



The Soroptimist Workplace Campaign to End Domestic Violence **Keeping Women Safe at Work**

The Soroptimist Workplace Campaign to End Domestic Violence is an ongoing effort to raise awareness about a seldom addressed domestic abuse issue: domestic violence as a workplace concern.

Domestic violence is a workplace concern because of the affects it has on both women and on businesses. Women do not leave abuse behind when they leave their homes. Their abusers often harass them at work, by telephone, text or e-mail. In worst case scenarios, perpetrators come to the workplace to threaten women and sometimes their co-workers as well.

Women who are the targets of domestic violence may often be late or absent from work. According to a World Bank study, one in five work days lost for health reasons by women is the result of domestic violence. In addition, women's work performance and productivity is often adversely affected.

Domestic violence costs countries millions of dollars in health care, police and court costs, and lost productivity. A study conducted by the Inter-American Development Bank, found that the cost of domestic violence in Canada was \$1.6 billion per year, including medical care and lost productivity. In the United States, researchers have found that losses arising from domestic violence range from \$10 - \$67 billion per year.

The Soroptimist Workplace Campaign to End Domestic Violence is a comprehensive campaign providing information, materials and support specifically designed for employees who are the target of domestic violence, their co-workers and their employers. To this end, Soroptimist has created a [Keeping Women Safe at Work hotline card](#), which includes:

- A description about domestic violence as a workplace concern
- A national hotline number for immediate assistance
- Warning signs of domestic abuse
- Suggestions for approaching a co-worker who may be the target of domestic abuse
- Suggestions for what employers can do to support employees who may be the target of domestic abuse

The hotline card has been designed for discreet placement in employee paycheck envelopes and in women's workplace restrooms. These are both safe environments where women can feel comfortable receiving and reading the card. Since women who are the targets of domestic abuse are often isolated from friends and family members by their abuser, the workplace is often the only place and time that they are away from their abuser and may be their only opportunity to seek information and support.

Although the hotline cards can be distributed at any time of the year, Soroptimist suggests distributing the cards in October to commemorate National Domestic Violence Awareness Month or in November to commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, which takes place on November 25.

The [Keeping Women Safe at Work hotline cards](#) can be purchased directly from Soroptimist. The cards are sold in packages of 25 for a cost of \$15. Proceeds from the sale of the cards go to support the programs and mission of Soroptimist, which is: To improve the lives of women and girls in local communities and throughout the world.

In addition to placing [Keeping Women Safe at Work hotline cards](#) in paycheck envelopes and in women's workplace restrooms, employers can support women who are the targets of domestic violence by implementing [domestic violence policies](#) into existing workplace policies.

To facilitate this process, Soroptimist has created [guidelines](#) for implementing domestic violence workplace policies, which include [sample policies](#). Domestic violence workplace policies can include:

- Training for supervisors and co-workers on how to recognize and respond affectively to warning signs of domestic violence
- Flexible work schedules for doctor or court appointments
- Procedures for screening telephone calls and e-mails

As stated earlier, the workplace may be the only place and time that women who are targets of domestic violence are away from their abuser and therefore may be their only opportunity to seek information and support. As such, Soroptimist encourages you to keep your eyes and ears open for signs that a woman in your workplace may be the target of domestic abuse.

Warning signs of domestic abuse include:

- Fearful behavior
- Social withdraw
- Bruises or physical complaints that show evidence of assault
- Intermittent crying and/or outbursts of anger while talking with a domestic partner on the phone
- Increased absenteeism; reduced productivity and/or a lack of concentration

If you suspect a co-worker is a target of domestic abuse, let her know that it is safe for her to talk with you about her situation. If you do not know your co-worker very well, try first to establish a rapport before approaching her. Be prepared to respect her privacy if she is not ready to talk, but reassure her that you will be there for her should she change her mind. If she does want to talk, listen without judging and assure her that she is not alone or at fault.

You can further support her by:

- Encouraging her to save threatening e-mail, texts or voicemail
- Offering to screen her calls and e-mails
- Offering to walk her to her car at the end of the work day
- Providing her with contact information for local domestic violence support services

For more information, please refer to the following resources:

- [Domestic Violence as a Workplace Concern](#) white paper
- [Fact Sheet](#) about the Soroptimist Workplace Campaign to End Domestic Violence
- [Sample Publicity Materials](#) for the Soroptimist Workplace Campaign to End Domestic Violence
- [Links](#) for additional resources, including support services for victims of domestic violence