

# Domestic Violence:

## A Guide to NIH Supervisors and Employees

### *What is Domestic Violence?*

It is a pattern of assaults and controlling behavior that restricts the activity and independence of another individual. It includes physical, sexual and psychological attacks, and economic control. It affects all cultures, religions, ages, sexual orientations, educational backgrounds, and income levels. Victims and abusers come from all walks of life.

#### **Domestic violence can “spill over” into the workplace.**

Employees may have difficulty focusing on work, as a result of stress or abuse at home. Also, employees may receive unwanted visits at work by the abuser, particularly if it is someone with whom they have terminated a relationship.

#### **Domestic Violence is costly and can result in reduced work productivity, absenteeism, and increased medical/other expenses.**

*As a supervisor, how would I know if an employee is being affected by domestic violence?*

A supervisor should *not* try to diagnose the employee’s problem, but *should* approach the employee in a non-threatening way about observed changes in performance or conduct. Show concern for a distressed employee, and suggest seeking help from the NIH Employee Assistance Program. Possible warning signs:

- Increased/unexplained absenteeism
- Inappropriate/excessive clothing
- Chronic health problems/chronic pain
- Isolation; distress; depression; distraction, and
- Excessive personal phone calls.

### *Safety at Work*

Employees who are victimized should explore available options with supervisors to help ensure the safety of oneself and others:

- Identify an emergency contact person, should a supervisor be unable to contact the employee directly.
- Identify potential worksite changes (telecommuting, changing the normally scheduled tour of duty to an unpredictable tour; parking in a location that would be unknown to the abuser; using police escorts to accompany the employee when traveling to and from parking lots to the office; temporarily changing the location of the work site; etc.)
- The employee might consider varying the normal commuting route to work; making special arrangements for childcare delivery/drop off.
- It may be appropriate to request and schedule leave, for a period of time.
- NIH police can work with the supervisors and employee to help develop safety plans that can inhibit unwanted visits at work.
- Calls can be screened and threatening or harassing calls can be documented. The employee may

- need to use a cell phone.
- Make the NIH police aware of any protective orders or other legal tools that would bar entry by the perpetrator to the work site.

*Supervisors can work with the NIH Police and Crime Prevention Branch and/or the Division of Public Safety to explore enhanced security measures such as:*

- Posting of security guards at work entrances
- Installation of security cameras
- Installation of silent alarms.

## **Resources**

Many resources are available to help victims, supervisors, and others who wish to learn more. Perpetrators of domestic violence can explore these resources as a first step toward ending the battering:

### **Campus Resources**

- The NIH Police: 911
- The NIH Employee Assistance Program  
301-496-3164

### **Other Resources**

- National Domestic Violence Hotline  
1-800-799-SAFE (7233)  
TDD (800) 787-3224  
For crisis intervention and resource and referral,  
including provision of the names of local shelters.
- The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence:  
(303) 839-1852, <http://www.ncadv.org/>
- The National Center for Victims of Crime, formerly the  
National Victim Center: 1-800-FYI-CALL,  
<http://www.ncvc.org/>
- NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund,  
<http://www.now1def.org/>
- *Understanding and Responding to Domestic Violence in the  
Workplace*, <http://www.hhs.gov/progorg/ohr/eap/library.html>
- *Handling Traumatic Events: A Managers' Guide*,  
<http://www.opm.gov/ehs/traugdpg.htm>
- *Responding to Domestic Violence: Where Federal Employees can Find Help*, <http://www.opm.gov>
- *Dealing with Workplace Violence: A Guide for Agency  
Planners*, <http://www.lop.gov/workplac/index.html-ssi>

- *Family Violence Prevention Fund, <http://www.igc.org/fund/>*

## *How can Supervisors Help?*

If you are a supervisor and suspect that an employee may be in an abusive relationship, but the employee has not disclosed this to you, focus on any job performance changes and consult the NIH Employee Assistance Program (EAP). If the employee *has* disclosed, work collaboratively with him/her, your internal IC contacts, such as Human Resources and Administrative staff, and CIVIL to develop a response plan. The CIVIL includes members of the NIH EAP and NIH Police.

*Be supportive! Don't ignore the situation.*

- Tell the employee that you will protect her/his confidentiality to the fullest extent possible. Exercise caution when considering who in the NIH has a "need to know."
- Be understanding, approachable, and non-judgmental.
- Respect the employee's decisions in terms of helping her/him develop a safety plan.
- Convey that the employee is a valued part of the team; meet privately and address observed performance or conduct problems. Consult with your Human Resources staff.
- Be flexible and work with the employee to identify potential accommodations such as changing tours or work location, approving leave use, etc. to address employee safety concerns.
- **If you believe the employee and/or co-workers may be in imminent danger at work, contact the NIH police immediately.** They can help assess the potential seriousness and devise a plan of action.

*Supervisors can disseminate educational material and maintain resource information in accessible locations at work.*

## *How can Co-Workers Help?*

*Be Supportive! No One Deserves to be Abused.*

Co-workers can be very helpful as many troubled employees may be hesitant to alert supervisors of problems at home. A co-worker is not expected to diagnose problems or help directly, but *can* seek assistance from NIH resources listed on the reverse side.

*What are some possible signs of domestic violence that a co-worker might observe?*

- Changes in behavior and work performance, lack of concentration, increased or unexplained absences, unexplained bruises or injuries, stress-related or frequent illness.
- Becoming withdrawn from co-workers; other observable behavioral changes
- On-the-job unwanted/unsolicited contacts made by an abuser to the victim, either in person, on the phone, or on the internet.

*What can one do if a co-worker confides that he/she is being abused?*

- Believe it! Listen actively and without judging.
- Express concern, and offer help.
- Suggest that he/she contact the NIH Employee Assistance Program for confidential advice and guidance.
- **In cases where the victim believes that he/she and possibly co-workers may be endangered at the worksite, the co-worker should encourage the victim supervisor, the NIH EAP, and the NIH to involve the Police, so that safety and security plans can be developed promptly and proactively.**

### *Are You in an Abusive Relationship?*

Domestic violence is much more than physical abuse. The perpetrator of domestic violence may:

- *Use emotional and psychological control*
- *Use economic control*
- *Make threats, and*
- *Commit acts of physical violence*

#### ***Develop a Personal Safety Plan!***

***Victims can:***

- ***Call 911 when danger is present. Leave the dangerous situation quickly and seek assistance from a neighbor, friend, or shelter.***
- Tell the doctor what happened, if hospitalized as a result of injuries by a perpetrator. Ask the doctor to document the medical file. Keep evidence (photos of injuries/ripped clothing); keep a log of any stalking activity.
- Identify resources (minister/rabbi, counselors, close friends, and family members). Let them know what is happening. Make sure safe locations/new phone numbers are not inappropriately disclosed.
- Develop a safety plan: hide spare keys, money, credit cards, extra clothes, cell phone, flash light, etc.
- Collect important family papers such as birth certificates, bank account information, medical records, medicines, info on assets, etc.
- Change locations for shopping, banking, and parking.
- Consult with legal and law enforcement experts to learn about protective orders and other legal options.

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