

Dealing with domestic violence - in the workplace



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The aim of today's course

Knowledge about:

- Why focus on domestic violence in the workplace?
- What is domestic violence – myths and facts
- Consequences: Domestic violence and the workplace

How to:

- Spot a victim/survivor of domestic violence
- Have the difficult conversation
- Deal with and prevent domestic violence in the workplace



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The aim of today's course is twofold:

First of all, you will gain knowledge about why focusing on domestic violence in the workplace is both very relevant and very important – for the person subjected to domestic violence and to the company. You will also gain knowledge about what domestic violence is; and here we will call out some of the myths that act as barriers for ending domestic violence and we will replace the myths and prejudice with facts. Furthermore, you will get an insight into how domestic violence affects people subjected to it – especially when it comes to their work life.

Secondly, you will also get tools to spot a victim of domestic violence and you will learn about how to have the difficult conversation with a co-worker you know or suspect is subjected to domestic violence – how to help. And then you will also, collectively as a workplace, get some tools that can help you deal with and prevent domestic violence in your workplace.

Domestic violence is a gendered problem which means that women are more subjected to domestic violence than men – however, this does not mean that men are not subjected to domestic violence. And recently more research about men

subjected to domestic violence is appearing and the numbers may be even higher than we have previously thought.

In this course we will for the most part use gender—neutral words about who is the abuser and the abused – but sometimes the language will be gendered. And the reason for this is that domestic violence *also* is a gendered problem.

Why focus on domestic abuse in the workplace?

- There is no clear boundary between private life and work life – victims/survivors of domestic violence inevitably take the violence (or the consequences) with them to their work
- The workplace can play a big role in helping victims/survivors –both getting out of an abusive relationship *and* keeping their job
- Ethically *and* economically, it only makes sense for companies to make domestic violence work an integrated part of the company
- Security: Domestic violence can also enter the workplace quite literally. Abusive partners sometimes seek out their partner at work and subject her to violence. Therefore, focusing on domestic violence at work also has to do with taking employees' security at work seriously.



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- Some may think that domestic violence has nothing to do with the workplace. Domestic violence is of course something we do not wish on anyone, however, it belongs to the private sphere. At least, that is what some people may think. But a large portion of people who are subjected to domestic violence are part of the workforce – they are your co-workers, colleagues and managers. And people subjected to domestic violence will in some sense always bring the violence – or the consequences of the violence – with them to the workplace. Therefore, there is no clear, blank-and-white, separation between private life and work life. This is one reason why every workplace should be equipped to deal with domestic violence; because domestic violence also influence the workplace of victims/survivors.
- The other reason why every workplace should get involved with dealing with domestic abuse, is that the workplace can make a big difference for victims/survivors of domestic abuse – both when it comes to getting help and ultimately ending the abusive relationship, but also when it comes to keeping their job. Because of all of the consequences people subjected to domestic violence experience, it can be very hard to maintain a well-functioning work life, especially in the periods where the abuser is most violent. But the work place can make a big

difference and play a big part in helping the abused part keeping his/her job.

- The third reason why workplaces should get actively involved in preventing and dealing with domestic violence is that it is the right thing to do – ethically *and* economically. No one should be subjected to domestic violence and as a society we should do what we can to stop this kind of violence. Furthermore, a happy, thriving employee is a productive employee that contributes positively to the workplace and the financial situation of the workplace.
- And lastly, domestic violence does not just enter the work place in form of the consequences of the violence that affect an employee's satisfaction with and productivity at work. Domestic violence can also enter the work place quite literally. Sometimes the abusive partner shows up at the victim/survivor's workplace to threaten/harm her while at work. This situation can be dangerous – both to the victim/survivor and to all the other co-workers. Therefore, it is also important to know about domestic violence at work so that employees subjected to domestic violence feel safe enough to let the work place know what is going on at home. And if a workplace has been successful in making a co-worker feel seen and safe enough to tell about her experiences, then the work place is also able to make a risk assessment and to start the process of referring the victim/survivor to professional help.

The consequences

One study

- twice as much absenteeism
- twice as many were unable to work, had switched jobs or were on part-time because of health problems
- four times as many had conflicts with their colleagues

("The work life of abused women" by the Danish National Board of Social Services, 2006)

Another study

- 71 % experienced fatigue at work
- 35 % had difficulties making deadlines
- 64 % had concentration problems
- 30 % had extra sick leave
- 55 % worried about what their colleagues think
- 35 % had difficulties participating in social activities with colleagues

("The work life of abused women" by the Danish National Board of Social Services, 2009)



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When looking at the studies about the consequences of domestic violence, it is very clear that the abused person does not leave the consequences of the abusive relationship at home. The consequences listed here will hopefully make it very clear why it makes great sense for workplaces to start actively dealing with and preventing domestic violence.

One study

One study compared people not subjected to domestic violence with people who were victims/survivors of domestic violence.

This study found that people subjected to domestic violence were twice as absent, and twice as many of the victims/survivors were unable to work, had switched jobs or were part-time because of the health problems caused by the abuse. And four times as many of the victims/survivors of domestic violence had conflicts with their colleagues which can be the result of the abuse taking so much of the person's mental and physical resources leading to a shorter temper.

Another study

Another study looks at the work-related consequences women subjected to domestic violence experienced.

This shows that 71 % experienced fatigue at work, 35 % has difficulties making deadlines, 64 % experienced concentration problems, 30 % has extra sick leave, 55 % worried about what their colleagues think (about their work performance, whether they have any suspicion about what is going on) and 35 % had difficulties participating in social activities with colleagues.

These studies show that people are affected in various ways by domestic violence – more sick leave, less energy for the social aspect of work life, less productive, more conflict and so on. These numbers just further demonstrates why it makes perfect sense for a workplace to help the women or people trapped in a violent relationship.

Myths & prejudice

Myth 1: It does not occur in ordinary families and it does not affect any of our colleagues

Myth 2: The abuse could never happen to me – it only happens to other people or a certain kind of person.

Myth 3: She can just leave the him!

Myth 4: She must have done something to provoke him



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In order to prevent and deal with domestic violence in the workplace it is important to debunk some of the many myths that are related to domestic violence, because these myths are big barriers when it comes to solving the problem of domestic violence.

Some of the myths or prejudice that are barriers for this work are the following:

- Myth 1: “It does not occur in ordinary families and it does not affect any of our colleagues”.
Many people have a tendency to think that domestic violence is not something that affects anyone *they* know. Many people think it is something that happens to “other” people.
- Myth 1 is probably connected to myth 2, which is “The abuse could never happen to me – it only happens to other people or a certain kind of person.”
Many people have a certain image of what an “abused person” is and that domestic violence can only happen to a certain kind of – weak, poor, unintelligent ? – person. Many people don’t have insights into the complex mechanisms that are involved in keep domestic violence in a relationship alive, which is probably why

they do not think that it could ever happen to them.

- Myth 3 is “But she can just leave him!”.
When you don’t have factual knowledge about what domestic violence actually is, it can be difficult to understand why someone doesn’t just leave. If you get abused, you leave – that is the simple conclusion many people come to.
- Myth 4 is “She must have done something to provoke him”.
To some people it may be difficult to understand why someone can become abusive without any “real” reason – therefore, people may think that the abused person has some kind of blame for the abuse, because “people don’t just get violent for no real reason”. And some might think that the abused person can just stop doing the thing that triggers the abuser to go off.

It is important to talk about these myths about domestic violence in order to refute them and to make it very clear that the myths **do not** tell the true story of what domestic violence is. Thinking that the myths represent the truth makes it almost impossible to end domestic violence. This is why the myths must be replaced with facts.

The facts

Fact 1: Domestic violence occurs in all social classes, age groups...

Fact 2: A complex mechanism keeps a person in a violent relationship:

- > violence develops over time
- > control and psychological abuse gradually intensifies until the person's self-esteem and sense of reality are affected
- > self-blame, no longer knows what counts as acceptable behavior
- > abuser switches between affection and violence
- > financial and practical reasons (especially with children)

Fact 3: Victims/survivors do everything they can to prevent the violence.

To sum up:

1. Understanding the nature of domestic violence is necessary
2. **The issue: Focusing on the victim/survivor, and not the abuser!**
3. Myths lead to: Double victimization + no help



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So here are some of the fact that can debunk the myths just mentioned.

- First of all, domestic violence occurs in all social classes, age groups, in hetero- and homosexual relationships and so on. No one is exempted. The CEO, the plumber, the professor and the healthcare worker can all be abusers or subjected to domestic abuse. It does not just happen to a “certain kind of people” – it can happen to anyone, and it *does* happen to anyone. People subjected to domestic violence are not weaker, less intelligent or anything else – they are just like you and me.
- Secondly, thinking that domestic violence could never happen to you indicates that you may not understand the complex mechanisms that keep a person in a violent relationship.
First of all, the violence in a violent relationship almost always develops over time. No one wants to be in an abusive relationship. The violence often develop very gradually which means that the person's boundaries are slowly crossed and pushed more and more.
Oftentimes, the abuser gradually gets more and more controlling and the the abused person is being told again and again that they are not worth anything and

that everything is their fault. The abused sense of self-esteem and self-worth is often highly affected.

Abusers also often switch between being abusive and very affective/apologetic. It is also important to remember that there used to be – and maybe still is – love between the abuser and the abused. And the hope of getting back to the good days of the relationship may keep the person in the relationship.

Sometimes financial and practical reasons (for example threats about hurting the children) can also keep the abused part from leaving. Sometimes the abuser also has complete control over the finances and the abused person has no means with which to escape, and perhaps no privacy if the abuser checks the abused phone and so on.

To sum up: A whole array of different practical, psychological and financial things can make it extremely difficult to leave an abusive relationship. And that is why the abused person cannot just leave.

- Thirdly, most abused persons do everything in their power to prevent the violence. Thinking that they must have done something to provoke the abuser to be violent is a big misunderstanding and not true.

To sum up

The first thing that is important to realise is that domestic violence is a very complex problem and that dealing other kinds of violence is not at all the same as understanding and dealing with domestic violence. The reason for this is that domestic violence has a whole other nature; it is entrenched in so many taboos, myths and prejudice which makes domestic violence very complex to understand and therefore to deal with. Therefore, having very exact, factual knowledge about domestic violence is necessary if you want to start dealing with it. You cannot solve a problem if you do not really understand what the problem is.

Secondly, the myths often focus a lot on the victim/survivor of the abuse – what she/he has or hasn't done or said, when the focus should clearly be on the person abusing. No matter what, no one deserved to be abused, which is why it is not even relevant to think about why someone does not just leave or what she/he must have done to trigger the abuser. No one can be blamed in any way for being subjected to abuse. That is a very important take away from some of the myths that circulate about domestic violence.

Thirdly – and in relation to what has just been said – these myths are problematic because they can lead to double victimization. This means that, first of all, the woman or person subjected to domestic violence is victimized by the abuser. But on

top of that, the abused person also gets blamed, directly or indirectly, by the outside world, because "she/he can just leave" or "she/he must have done something to provoke the abuser". And this leads to double victimization of the abused part. Another reason why these myths are so harmful is that they can be partly responsible for victims/survivors not getting any help. Because if people think "She can just leave" then there is not a big incitement to really help someone. The myths have some degree of responsibility in maintaining the domestic violence, and that is why it is so important to debunk them.

How does domestic violence often play out?

Types of domestic violence:

- Psychological, physical, sexual, material and economic abuse
- The abuser often uses different types of violence which overlap and intensify each other.

The cycle of abuse:

1. **Green stage:** The relationship starts out peacefully.
2. **Yellow stage:** **Gradually** more jealousy, threatening, blaming and isolation, resulting in low self-esteem and difficulties in distinguishing between love and violence/acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. This can last for years.
3. **Red stage:** One small incident causes an explosion of anger: sexual, physical, or extreme verbal abuse occur. This part of the cycle has the shortest duration.
4. **Green stage:** Back to peace and affection (flowers, gift, excuses for violence, apologies).



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Keyword: **Denial**

In order to really understand the nature of domestic violence, we will not go through how domestic violence often plays out in a relationship.

But before that, we will run through what domestic violence is and how we can define it.

Types of domestic violence

When speaking of domestic violence, most people think only of physical abuse that can result in a black eye, a broken leg, or visible bruises. But domestic violence is also when someone subjects their partner or ex-partner to one or more of the following types of abuse:

- Psychological abuse can be where someone or someone's child is threatened, yelled at, constantly criticised, controlled, demeaned, or isolated
- Physical abuse is when the victim/survivor is hit, kicked, pushed, thrown around, or victimized with weapons or objects
- Sexual abuse is when the victim is forced to have sex with the abuser or forced to participate in other unwanted sexual acts
- Material abuse can be when the belongings of the victim/survivor are destroyed or

she/he is threatened with them being destroyed

- Economic abuse is when a victim/survivor is forced or tricked into debt, or when she/he isn't able to or allowed to spend their own money (such as on food). Without money, the victim/survivor ends up in poverty and is isolated from public life.

An abuser often uses different types of violence and they often overlap and intensity each other. Psychological violence almost always occur.

The cycle of abuse

It is important to understand how abusive relationships often look like or behave, in order to understand the nature of the abuse which is crucial to understand if you want to help someone in an abusive relationship.

1. An abusive relationship almost always does not start out being abusive. Like any other, it starts with falling in love. This can be called the first, or the green, stage of the cycle of abuse.
2. In a relationship that becomes abusive, some dynamics between couple at some point begin shift very gradually. In this next stage of the cycle of abuse, the yellow stage, the abusive part gradually becomes more and more jealous, threatening, blaming, frustrated, angry or the like. This stage can last for days, months or years which means that the build up and the changing of dynamics and behaviour can happen very slowly. This is the stage that builds up to the more extreme abusive outburst.

In the yellow stage, the abused person often tries to calm the abuser down and she/he tries to handle the situation. The abuser almost always isolates the other person more and more – from friends, family, and the social aspects of the person's work life. In this stage the abused part often becomes more and more unable to tell the difference between what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in a relationship because of how their boundaries have been crossed continually over a long period of time and because of their isolation from other people and other kinds of inputs other than those coming from their abusive partner. The abuser often becomes the one to decide/define what is right and wrong and this can result in the abused part no longer being able to distinguish between violence and love. One crucial thing that happens in this stage it that the victim/survivor's self-esteem is often completely broken and the abused part becomes more and more unable to distinguish between love and violence.

3. The third stage is the red stage, which is the most dangerous one. In this stage, one small incident can cause an explosion of anger. The abuser may use sexual, physical, or extreme verbal abuse. Some abusers use weapons, tear their

partner's hair or humiliate the partner in public. In this stage the victim may call the police, fight back, leave the home, or become paralysed.

4. The cycle is completed when the couple return to the green stage, where the abuser often quickly try to cover up his/her behaviour. The abuser will often bring flowers and gifts, and he/she declares his/her love. The abuser apologises, and promises never to let it happen again, or he/she maybe even agree to start therapy. During this stage, the abuser will blame his violent behaviour on work-related stress or other factors, which have nothing to do with him/her personally. The victim/survivor might at this stage stop any legal proceedings, return to the relationship, and promise to work on the relationship, hoping that things will improve.

Denial

The cycle of abuse revolves around denial. As long as the couple deny the violence, it is impossible for them to stop the violence or this cycle of abuse without outside help, and the power balance in the relationship becomes more and more one-sided. Even though there can be temporary pauses in motion, the cycle will gradually move faster and faster. In most cases, the violence will become more severe and more frequent and it can even result in murder. No one wants to end up in the cycle of abuse, and the mechanisms which keep it going – denial for instance – are for the most part unconscious. This does not, however, reduce the abuser's responsibility for his/her violent actions. When the cycle is in motion, it is very difficult to stop it, but it can be done.

How to spot a victim/survivor

Signs that your colleague may be abused:

- Mood, appearance, body weight or work performance change
- Many sick days, forgets/cancels appointments at the last minute and gives unreliable excuses.
- Injuries which she/he cannot explain/the explanations are not credible
- You overhear/see your colleague's partner acting demeaning
- The partner keeps an eye on your colleague at work
- Your colleague is afraid of upsetting her/his partner.
- Your colleague often apologizes for her partner's behavior.
- Your colleague is not allowed to/does not participate in social events at work



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It can be helpful to know what kinds of signs people typically show at work if they are subjected to domestic violence. These are some of the sign that can occur. The important thing to underline here is that you will not necessarily see dramatic signs of abuse like bruises and broken bones.

But one thing you can always do is to listen to your gut feeling. If you are worried about your colleague, there probably is a reason for it. Apart from that you can look after sign like these that **may** indicate that your colleague is subjected to domestic violence:

- Someone's mood, appearance, body weight or work performance changing can be a sign that something is going on at home – perhaps domestic violence.
- If someone has many or get more sick days and forgets or cancels appointments at the last minute and gives unreliable excuses, then that can be a sign of domestic abuse as well.
- If a person gets injuries which she/he cannot explain – or if the explanations are not credible – then that can be a red flag.

- If you overhear/see your colleague's partner acting demeaning towards her/him, that can be a sign of domestic violence.
- If you experience that the partner of your colleague keeps an eye on your colleague at work – for example if he/she calls or texts often, or maybe always follows your colleague to work and come pick your colleague up after work, then that can be a sign of controlling behavior and therefore domestic violence.
- If you get the feeling that your colleague is afraid of upsetting her/his partner, then that can be a sign as well.
- If your colleague often apologizes for her partner's behavior, that can also be a red flag and an indication that there may be domestic violence in the relationship.
- If your colleague is not allowed to or simply does not participate in social events at work, this can also be a sign of isolation which is very common in domestic violence.

Of course, these signs can mean nothing, or they can mean that something else – other than domestic violence – is going on. But especially if several of the signs are present, and your gut feeling tells you that something is off, you might be right.

Case exercise

After work and right outside your workplace you witness a colleague who is having an argument with her partner. You see the partner shove her quite hard a couple of times. The colleague is not someone you know well and there are other colleagues who witness the same incident, but they do nothing.

What do you do? Why?



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Now it is time for today's exercise.

Imagine this situation:

After work and right outside your workplace you witness a colleague who is having an argument with her partner. You see the partner shove her quite hard a couple of times. The colleague is not someone you know well and there are other colleagues who witness the same incident, but they do nothing.

The exercise is to each take 5-10 minutes to think about what you would do in this situation – and, most importantly, why. Think about what your train of thought would be in a situation like this. After the 5-10 minutes we will hear what you have all said and talk about your answers.

[Do the exercise as described. The most important thing here is to make the participants reflect on the situation, what they would think about it, why, what they would do and why. Hear what each participant has to say and turn in into a conversation/discussion among you and all the participants.)

[After you are done with the exercise] To sum up:

Every situation has many possibilities for action. But no matter what, it would be much easier to act in the situation if you have already discussed domestic violence at work, if the workplace has an employment policy on this issue, and if you know something about how to talk to someone who may be subjected to domestic violence.

The difficult conversation: Do's and don'ts

What to expect:

- Minimizing/excusing abuse.
- Shame, guilt, denial.

Do:

- Be **specific** about why you are worried + that you can be trusted
- Show sympathy. Make it clear how you/the workplace can help.
- Refer to resources inside and outside the workplace.
- Underline: it is not their fault + others are in the same situation.
- Tell her/him that you would like to talk again whenever there is a need.
- Listen!

Prepare for the conversation:

- Undisturbed room, resources, examples.

Don't

- Speak negatively about your colleague's partner
- Put pressure on your colleague to act or leave the relationship
- Be judgmental/talk down to her/him
- Tell your colleague what YOU think she/he should do
- Promise more than you can keep
- Decide when you will talk again.

Remember:
Your job is not to solve your colleague's problems, but to help him/her express the problem, to build her/his self-esteem, and refer to professional help!



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If you have a gut feeling that something is off or if you see some of the signs that your colleague might be subjected to domestic violence, and you want to try and talk to the person about it, it is important to know what to expect from the conversation, how to prepare for the conversation and to know what is important to say and what you should probably not say. It is difficult to open up a conversation about domestic violence which is why it is good to have some general pointers about what to do and what not to do.

What to expect

First of all, it is good to prepare yourself for what to expect from a conversation like this. If it is the very first talk you will have with this person about this topic, it would be very normal if your colleague is in denial about anything happening (of course there also is the possibility that nothing is happening). This denial can be particularly tough to get through. However, if you feel like something is going on but the person just isn't ready to talk about it, that is fine too. Even if the person does not open up and tell you what is wrong, it is still really important to have this conversation. Your reaching out can be the first time someone has tried to help the person directly. And this first conversation – even if the person is in denial – can plant the seed that eventually makes her/him leave the relationship.

It is often very difficult for victims/survivors to talk to their colleagues about domestic violence. Many victims find it even harder to ask for help, and they are often relieved when someone offers a helping hand. Even if they are not yet ready to receive the help.

And if the person opens up and tells you that your suspicions are correct, then it is very common that the abused person will minimize the violence at first, to perceive the abuser's behavior as "normal" or to make apologies for the abuser's violence. It can be to protect the partner, or it can be a way to ease into the topic and making sure you can be trusted and will not judge her/him.

It is also very common that the person experiences a lot of shame and guilt about what is happening – that she/he is in this situation and that she/he couldn't handle it herself/himself. This can also be a barrier that makes it hard for the person to open up.

Prepare

Apart from getting clear about what kind of reaction to expect, it is also important to prepare some things before the meeting: Make sure the conversation takes place somewhere completely undisturbed, where one can listen to what you talk about. It is very important that the person feels safe, and that the situation is completely confidential. Furthermore, before the meeting/talk, find out what resources are available – both in the company but also outside the company. Any resources that may be of help to someone in an abusive relationship will be good to bring to the meeting.

It is also a good idea to think through what has made you suspect that something is wrong – change of behavior, observing the colleague's partner? Think about what has made you think that something might be wrong.

It is important to bear in mind that all victims of intimate partner violence have dealt with the situation as well as they could with the knowledge, experience, and resources they had at that time. It is the perpetrator who has done something both wrong and illegal.

And remember: Your job is not to solve your colleague's problems, but to help him or her express and define what the problem is and then refer them to relevant professional assistance.

The difficult conversation

Here are some do's and don't's about what to say and what not to say in a

conversation with someone you think may be a subjected to domestic violence.

Do:

- In your conversation it is a good idea to be specific about why you are worried, and what you have seen/heard/felt that made you suspect that you colleague may be in a relationship with domestic violence.
It is important to find the right balance between being a little direct about what you suspect and why, but also to treat the topic very carefully in your conversation.
- Also, be very quick to establish that what is said in this meeting will not be told to anyone if the person does not want to. Let the person know – both through what you say and how you act – that you can be trusted.
- Show sympathy and consideration. This is very important to building trust, which is crucial. And make it very clear *that* you and the workplace want to help and *how* the workplace can help. Be very specific about what you can offer her/him.
- Tell the person about resources, inside and outside the workplace. Some people who are in abusive relationships are not aware about where they can get help and what kind of offers exist.
- It is very important – whether the person opens up about being subjected to domestic violence or if the person just listens and does not explicitly confirm your suspicion – that you make it very clear to her/him that being in an abusive relationship is never, ever their fault. This important to say very explicitly and clearly because many victims/survivors may think that it is their fault, or they may think that other people will blame her/him for being in an abusive relationship. Furthermore, it is also very important to say, that others are in the exact same situation as her/him and that this is a common problem. This will make the person know, that she/he is not alone.
- Tell the person that you are available to talk again whenever she/he would like to talk. Let it be up to her/him when you should talk again – give her/him the power to decide this.
- And the most important thing: Listen! Make space for her/him to talk. Give it time. It is a very difficult thing to open up about.

Don't:

Some things are not a good idea to say in the first, difficult conversation (or ever).

- It is not a good idea to speak negatively about your colleague's partner. This may

make her/him feel like she/he has to defend the partner.

- Do not put pressure on your colleague to do anything specific: To leave the relationship or anything else. It is so very important to respect that you do not know what is going on and to respect that she/he will do what she/he can do in her/his own time.
- Be careful not to show any kind of judgement that may lead your colleague to think that you blame her/him for being in an abusive relationship in any kind of way. Be mindful of talking in a respectful way that does not make her/him feel talked down to – this is likely something the person is very used to from her/his partner, if you are right about your suspicion. Treating the person like an equal is very important.
- Do not promise more than you can keep. Be very clear about what you can help with, but do not say you can do something that you can't or will not do. It is important that the person can trust you and what you say.
- Do not make the decision about when you should talk again. Again, it is important to give her/him the power, and to let her/him decide what can happen when.

And if your colleague denies that anything is wrong:

Accept the refusal. You don't know why she or he refuses to talk to you.

Be patient.

And follow up on your conversation at another time.

And remember: Your job is not to solve your colleague's problems, but to help her/him express the problem, to help build some self-esteem, and to refer to professional help!

What can you as a workplace/co-worker do?

- Help the abused person put her situation into words and to her/him further along a process which moves towards the person finding the way away from the violence.
- Raise awareness and reduce the taboos, myths, prejudice
- Spread information about how to get help if you are a victim/survivor

Guidelines about: identifying, preventing, and dealing with domestic violence

1. A declaration about the aim to deal with domestic violence
2. A definition
3. Who to contact (an **educated** employee)
4. How the workplace can help

Prevention: Empowerment and boundaries



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As co-workers to someone who may be or is subjected to domestic violence the best thing you can do is to help the person put the situation into words and to thereby help her/him further along a process which moves towards the person finding the way away from the violence. Your job is not to solve the problem or to convince the person to leave the relationship but to create a space in which the person can safely open up about her/his experiences, build self-trust and self-esteem and thereby – eventually and hopefully – leave the relationship. But leaving the relationship is often something that takes some time to be able to do.

Another thing you as a workplace can do is to raise awareness about what domestic violence actually is – be vocal about the facts and try to crush the myths, taboos and prejudice. This will be a big help as well.

A third thing you can easily do is to spread information – via posters, meetings, flyers or the like – about where and how to get help if you are a victim/survivor of domestic violence.

And apart from these initiatives, it is also very important to make a policy or guideline in your workplace that addresses domestic violence. Perhaps you already have one

about violence, but remember that other types of violence cannot be compared to domestic violence. Domestic violence must be dealt with as a separate issue.

A guideline should include something about how your workplace will identify, prevent and deal with domestic violence. It should contain at least this:

1. A declaration that clearly states that you actively work to deal with domestic violence in the work place; that you take it seriously and that no one should be subjected to domestic violence.
2. A definition of what domestic violence is. That could be the different types of domestic violence – psychological, material, sexual, economic and physical. And what domestic violence is not – myths and facts.
3. Who to contact if you suspect someone is subjected to domestic violence or if a victim/survivor wants to seek help. Make it very clear who has the responsibility for what. It is important that the contact person is someone who has some kind of education or knowledge about this topic – otherwise victims/survivors may be comfortable reaching out to the person. Or, if they do, they may have a bad experience.
4. How the workplace can help. This can be offering victims/survivors some sick leave, protection, a period with less work hours, days off in relation to court days or the like, offering the person to move to another part of the company and other safety measures that may be necessary for a person still in an abusive relationship or for a person in the midst of leaving an abusive relationship.

Remember that the value of the guidelines also lie in the process of developing them. The discussions among colleagues and management during the negotiations are just as important as the final document. It is also important that the guidelines fit the individual workplace and its work culture. Both management and the employees should approve and support the guidelines. And that can take time to achieve.

Clarify what opportunities are available at the workplace for taking consideration of special needs, like the need for flexible working hours while the victim is living in a shelter or has to appear in court. When the victim ends the relationship with the abusive partner, there may be a long period of time where she has to find a new place to live, appear in court, start divorce and custody proceedings, etc. During this period the victim might have difficulties working full-time. And it may, as well, take time to recover emotionally and psychologically. In some cases, a gradual return to full-time work would be the most suitable solution.

In order to prevent domestic violence in the work place – both preventing people from entering or staying in abusive relationships but also preventing people becoming

abusive – it is a good idea to focus on empowerment and boundaries if a workplace wants to prevent domestic violence.

Empowerment means processes which improve the ability of individuals or communities to create and use their mental, material, social, and cultural resources. Individual empowerment is about feeling able to have a positive effect on your own life and about appreciating and taking care of others. E.g. we can empower each other to act in relationship to the prevention of domestic violence and to find ways to deal with it in the workplace. We can start processes which “empower” the abused colleagues we meet at work and their counterparts, the ones who abuse.

We can also participate in creating an environment and team spirit at work where personal **boundaries** are something which everyone is aware of and take seriously. This has to do with treating our colleagues with respect and demanding respect from others.

Workplaces are situations where social norms, values, and behaviour are shaped and where they can be changed and this is why empowerment and work around boundaries can have a positive effect on preventing or dealing with domestic violence.