

## **Guidelines to create a safe space for a victim of domestic abuse**

### **Know the warning signs**

The effects of domestic violence can show up in many ways. Being aware of these effects will not only help you better understand the experience of those affected by abuse, but it will also help you better identify someone who is being abused. Signs of violence are not always as obvious as bruising or a black eye. Things like declining performance and unexpected absences may be signs that something is not right. While we must be careful not to get too suspicious, if you notice unexpected and out-of-character behaviour, you should offer the employee support.

### **Build awareness**

Incorporate information about awareness of domestic violence into employee orientation and wellness programmes. Make it clear that your organisation believes domestic violence is unacceptable and that you are committed to support victims. Employees should know that they will not be penalised for seeking help, and should receive information on how to recognise the possible signs of a troublesome or abusive relationship and know where to turn to for assistance for themselves or co-workers. By raising awareness, you help to reduce the stigma around domestic violence, which can be helpful in encouraging victims to seek help and for concerned parties to speak up when they suspect something is wrong.

### **Keep it private and confidential**

For employees to be comfortable raising concerns and reporting issues to their employers, they need to feel that their privacy will be protected. This reporting is crucial in helping employers protect the direct victim of violence as well as others at the organisation. The role of HR should be carefully defined, and the flow of information should be restricted. Victims must know that any information they give, including their whereabouts, will be treated as confidential and will not be passed on without their permission unless there are safeguarding or legal reasons for doing so.

### **Provide training**

Employers should train supervisors to recognise and to respond to signs of domestic violence. Managers should know how to appropriately address changes in behaviour that affect performance. Training should include how to respond sensitively and confidentially when victimised employees are identified, how to communicate with the victim and perpetrator, the security procedures (e.g. workplace safety plan) to keep themselves and others safe in the workplace, as well as what referrals are available.

**“Creating standards others are drawn to”**

### **Offer support**

Remember that you are not a counsellor or therapist. Do not give personal advice or counselling, but rather provide support and information. If a victim tells you about a violent or abusive situation, listen, offer support and help them decide what the next step is. Help connect them to people with professional services, so they can have ready access to support provided by trained professionals. When presented with options, victims should decide for themselves what they do next so that they feel in control of their lives.

### **Make a difference in the community**

Getting your organisation involved in fundraising activities, sponsoring programmes in the community that help combat domestic violence, and making donations to non-profit organisations that support victims sends out the message to your employees that your organisation cares about victims of abuse.

### **References**

- [www.shrm.org](http://www.shrm.org) – ‘When domestic violence comes to work’ – by Roy Maurer
- [www.michaelpage.com](http://www.michaelpage.com) – ‘How employers can support domestic violence sufferers in the workplace’ – by Michael Page
- [www.springtidereources.org](http://www.springtidereources.org) – ‘Responding to emotional abuse: How you can help someone you know’ – by Springtide Resources
- [www.nationalcenterdvtraumah.org](http://www.nationalcenterdvtraumah.org) – ‘Creating trauma-informed services’ – by National Centre of Domestic Violence, Trauma & Mental Health