

The Successful SUPERVISOR

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Tips from  LifeSolutions

Partner Violence, also called Domestic Violence or Intimate Partner Violence, is one of the most visible "hidden problems" in the workplace. Viewed by most employers as a private, family concern, partner violence is responsible for over 5.8 billion dollars each year in health-related employer costs. In this issue, we will explore the impact of partner violence on the workplace and provide suggestions regarding how to respond. To continue the discussion and address questions, contact LifeSolutions at ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com or call an EAP account manager at 1.800.647.3327.

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What Is Partner Violence?

Partner Violence is described as a pattern of assaultive and controlling behaviors that includes physical, sexual, and psychological attacks as well as economic control.

It is *not caused* by drug, alcohol, or anger issues, although these conditions may be contributing factors. The key precipitating issue is control. The perpetrator wants complete control over the partner.

Partner violence occurs across all economic, racial, and ethnic groups. It includes married or cohabitating couples as well as those who are only dating. Couples include heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgendered individuals. Perpetrators and victims alike can range in age from teenagers to the elderly.

More than ONE in FIVE full-time employed adults has been the victim of partner violence, and 64% of those victimized indicate their work performance was significantly impacted (*standingfirmswpa.com*).

What Is Partner Violence in the Workplace?

Simply put, it is any behavior in or out of the workplace which affects the workplace and includes a continuum of threats:

- ◆ **Virtual stalking:** Harassing and repeated phone calls, e-mails, faxes and text messages to the victim at work (from a few as 1 to as many as 100+ a day).
- ◆ **Physical stalking:** Hanging out in the parking lot or in a building near where the target works; letting that person know who's in charge.
- ◆ **Workplace entry:** Going to the workplace of the victim and verbally harassing, physically harming, or killing the victim.

According to *Standing Firm*, employed victims report a decline in work productivity due to: distraction at work (57%); fear of discovery (45%); harassment by the partner at work (40%); fear that the abusive partner will show up at work (34%); and inability to complete assignments on time (24%). Some 20% report serious workplace errors due to preoccupation, and 21% reported that they actually lost their position as a result of partner violence (*standingfirmswpa.com*).

These statistics alone support addressing the problem; however, there is more to workplace impact. Co-workers are affected as well. They may initially feel concerned, but confused about what to do. They may become frustrated over having to pick up the workload of the target or fearful that the perpetrator will come to the workplace and cause harm to everyone. Additionally, they may be unsure about whether to go to their supervisor for assistance. Often, supervisors and managers themselves are not

sure where to turn. Studies show that only 5% of employers ever mention domestic violence or have a policy to address its workplace impact. Supervisors and managers should check with their leadership or HR departments to see what is available and how the organization would like to handle matters of partner violence.

To fully understand the impact of partner violence in the workplace, we also need to acknowledge perpetrators. This group is often an overlooked part of the problem. Perpetrators also work. They often misuse workplace resources to harass victims (computers to e-mail and fax; company phones to call and text; time at their worksites; leaving the worksite to go to where the victim works; and using company cars to make those trips). *Standing Firm* cites research where abusers admit to making costly and potentially dangerous mistakes on the job due to being distracted by thoughts about their partners.

Finally, *Standing Firm* reports an annual cost to industry of over \$7.9 million due to missed workdays as well as \$727.8 million annually in lost productivity costs.

How Should the Workplace Respond?

Employer

A good way to begin is to build the business case for addressing partner violence. There is a validated instrument which can calculate dollar costs to your organization. Your EAP and *Standing Firm* are available to assist. Gaining leadership support is essential to translate the business case into action, including developing a policy and training managers and employees on what to do. Again your EAP and *Standing Firm* are available for consultation.

Supervisors

Taking action involves recognizing workplace patterns for victims and perpetrators. Your EAP and HR are available for assistance. You are not alone. Look for *patterns over time*.

1. Victim Warning Signs at Work

- ◆ Bruises/injuries: Frequent and with elaborate stories
- ◆ Late for work — examples of problems which arise
 - Up all night
 - Assaulted/alarm turned off by abuser
 - Threats to children or pets by abuser
- ◆ Isolation
 - Stays by phone at work
 - Partner must join any workplace activity
- ◆ On telephone a lot
 - Hushed tones or crying
 - Leaves area upset after the call
- ◆ Stress symptoms
- ◆ Concentration problems
- ◆ Hurried to leave work/reluctant to leave
- ◆ Personality changes

How to Respond:

First: The Don'ts

- ◆ Do not pressure the employee to admit anything.
- ◆ **DO NOT EVER** tell the victim to leave the abuser.
 - Leaving is the most dangerous time for the victim.
 - Planning is needed to keep the victim from physical harm or death.
- ◆ Do not assure confidentiality unless you are sure you can provide it.
- ◆ Do not offer to get involved in any situation outside the workplace.
 - It can be a risk to you and to the employee.

How to Support:

If you are concerned about possible abuse:

- ◆ Speak to the employee in private and in a calm tone.
- ◆ Express concern: "I am thinking it's possible you are being hurt by someone and I'm concerned. No one deserves to be hit."
- ◆ Pause and allow the employee to either say something or not. Follow the lead of the employee
- ◆ Offer EAP as a free and confidential resource at 1.800.647.3327.
 - If the employee discloses abuse:
 - Express concern: "I'm glad you trust me to talk about this."
 - Offer EAP as free and confidential.
 - Available 24/7
 - You won't know if she/he attends.
 - Offer to leave area if employee wants to make a call then.
 - Reinforce your availability to help with any workplace issues.
 - The priority is developing a safety plan if needed. Consult HR and security to assist.
 - Evaluate the need for a leave and follow up with HR for assistance.

2. Perpetrator Warning Signs: Look for Patterns

- ◆ Leaves work area regularly/not for smoke breaks
 - With cell phone
 - Leaves building — unscheduled
- ◆ Frequent demeaning conversations overheard at work.
- ◆ Talks to co-workers to find out detailed information about the partner.

How to Respond:

- ◆ You have noticed a pattern of questionable behavior and want to respond.
- ◆ First call your HR representative or designated leader.
 - Share your observations and concerns.
 - Review your company's applicable policies and determine how to proceed. This supports finding the appropriate way to protect everyone.
- ◆ Contact your EAP for suggestions on how to present EAP to the employee. We work with both victims and perpetrators with the goal of safety and living violence-free.

More Training Available

LifeSolutions offers online resources to equip supervisors and managers to make a positive difference in the workplace. Follow the steps below to get started:

- ◆ Access www.lifesolutionsforyou.com.
- ◆ Click on the *WorkLife* log-in at the top right.
- ◆ Enter your company code. If you do not know your code, call 1.800.647.3327.
- ◆ Locate Site Search on the right-hand side of the page.
- ◆ Type in either "Partner Violence" or "Domestic Violence" and a list of related articles and other resources will come up.
- ◆ Check the middle of the screen for categories.
- ◆ Click on items of interest.

If you have questions, call **1.800.647.3327**.

Nothing in this information is a substitute for following your company policies related to information covered here.

Source Material

- *Standing Firm* website: www.standingfirmwpa.com
- Department of Labor and Family Crisis Services, 2004: *Employers Against Domestic Violence*, Boston, MA. 2001.