



SOROPTIMIST
Best for Women

*Improving the lives of women and girls through
programs leading to social and economic
empowerment.*

SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL OF THE AMERICAS

Domestic Violence Workplace Policies

Domestic violence is a problem in all countries served by Soroptimist International of the Americas. Any woman in any part of the world could be a potential victim. It doesn't matter what country she lives in or if she is rich or poor. It doesn't matter what language she speaks, the color of her skin, how educated she is or what religion she practices. She could be a neighbor, a sister, a friend or a co-worker.

In addition to being a domestic issue, violence of this type is also a workplace concern. Women do not leave abuse behind when they go to work: Their abusers often harass them at work, by telephone or e-mail. Abusers may also go to their victims' workplaces, and harass and threaten them and their co-workers. Some may argue that domestic violence is a personal problem and that employers have no reason or obligation to get involved. The reality is, however, that it is in the self-interest of employers to take steps to protect and assist employees who are the victims of domestic violence. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), domestic violence victims lose a total of nearly eight million days of paid work a year—the equivalent of more than 32,000 full-time jobs. In addition, domestic violence costs American businesses more than \$4.1 billion a year in health care-related services for victims and an additional \$727.8 million in productivity losses, according to the Family Violence Prevention Fund.

Although it is difficult to find statistics about workplace domestic violence in countries outside of the United States, it can be assumed that, just as domestic violence occurs in all countries, domestic violence affects the workplace—wherever that workplace may be.

These materials provide information for club members to institute domestic violence guidelines in their workplaces. Whether business owners or employees of large or small organizations, Soroptimists can and should advocate for businesses to institute domestic violence workplace policies. Not only can the policies assist women who are victims, they will also raise awareness about domestic violence with other employees. And, ultimately, the businesses will benefit as well.

I. Workplace Policies

At first glance, implementing domestic violence workplace policies may seem like a daunting task. However, many employers have personnel policies or other workplace policies and including information about domestic violence will just be an addition to the existing policies. Larger corporations or city and state governments may already have existing policies concerning domestic violence and it will only be necessary to review them to make sure they are comprehensive. Many corporations already have Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) addressing issues such as mental health and drug and alcohol addiction. These companies have already recognized that employees' private lives affect their work performance. If the business is Soroptimist-owned, instituting policies may be as easy as looking through sample policies and designing guidelines that are right for the business. However, for Soroptimists who work for others, the process may be more involved.

Club members can work together to target those businesses that do not already have workplace policies. It may be beneficial to work as a group to tackle one business first and, after the ground work has been completed, target other businesses.

II. Know the Facts

Many studies have been conducted in the United States about domestic violence in the workplace and it has been proven that domestic violence affects not only the victim but has a detrimental effect on businesses as well. Current statistics are listed below. Also, gather any local statistics about domestic violence in the workplace in order to make a persuasive argument about the importance of having policies.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that the annual cost of lost productivity due to domestic violence equals \$1.8 billion, with more than 7.9 million paid workdays lost each year – the equivalent of 32,000 full-time jobs.

In Canada, combined lost net earnings (to the employer) due to injuries sustained in physical and sexual assaults are estimated at \$7,097,233 per year. (Finding Our Voice, Education Wife Assault, 1998. Reprinted in Training Programs for the Workplace, Assaulted Women's Helpline.)

The Family Violence Prevention Fund reports that a study of survivors of domestic violence found that abusive husbands and partners harassed 74 percent of employed battered women at work. Domestic violence caused 56 percent of them to be late for work at least five times a month, 28 percent to leave early at least five days a month, and 54 percent to miss at least three full days of work a month. The women reported that abuse also affected their ability to keep a job.

A 2005 survey by the Corporate Alliance to End Partner Violence found that domestic violence affects the victims of co-workers. Thirty-eight percent of co-workers were concerned for their own personal safety, and 30 percent noted that abusers frequently visited the office, heightening victims' and co-workers' sense of fear. Furthermore, 27 percent of co-workers reported frequent to somewhat frequently having to do victims work, and 31 percent often "covered" for a victim of domestic violence, cutting down on worker productivity.

The American Institute on Domestic Violence reports the following statistics:

Employers lose \$3–\$5 billion every year in absenteeism, lower productivity, higher turnover and health and safety costs associated with battered workers.

Businesses lose an additional \$100 million in lost wages, sick leave and absenteeism.

Ninety-four percent of corporate security directors rank domestic violence as a high security risk

Seventy-eight percent of Human Resource Directors identify domestic violence as a substantial employee problem.

Forty-nine percent of senior executives said that domestic violence has a harmful effect on their company's productivity.

Partners commit 13,000 acts of violence against women in the workplace every year.

III. Workplace Policies

Businesses can make a difference. Work may be the only time that victims are away from their abusers. The 2005 CAEPV survey found that of those who were identified as domestic violence victims, 48 percent indicated a comprehensive workplace domestic violence awareness program would have been helpful and 43 percent wished their employers offered training on domestic violence. The steps that employers can take are simple and in most cases, without cost. The following is a list of what should be included in any workplace domestic violence policy. (A copy of Soroptimist International of the America's policy follows on page 6.)

Policy Statement: This should state the reasons and the mission for the policy. Why is a policy being instituted? What is it supposed to accomplish? In addition, it might be a place to mention the responsibilities of the employer and employee.

Definition of Domestic Violence: This can be a brief statement about domestic violence. Because part of the workplace policy will be to offer education about domestic violence, more detailed information can be covered at that time. It is important to note in the policy how the workplace will define domestic violence. It should include current and former partners and also same sex couples.

Education: In order to have an effective workplace policy, employees need to be educated about how to recognize and deal with a co-worker whom they suspect is a victim of domestic violence. Many domestic violence agencies have a community outreach department that is willing to provide education to businesses. This education should be offered annually.

Employee responsibilities: Both the employee who is the victim and the employer have responsibilities. The employee must continue to follow the policies of the workplace and maintain the standards of their position. In order to avail themselves of the benefits of the workplace policy, they will have to identify themselves as a victim of domestic violence to a designated person (supervisor, human resources department or executive director, for example). Some of the other responsibilities may include:

Providing copies of any protection orders.

Providing current emergency contact.

Providing a photograph of the abuser.

Having a signal or code word for co-workers that let them know the victim is in trouble and to call the police.

Working with the employer or a domestic violence professional to develop a workplace safety plan.

Saving threatening e-mails or voice mail messages.

Keeping lines of communication open with the employer during any extended time off.

Employer Responsibilities: Once an employee has identified themselves as a victim of domestic violence, an employer has responsibilities to their employee and some options for making it easier to deal with the realities of the situation. The responsibilities of the employer are to:

Keep the domestic violence confidential, except where necessary to protect the safety of the victim and other employees. Information about the employee and the situation will be given to others on a need-to-know basis.

Provide the employee with contacts for domestic violence resources.

Maintain reasonable efforts to maintain a secure office environment.

Be respectful of the employee's personal choices and privacy.

Provide orientation about the domestic violence guidelines for new employees.

Limit information about employees shared with others including home addresses or telephone numbers, cell phone numbers, work hours or lunch breaks.

Include the victim in any policy changes or specific plans made to address the situation. The victim knows the abuser better than anyone.

In addition, the employer can consider making the following options available:

Have another employee screen the employee's e-mails, mail or telephone calls.

Provide an escort to and from transportation.

Allow flexible use of available leave time for doctors, lawyers or court appointments.

Offer the possibility of leave without pay if there is no accrued time available.

Change or alternate work hours.

Change workspace to a more secure location or a different site.

Remove name from website or telephone directory.

Change payroll addresses or direct deposit information.

Provide priority parking.

Name a key contact person in the office to have special training.

Facilitate changes in beneficiaries for life insurance or retirement benefits.
Allow telecommuting if she has a safe location.

Perpetrator Policies: It is also possible that an employee may be using the workplace and its resources to abuse or harass an intimate partner. Personnel policies should make it clear that this is prohibited and that any employee who does this will be subject to disciplinary action, including dismissal. Resources should also be provided for abusers to get help.

Available Resources: Local domestic violence resources should be readily available to all employees. These should include resources in the geographical area in which the employees live. They should be updated regularly and be available in work areas where victims can access them without having to ask for them.

IV. Step by Step Instructions for Implementing Workplace Policies

Step One: Identify Other Sources of Information and Assistance

In addition to information gathered by club members, it may be necessary to work with other experts in the field. For example, if there is a human resources department in the workplace, discuss ideas with them. They may also be aware of other interested groups, such as labor unions, with whom to consult.

Also enlist the support of domestic violence agencies in the area. Many will have experience designing policies and will be able to help the club reach its goals. Clubs will also need to enlist their support in providing education to the employees. They may also be willing to assist in presenting the information to the employer.

Step Two: Review existing personnel policies.

Review existing personnel policies to see which ones could help victims of domestic violence; for example, flexible work hours or the generous use of sick or vacation time. Make a list of these policies.

Step Three: Write Sample Policies

Using the information in this kit, SIA's sample policies, and information gleaned from local research, write sample policies for presentation to the employer. When writing policies consider legal issues. The goal of the guidelines is to ensure that the employer is sensitive to domestic violence, but the guidelines should not open the employer to legal liability. It should be noted that juries in the United States are beginning to hold companies liable for a lack of protection. (The Family Violence Prevention Fund points out that domestic violence is already a security and liability concern. Jury awards for inadequate security suits average \$1.2 million in the United States and settlements average \$600,000. In a recent wrongful-death action against an employer who failed to protect a woman from her violent boyfriend, the employer paid a settlement of \$850,000 for failing to protect her after being notified of a specific threat.)

Step Four: Schedule a Presentation for the Employer

Compile the information into a proposal for the employer stressing the importance to businesses in adopting these policies. Club members may ask someone from the domestic violence agency to accompany them if they feel this would be useful. Include information about the little or no cost education options that are available in the community to educate the staff about domestic violence and using the policies. Once the employer has reviewed the policy, make any necessary changes. It may also be necessary to have a lawyer review the policies.

Step Five: Take Responsibility

Offer to take responsibility for keeping the guidelines updated and scheduling annual employee education. Also make sure that the policies are distributed to all existing employees and to new employees when they are hired. Furthermore, the policies and resources should also be posted in public areas.

V. Sample Domestic Violence Workplace Policies

A copy of the Soroptimist workplace policies is attached.

VI. Resources

The following is a list of resources that were used to create these guidelines. More information is available on their web sites. Information on national and local domestic violence services is available on the web. A World Wide Web search of “domestic violence workplace policies” also yields a wealth of resources and sample policies. Try adding a location to the search to get a sample of local policies. Please also contact SIA headquarters with any questions.

Family Violence Prevention Fund: <www.endabuse.org>

Corporate Alliance to End Partner Violence: <www.caepv.org>

American Institute on Domestic Violence: <www.aidv-usa.com>

Final Comments

The above are the steps that were taken to implement policies at SIA headquarters. Obviously, Soroptimist was amenable to including such policies. It could be more difficult if the employer was less inclined or interested in instituting such policies. However, the policies ask very little from employers and offer them a positive opportunity for educating employees about domestic violence and protecting themselves in the event of an incident.

Furthermore, implementing policies offers both the club and the employer a great public awareness opportunity. The employer can advertise the work they are doing to promote the rights of women in their workplace and the club can raise awareness about the work that Soroptimist does worldwide to end violence against women. If you tie the project to November 25th, the International Day to Eliminate Violence against Women, you will increase your chances of receiving media attention. Remember to publicize club efforts and successes.

Soroptimist Workplace Domestic Violence Guidelines

Policy Statement

Soroptimist International of the Americas, Inc. seeks to provide a work environment free from violence or threats of violence against employees—including domestic violence that may occur on Soroptimist property. Soroptimist is committed to ending violence against women and supporting its victims, including those who might be employees of Soroptimist. Soroptimist will take reasonable steps to maintain the safety of employees who are victims of domestic violence. Assistance to employees will be given when possible and will follow all applicable personnel rules.

Soroptimist recognizes that victims may have performance problems as a result of their situation. Soroptimist will make reasonable efforts to resolve performance problems but employees are still responsible for meeting the standards of their position. No employee will be penalized or disciplined solely for being a victim of domestic violence in the workplace.

In addition, Soroptimist prohibits the use of company property, such as telephones, faxes, e-mails, the mail or any other means to threaten or abuse intimate partners or former intimate partners.

Definition of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is defined as violent behavior committed by one intimate partner against another. The violence can be physical, sexual or psychological with the primary purpose to control, dominate or hurt the partner. This criminal act, which primarily affects women, can happen between husband/wife, boyfriend/girlfriend or in same sex relationships. This also includes former intimate partners. (More information is available in *Every Home a Safe Home*, which is distributed to new employees.) Soroptimist understands that a woman is never to blame for the abuse and acknowledges the barriers she must overcome to leave a violent relationship.

Education

Soroptimist will endeavor to provide annual staff education by a domestic violence professional to address current topics such as:

- Definition of domestic violence
- Signs that a co-worker could be a victim
- What to do if it is suspected that a co-worker is being abused
- Resources for employers and victims

Employee Responsibilities

Although the Soroptimist staff will be provided with training on how to identify and handle situations where they suspect a co-worker is a victim of domestic violence, nothing can happen until the employee has identified herself as a victim to her supervisor. In order to access the possible workplace services available, the employee has an obligation to:

- Alert both the supervisor and the executive director of the abuse.
- Provide Soroptimist with copies of any protection orders.
- Provide Soroptimist with a current emergency contact.
- If necessary, provide Soroptimist with a photograph of the abuser.
- Work with the supervisor and a domestic violence professional to develop a workplace safety plan.
- Save threatening e-mails or voice mails.

Designate a signal or code word for co-workers to alert them that you are in trouble and they should call the police.

Employer Responsibilities

Once an employee has been identified as a victim, Soroptimist will endeavor to:

Keep the domestic violence confidential, except where necessary to protect the safety of the victim and other employees. Information about the employee and the situation will be given to others on a need-to-know basis.

Provide the employee with contacts for domestic violence resources.

Make reasonable efforts to maintain a secure office environment.

Be respectful of the employee's personal choices and privacy.

Provide orientation to new employees about domestic violence.

Limit the information about employees given to the general public including home contact information, cell phone numbers, work hours or lunch breaks.

In addition, the employee and supervisor, in consultation with the executive director, can discuss the feasibility and necessity of the following options:

Screening the employee's e-mails or telephone calls by a different employee

Providing an escort to and from transportation

Flexible use of available leave time for doctors, lawyers or court appointments

Possibility of leave without pay if there is no accrued time available

Changing work hours or alternating work hours

Changing workspace to a more secure area

Removing name from website or telephone directory

Changing payroll addresses, direct deposit information or beneficiaries

Perpetrators

Any Soroptimist employee who threatens, harasses or abuses an intimate partner or former intimate partner at or from the workplace will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal. This includes employees who use workplace resources such as phones, fax machines, e-mail, mail or other means to threaten, harass or abuse an intimate partner or former intimate partner. Soroptimist encourages abusers to seek help.

The following organizations work with men who are violent:

Menergy: 215-242-2235

SAFE: 610-970-6590

Men's Resource Center: 610-971-9310

Domestic Violence Resources

National Domestic Violence Hotline Number: 800-799-SAFE

Pennsylvania:

PA State Domestic Violence Coalition: 800-932-4632

Women in Transition, Philadelphia, PA: 215-751-1111

Lutheran Settlement House, Philadelphia, PA: 215-739-9999 (English), 215-235-9992 (Spanish)

Women's Center of Montgomery County, PA: 800-773-2424

Laurel House, Norristown, PA: 800-642-2424

Domestic Abuse Project of Delaware County, PA: 610-565-4590

Bucks County, PA Domestic Violence Agency: 800-220-8816

Chester County, PA Domestic Violence Agency: 888-711-6270

New Jersey:

New Jersey Coalition for Battered Women: 800-224-0211, 609-584-8107

Burlington County: 609-871-7551

Camden County: 856-227-1234

Gloucester County: 856-881-3355

Mercer County: 609-394-9000

Legal Help Lines:

Women against Abuse Legal Center: 215-686-7082

Women's Law Project: 215-928-9801