

# SOROPTIMIST WORKPLACE CAMPAIGN TO END DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:

## *Guidelines for Implementing Domestic Violence Workplace Policies*

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 targets of domestic violence.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, 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 and an additional \$727.8 million in productivity losses. (Family Violence Prevention Fund)

By implementing domestic violence workplace policies, employers can not only provide support and protection for their employees who may be the target of domestic abuse, they can also protect their bottom-line. In addition, domestic violence workplace policies will also serve to raise awareness of the issue amongst all employees. To assist employers with implementing domestic violence workplace policies, Soroptimist has created the following step-by-step guidelines.

### I. REVIEW EXISTING WORKPLACE POLICIES

Implementing domestic violence workplace policies may seem like a daunting task. However, most businesses already have personnel or other workplace policies in place. In addition, corporations will often have Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) as well. In these cases, businesses have already recognized that employees' private lives affect their work performance. Including information about domestic violence can thus simply be added to an existing policy. In some cases, larger corporations and city and state governments may already have existing policies that address domestic violence. In these cases, it will only be necessary to review the policy to make sure it is comprehensive.

### II. KNOW THE FACTS

Many studies have been conducted in the United States about domestic violence in the workplace. It has been proven that domestic violence adversely affects not only the target of abuse but also has a detrimental effect on businesses. In addition to the statistics provided below, gather local statistics about domestic violence in the workplace. If necessary, use the statistics to make a persuasive argument for the implementation of domestic violence workplace policies.

- The estimated 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. (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- 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, Canada.)
- 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. (Family Violence Prevention Fund)

- Thirty-eight percent of surveyed co-workers noted concern 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. (Corporate Alliance to End Partner Violence)

**In addition, 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 abused employees.
- 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. CREATE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE WORKPLACE POLICIES

Following is a list of what should be included in any domestic violence workplace policy. For an example of a domestic violence workplace policy, please refer to the copy of [Soroptimist's policy](#).

#### 1. Policy Statement

State the reasons and the mission for the policy. Why is the policy being instituted? What will it accomplish? This is also a good place to mention the responsibilities of the employer and employee.

#### 2. Definition of Domestic Violence

Provide a definition of domestic violence. Make sure the definition includes both current and former partners as well as same sex partners. Since the workplace policy itself will include more in-depth educational training on domestic violence, the statement here can be brief.

#### 3. Educational Training Program

State that an annual educational training on domestic violence will be provided for employees. In order for the workplace policy to be effective, employees need to know how to recognize signs of domestic abuse and communicate effectively with a co-worker whom they suspect is a target of domestic abuse. Most domestic violence agencies have a community outreach department willing to provide educational trainings to businesses.

#### 4. Statement of Employee Responsibilities

Provide a list of employee responsibilities. In order for employees to effectively utilize the benefits of a domestic violence workplace policy, they need to know what they are responsible for. An employee's first and foremost responsibility is to disclose themselves as a target of domestic abuse to a designated person (supervisor, human resource staff or executive director, for example). Further 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 to let them know they are in trouble and to call the police.
- Working with their employer or a domestic violence professional to develop a workplace safety plan.
- Saving threatening e-mails, text or voice mail messages.
- Keeping lines of communication open with the employer during any extended time off.

### 5. Statement of Employer Responsibilities

Provide a list of employer responsibilities. Once an employee has identified themselves as a target of domestic violence, the responsibilities of the employer include:

- Keeping the domestic violence confidential, except where necessary to protect the safety of the target of abuse and other employees. Information about the employee and the situation will be given to others on a need-to-know basis.
- Providing the employee with contacts for domestic violence resources.
- Maintaining reasonable efforts to maintain a secure office environment.
- Being respectful of the employee's personal choices and privacy.
- Providing orientation about the domestic violence guidelines for new employees.
- Limiting information about employees shared with others including home addresses or telephone numbers, cell phone numbers, work hours or lunch breaks.
- Including the target of abuse in any policy changes or specific plans made to address the situation. The target of abuse knows the abuser better than anyone.

Further employer responsibilities can include:

- Having another employee screen the employee's e-mails, mail, texts or telephone calls.
- Providing an escort to and from transportation.
- Allowing flexible use of available leave time for doctors, lawyers or court appointments.
- Offering the possibility of leave without pay if there is no accrued time available.
- Changing or alternate work hours.
- Changing workspace to a more secure location or a different site.
- Removing employee's name from work website or telephone directory.
- Changing payroll addresses or direct deposit information.
- Providing priority parking.
- Naming a key contact person in the office to have special training.
- Facilitating changes in beneficiaries for life insurance or retirement benefits.
- Allowing telecommuting if the target of abuse has a safe location to work from.

### 6. Statement Pertaining to Perpetrators

Employees who are domestic violence perpetrators may sometimes use the workplace and its resources to abuse, threaten or harass an intimate partner. Workplace policies need to state clearly that this is prohibited and that any employee who violates this prohibition will be subject to disciplinary action, including dismissal. In addition, provide a list of resources for abusers.

## 7. List of Resources

Provide a list of domestic violence resources. Make sure the resources cover all geographical areas in which employees live. The list should be included in the policy manual as well as posted in the workplace where employees can easily view it. Remember to update the list as needed.

### ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS

- **Solicit the help of others.** If necessary, consult with staff from the human resources department and/or seek advice from domestic violence agencies. Both may be able to assist with creating domestic violence workplace policies.
- **Hire a lawyer to review the policies.** When creating domestic violence workplace policies make sure employers are legally protected as incidences of domestic violence in the workplace can be a security and liability concern for businesses. Jury awards for inadequate security lawsuits average \$1.2 million in the United States and settlements average \$600,000. For example, an employer paid a settlement of \$850,000 in a wrongful-death action for failing to protect an employee after the employer had been made aware of a specific threat to the employee made by a violent boyfriend.
- **Distribute and post policies.** Make sure that the policies are distributed to all existing employees and to new employees as they are hired. In addition, post policies and resources in public workplace areas where employees have easy access to them.
- **Place Keeping Women Safe at Work hotline cards in employee pay envelopes and women's restrooms.** 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. The hotline card has thus been designed for discreet placement in employee paycheck envelopes and in women's workplace restrooms, both safe environments where women can feel comfortable receiving and reading the card. [Click here to order hotline cards.](#)

### RESOURCES

The following resources were used to create these guidelines:

- Family Violence Prevention Fund
- [www.endabuse.org](http://www.endabuse.org)
- Corporate Alliance to End Partner Violence
- [www.caepv.org](http://www.caepv.org)
- American Institute on Domestic Violence
- [www.aidv-usa.com](http://www.aidv-usa.com)

[Links](#) for additional domestic violence resources.

For more information, please contact Soroptimist at [program@soroptimist.org](mailto:program@soroptimist.org).

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