

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

What workplaces need to know

1 in 5 women and 1 in 7 men report having experienced severe physical violence in their lifetime. How do you know if your co-worker is being abused? What should you do if they are? This guide offers tips and suggestions for talking to your colleagues about intimate partner violence.

What is Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)?

IPV has traditionally been known as “domestic violence” or “domestic abuse.” Intimate Partner Violence consists of physical violence, sexual violence, stalking, or psychological aggression within intimate relationships. Violence is always perpetrated by a “power and control” dynamic, where one partner exerts control over the other through a number of physical and psychological means. Some of the tactics include coercion, threats (verbal and non-verbal), isolation, avoiding responsibility for actions, blaming others, manipulating the children, minimizing the impact of their actions, and withholding money, resources, or affection—to name a few.

Why should workplaces care?

Intimate partner violence causes both physical and mental illness. Over ¼ of IPV survivors have experienced some type of physical injury related to their abuse. Chronic health problems associated with IPV include: cardiovascular, musculoskeletal,

reproductive (from internal trauma, forced abortions and/or STDs), as well as depression, anxiety and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (just to name a few). It’s no wonder that experts estimate that there are over 8 million lost paid work days related to IPV over the course of a year. Throw in the fact that over the last 20 years, hundreds of women were murdered by their partner *in the workplace*, it becomes obvious why businesses all over the country are joining the voice against Intimate Partner Violence.

Since the passage of the Violence Against Women Act of 1994 (VAWA), states have passed approximately 700 laws protecting victims (namely women) from intimate partner violence. Since then programs have grown and developed in communities all across the country. There are more resources than ever before for survivors of IPV, including emergency and temporary housing, legal advocacy, counseling, support groups, and community education, as well as expanded services for men and LGBTQ+—but the battle is not yet won.

Every day co-workers and supervisors face the stark reality that intimate partner violence is still alive and well today. Maybe Sue in accounting has a bruise she keeps trying to cover, or Allan in sales has been acting very secretive and apologetic lately. What are the signs of IPV, and what should a co-worker do if they suspect it’s happening?

Signs of Abuse

- **Physical:** black eyes, bruises on neck or arms, busted lip, wearing long sleeves on warm days
- **Emotional:** low self-esteem, extremely apologetic, fear, agitation or anxiety, developing drug/alcohol problem, loss of interest in pleasurable activities, suicidal ideation
- **Behavioral:** distant, drops out of activities, cancels at the last minute, often late, excessive privacy about personal matters, isolation
- **Relational:** asking their partner permission to socialize, partner constantly calls or texts, partner may follow them to check up on them, having access to very little money, not having access to a vehicle, having to account for every minute of their day/every dollar spent
- **Attitudes of a perpetrator:** Denying or minimizing impact of behavior, jealousy or possessiveness, refusing to take responsibility for actions (it's always someone else's fault), rigid views of sex roles or parenting, negative attitudes toward their partner's gender, race, economic status, body shape, etc.

How should I intervene ?

The best way that people can help is to be supportive. Compassionately ask questions, but don't pry. You might say something like, "I've noticed [mood, attendance, work performance, more distracted, on the phone a lot, etc.]. Help me understand/tell me more about that." Maybe the person will confide in you. If so, take what they say seriously.

- **Listen well.** Let them share as much or as little as they are comfortable sharing. It's ok to ask questions for clarification, but don't interrogate them for facts.

- **Suggest resources.** Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline (1-800-799-SAFE), the nearest domestic violence resource center, or your Employee Assistance Program (1-800-540-3758).
- **Make a plan for safety.** When things become dangerous again, who will they call? Where will they go? Will they have a bag already packed? What will be in it? Where will it be kept? There are many considerations for safety. Find resources online for sample safety plans, or call your EAP for help.
- **Let them know you care.** This may quite possibly be the most important step.

You can make a difference

So much great work has already been done around Intimate Partner Violence and domestic abuse! Victims have access to resources, help, education and support more than ever before. Despite these developments, some people in abusive relationships will not accept help and maybe do not even want it. Sometimes it's difficult not to judge the person or their circumstances, but be careful not to do that. There are many reasons why a victim of IPV might stay with an abuser; some which are very powerful and legitimate reasons to stay—reasons that you may not understand. Be patient. Continue to offer support, help and hope. Maybe in a few days, weeks, months or maybe even years the person may come back and tell you they are ready to take the next step.

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