone hurting you?
- Did someone hurt you?
- Are you afraid of your partner?
- Has your partner ever hit/kicked/hurt you?
- I have a friend whose partner tries to control everything they do. Is this happening to you?
- Is there someone from a previous relationship who is making you feel unsafe now?

You can say...

- I believe you.
- It is safe to talk to me.
- You are not alone. There are many people who have gone through this.
- I care about you, and I know how hard it is to talk about this.
- You don't deserve to be hurt, you've done nothing wrong. This is not your fault.
- What is happening is wrong.
- You know best what your partner may do. It is always best to have a plan in place.
- I can give you a number to call for help and advice.
- You are not alone. How can I help you?
- The City has an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) that allows you to speak with counsellors. These services are free and confidential.
- Outside of the City, there are also some community resources that might be helpful

What not to say...

- Why don't you just leave?
- Why did you return to your partner?
- What did you do to provoke your partner?
- Why did you wait so long to tell someone?

What to avoid...

- Using labels (e.g. "You're crazy to stay with your partner")
- Telling the person what to do
- Discussing the person's information with anyone else, unless you have his/her permission
- Blaming the abused person

Other ways to support the person who may be at risk ...

- Spend break time with them
- Listen to and believe them
- Offer to screen the perpetrator's phone calls or emails

- Encourage them to save threatening voice mails or emails in case they are needed for future legal action

Sources:

1. Cambridge Public Health Department. How to Respond to Employees Facing Domestic Violence: A Workplace Handbook for Managers, Supervisors, and Co-Workers. 2009.
2. Public Services Health & Safety Association. Addressing Domestic Violence in the Workplace: A Handbook, 2nd Edition. August 2010.
3. Make It Our Business. Guidelines for communicating with employees at risk of workplace domestic violence. 2010.
http://makeitourbusiness.ca/sites/makeitourbusiness.ca/files/MIOB_Guidelines_Communicating_w-Employees.pdf