

"What would it take to end domestic violence in Vermont?"

How Work Places Can Make A Difference

Domestic Violence: Today, It's a Workplace Issue

- Domestic violence doesn't stay at home when victims go to work.
- Domestic violence often becomes workplace violence.
- A study of survivors of domestic violence found that abusive husbands and partners harassed 74% of employed battered women at work. Domestic violence caused 56% of them to be late for work at least five times a month, 28% to leave early at least five days a month, and 54% to miss at least three full days of work a month. They said that abuse also affected their ability to keep a job.
- Batterers also may be less productive or miss work because of violence, incarceration, or legal proceedings resulting from the violence.
- 78% of Human Resources professionals polled by *Personnel Journal* said that domestic violence is a workplace issue. Sixty-six percent of Fortune 1000 senior executives surveyed say they believe their company's financial performance would benefit from addressing domestic violence among their employees.

It is crucial that domestic abuse be seen as a serious, recognizable, and preventable problem like thousands of other workplace health and safety issues that affect a business and its bottom line.

"I think even just a poster in the bathroom would make me know that I wasn't going to be completely off the mark. If I knew somebody cared enough to hang a poster like that, I would have felt a little better about saying something, in my present job"

- a survivor

Does your work place recognize that responding to domestic violence is "good business"?

Here is a list of model practices recommended by the **Family Violence Prevention Fund's** work place initiative. How does your employer do on these items? Could you suggest that management look at these recommendations and explore ways to incorporate them into policies and practices?

Manager Training: Trainings for managers - about how to recognize the signs of domestic violence in their staff and how to discuss the workplace policies around the issue - can raise awareness and increase sensitivity.

Education: Employee training, brown bag seminars, newsletter articles, and brochures on domestic violence are all ways that an employer can create an environment where it is safe to talk about domestic violence.

"Battered women need workplaces that respond to their needs. Corporate leaders need to take a leadership role in stopping this epidemic by reviewing their human resource and workplace policies to be sure they recognize and assist battered women who seek help. Taking these simple steps is more than altruism - it is in the interest of business."

-Wayne Moon, Chairman and Executive Officer,
Blue Shield of California

Security: Security can play a critical role in protecting an employee at work. Employees can provide security personnel with a photograph of a batterer in case he comes to the workplace. Additional best practices include: special training in domestic violence, relocating an employee to a safer workspace, installing a panic button or other security device at an employee's workstation, escorts to parked cars, installing extra lighting in the parking lot, and priority parking near the building for employees who fear an attack at work.

Counseling and Referrals: Companies with Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) or other counseling services can provide their employees with therapists trained to counsel on domestic violence. Companies without EAPs can maintain lists of resources in the community that specialize in domestic violence.

Leave and Benefit Policies: Employers can accommodate employees' needs for flexibility in their schedules by not penalizing them if they need to attend court proceedings, meet with a counselor or relocate to a shelter.

Financial Support: Employers can conduct drives to collect clothes, toys, furniture, or money for a local domestic violence program or shelter. Financial support can also include having an emergency fund for employees in crisis situations.

Disciplining Abusers: Companies can have policies in place that discipline abusive employees who are violent at work, including those who use workplace phones, faxes or email to harass their intimate partners.

Compliance Issues: Some federal, state and local anti-discrimination, family and medical leave, and disability laws may mandate certain actions and policies on the part of the employer. Prompt and proper compliance and reasonable accommodations can reduce the risk of employer liability for harm that may come to an employee from domestic violence.

"The security professionals at my work were invaluable in helping me to make a safety plan" - a survivor

If you are a victim or survivor of domestic violence, you might want to know your employment rights.

How should you talk to your employer? Can you expect accommodations for disabilities caused by domestic violence? How can you protect yourself from workplace discrimination? Can you collect workers' compensation for injuries caused by your abuser at work? Can I collect unemployment benefits if I have to quit my job due to abuse? All these and many more questions are addressed on the fact sheets prepared by the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund (see contact below).

If you would like more information on the workplace response to domestic violence:

- Go to the Family Prevention Fund's web site: www.endabuse.org and click on their workplace section. They have also published an excellent resource guide for employers and unions.
- GREAT and extensive information for employees who are victims of abuse can be found on the website of the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund at www.nowldef.org (-> Violence against women -> Employment rights for survivors)

If you or someone you know is being abused or has been sexually assaulted, call Vermont's 24 hour emergency hotlines:

**Domestic Violence 1-800-228-7395
Sexual Assault 1-800-489-7273**