



Desk Reference: Recognizing and Responding to Domestic Violence and the Workplace

This Desk Reference is designed to help you assess for domestic violence and provide appropriate assistance and referral for victims. The information applies to all victims, regardless of their gender or the gender of their partner, including gay, lesbian and transgender victims and men who are abused by their female partners.

Possible Indicators:

Victims of domestic violence may seek assistance for a wide variety of problems other than the violence itself. Possible indicators of domestic violence include:

Visible physical injuries	Stress-related illnesses	Disruptive personal visits
Marital/family problems	Alcohol or other addictions	Changes in job performance
Depression	Suicidal thoughts or attempts	Unusual/excessive number of phone calls
Arriving early or leaving work early	Absenteeism, lateness	

Assessment Guidelines:

The best way to identify whether an employee is a victim of domestic violence is to ASK. Recommended guidelines for assessing for domestic violence include:

- Speak to the employee alone and in a private setting.
- Inform employee of extent and limits of confidentiality.
- Use direct observations, i.e., “You’ve been late for work six times this month.” “Over the past several months there has been a change in your ability to complete projects on time.” “You’ve called in several times this month.”
- Universalize, i.e., “Lots of employees I see who miss a lot of work are having problems at home. Is someone or something at home making it difficult for you to come to work?”
- Be direct, specific and concrete. Avoid using jargon or labels. **Don’t** ask, “Are you a victim of domestic violence?” or “Are you being battered?” **Do** ask, “Has your partner ever hit you or threatened to hit you?” or “Has your partner ever made threats or done other things that make you afraid?”

If the employee states that they are or may be experiencing domestic violence:

- **Speak** to employee in a private setting.
- **Listen.** If you actively listen, ask only clarifying questions, and avoid making judgments and giving advice, you will most likely learn directly from the employee what they need.
- **Validate** the experience. Victims of domestic violence are frequently not believed or not taken seriously, and the fear they report is minimized. You can express support through simple statements, as appropriate, such as:
 - “You are not alone. This happens to lots of people.”
 - “You are not to blame. It’s not your fault.”
 - “It sounds like you have good reason to be afraid.”
 - “Help is available. I’d like to help if I can.”
- **Refer** employee to local domestic violence service provider and EAP if available. Consult agency/company Domestic Violence Policy. Create workplace safety plan if needed.

If the employee states they are not a victim, but there are clear indicators of domestic violence:

- Let the employee know that domestic violence happens to lots of people and that help is available if it is ever needed.
- Remind them about your agency/company policy and encourage them to take the local hotline number in case they or anyone they know might need it.

Provide support for employee’s decisions. Don’t judge the success of your intervention by the employee’s action and remember that there are risks attached to every decision a victim makes. Be patient and respectful of a victim’s decisions, even if you don’t agree with them.