

Recognizing Domestic Violence's Impact in the Workplace: A Guide for Faculty and Staff Managers

Managers, colleagues, and co-workers alike are concerned about domestic violence and its effect in the workplace. Domestic violence is not a private matter. It does not stay home when its victims go to work. It affects many employees. Abusive relationships can invade all facets of the workplace or classroom without regard to occupation or demographic group. It impacts businesses in terms of increased health care costs, lost productivity, increased absenteeism, employee turnover, and heightened safety risks. Managers must show diligence in confronting these issues, compassion in offering support, and openness in providing support and resources to improve a situation.

Some Workplace Statistics:

- 96 percent reported that domestic abuse affected their job performance (Ridley et al., 2005).
- 56 percent were late for work because of job interference tactics used by their batterers (Swanberg & Logan, 2005).
- The annual cost of lost productivity due to domestic violence is estimated at \$727.8 million, with over 7.9 million paid workdays lost each (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2003).

From "A Sloan Work and Family Research Network Fact Sheet" - <http://wfnetwork.bc.edu/pdfs/DV.pdf>

This guide is designed to assist managers in recognizing signs of domestic violence and confronting job performance issues that result from domestic violence. Much of the information was summarized from the VCU Institute for Women's Health publication, "What everyone at VCU should know about domestic violence" - http://www.womenshealth.vcu.edu/education/DV_brochure.pdf.

What is Domestic Violence/Family Abuse

Domestic violence / family abuse is any act involving violence, force, or threat including but not limited to any forceful detention, which results in bodily injury or places one in reasonable apprehension of bodily injury by one family or household member on another; a repeated or habitual pattern of coercive behaviors used with the willful intent of hurting, dominating, and controlling an intimate partner or family member. The controlling behaviors include physical, sexual and psychological attacks, and economic control. Examples of domestic violence include threats to cause harm, verbal harassment, intimidation, and disorderly conduct.

Signs of Domestic Violence

Visible physical injuries	Stress-related illnesses
Depression	Lacks confidence and exhibits very low self esteem
Tardiness	Absenteeism
Marital and family problems	Avoid friends/social isolation
Gets upset easily and is often distraught or crying	Frequent personal appointments
Afraid of partner's temper	Goes along with anything the partner says or does

A Manager's Responsibilities within a Domestic Violence Prevention Workplace

- **Be observant:** Managers and supervisors are in a unique position to observe employees' day-to-day performance, appearance, and attendance and, therefore, may recognize behavior that signals the presence of a possible personal problem including domestic violence. Balance observations and discussion with the employee's privacy rights. Avoid the appearance of interfering in an employee's private life and/or creating potential problems by presuming the employee is impaired in some way.
- **Know your role:** As a manager, you must be able to identify and address *job performance issues*. You are not expected to diagnose domestic violence or to provide treatment or counseling to faculty and staff. Your role is to observe and help improve performance, to document work problems and successes, and to apply the policies and procedures as needed.

- Become familiar with the resources offered by the VCU Institute for Women's Health: "What everyone at VCU should know about domestic violence" (http://www.womenshealth.vcu.edu/education/DV_brochure.pdf); and the Commonwealth of Virginia's Employee Assistance Program (EAP), managed by ValueOptions, Inc. (<http://www.dpt.state.va.us/genlbenefits/employeeassistance.html>).

Commonly Asked Questions

What action should be taken if you suspect a faculty or staff member is in an abusive relationship?

Ask the individual and encourage him/her to talk about the situation. Listen and refer him/her to appropriate resources. By starting a conversation, you may help the person feel more comfortable talking about the situation and he/she may be willing to ask for help. Continue to observe the person for other signs that could indicate involvement in an abusive relationship.

Examples of questions you can ask:

- I've noticed a change in your work over the past few months. You are not meeting your productivity goals, are frequently late for work, often leave early, and have missed the past two meetings. I am concerned about you and about your work performance – is there anything bothering you?
- I see that you have been upset lately – would you like to talk about it?
- I've noticed that you have been distracted at work. Is there anything I can do to help you improve your job performance or get you back on track?

What should I do if the faculty or staff member is clearly a victim of domestic violence (i.e., has visible physical injuries, stress-related injuries, marital and family problems, low self-esteem, depression, and anxiety)?

If the individual is in immediate danger and needs emergency help, contact the VCU Police. Do not attempt to "rescue" the victim; but do encourage him/her to seek professional help, provide emotional support, and encourage the victim to discuss the circumstances. Provide him/her with the Domestic Violence Resource List. Contact Employee Relations (828-1510 or emprel@vcu.edu) or Employee Health (828-0584) for assistance and guidance.

What should I do if the faculty or staff member is not willing to talk about it?

The most difficult step for an individual involved in domestic violence is to admit that he/she is being or has been abused. There is no easy answer in balancing an employee's privacy with a desire to assist in cases of domestic violence. The individual may not be willing to speak about it right away. Do not push him/her to talk. If the employee does not disclose anything about home, then a supervisor must respect the employee's privacy and remind the employee of resources available if assistance is ever needed. Reassure the person that you are available if or when he/she wants to talk, provide your contact information, offer him/her information about the statewide Family Violence & Sexual Assault Hotline (1-800-838-8238), and encourage the him/her to speak confidentially to an advocate to learn more about available options and safety.

Counseling About Job Performance Issues

Managers should address job performance issues in a direct and timely manner. This suggestion is frequently difficult to accomplish whether or not domestic violence is suspected. Plan what you will say. Develop an agenda and decide how you may wish to conduct the meeting.

During the discussion, describe your observations factually to the faculty or staff member and emphasize the need for performance improvement. Be specific with examples. Give clear expectations and explain

Guidelines for Effective Supervision / Management

- Be attentive and observe.** Know the signs of domestic abuse.
- Document.** Keep records of facts about job performance issues.
- Be straightforward yet thoughtful.** Focus on specific aspects of performance. Stick to the facts about job performance; avoid diagnosing or judging.
- Be consistent.** Follow the same procedures for all employees.
- Maintain confidentiality.** All job performance issues should be discussed privately and only with those "who have a need to know."
- Refer for assistance.** Encourage employees with performance problems to seek help from University or community resources as appropriate.
- Follow up.** Continue to assess and address performance issues more formally if needed.

what actions may be taken if performance is not improved.

If you suspect an employee's job performance is impaired due to domestic violence, you need not diagnose the condition or provide counseling. Instead, offer resources to help the employee improve job performance. Ultimately, how job performance is improved is the employee's responsibility. However, a referral to resources available through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) at <http://www.dpt.state.va.us/genlbenefits/employeeassistance.html> may be part of how you address a performance issue.

How Domestic Violence Affects Work Performance

Most domestic violence victims tend to display *classic problems and symptoms* over time in the workplace. Although the signs listed below may not necessarily mean an employee is a victim of domestic violence, they could indicate other personal problems that are affecting performance. When evaluating a situation, review the *total picture*. Do you see more than one of these signs? Have several instances occurred over a period of time?

Indicator	Employee Action	Manager's Response
Attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrives late in morning or frequent tardiness. • Leaves job early. • Unexplained absences from the workplace during the day. • Takes frequent time off for vague ailments or for improbable reasons. • Has prolonged, unpredictable absences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform the employee of punctuality and attendance expectations. • Document excessive tardiness and occurrences of absenteeism.
General Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complains of not feeling well. • Overreacts to real or imagined criticism. • Displays unreasonable resentment. • Avoids colleagues or co-workers. • Encounters financial problems or garnishment of salary. • Borrows money from colleagues. • Experiences legal problems. • Is hospitalized more than average. • Incurs repeated minor injuries on and off the job. • Experiences repeated hospitalizations. • Physical deterioration is visible. • Domestic problems interfere with work. • Develops serious family problems and/or divorce. • Refuses to discuss problems. • Becomes totally undependable. • Fellow workers complain about behavior or performance. • Statements become unclear or undependable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make observations and discuss with the employee. • Inform the employee that it is your responsibility to address performance issues. • Be careful to keep the focus of discussion on how behavior or performance is affecting work and the employee's responsibilities. • Have documentation or examples ready and keep the conversation focused on expectations and performance issues.
Job Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Misses deadlines. • Makes mistakes through inattention or poor judgment. • Displays decreased efficiency. • Exhibits general deterioration in work performance. • Works at spasmodic pace. • Shows lack of concentration. • Falls far below expected level of job performance. • Uneven work performance and generally incompetent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remain focused on job performance. If the employee reacts emotionally, reschedule the meeting. • Let the employee know that assistance is available.

The Rewards of Assistance and Intervention

There are several ways to help a faculty or staff member who is in a domestic violence situation:

- Provide emotional support.
- Encourage the faculty or staff member to discuss his/her circumstances.
- Encourage the faculty or staff member to seek professional help.
- Provide information on community resources.

Identifying these problems and providing assistance can improve health and safety for the faculty/staff member and the workplace, increase productivity, and enhance customer service.

To help ensure a positive outcome, there are several support networks available that include counseling services, hotlines, support groups, legal resources, and shelters that can give support, advice, financial assistance, counseling, and legal help. It is important for the supervisor to maintain regular communication with the faculty/staff member about expectations, performance, and adjustment issues. Those adjustment issues might include co-workers who will be interacting with the employee. Educating yourself about domestic violence and its impact on the workplace is necessary to support and provide resources to a victim of a domestic violence situation.

Domestic Violence Resources

VCU Police: 828-1234 (Emergencies), 828-6232 (Investigations)

Assistance and education; *contact the VCU police immediately in an emergency situation or if an employee believes he or she may be attacked at work*

VCU Human Resources - Employee Relations: 828-1510, emprel@vcu.edu

Confidential assistance with policy interpretation, application, resources and referral

VCU Human Resources - Employee Health Services: 828-0584

Confidential evaluation, treatment resources and referral, and education

VCU Sexual Assault & Domestic Violence Services: VCU Office of Health Promotion: 828-2085 (Tammy McKeown); information and referrals for student victims of sexual and domestic violence; see also

http://www.students.vcu.edu/health/ohp/sexual_assault.php

VCU Health System Department of Care Coordination/Social Work Services: 828-0212

Michelle Miles, MA, NCC, Institute for Women's Health Victim Advocate - (804) 827-1885; pager: 373-0592

VCU Employee Assistance Program through ValueOptions, Inc.: 1-866-725-0602

Employee assistance, counseling, mental health, and substance abuse treatment services for employees with COVA Care health insurance

VCU Virginia Center on Aging – Central Virginia Task Force on Domestic Violence in Later Life: 828-1525

Lisa Furr, Project Coordinator; see also "Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence in the Second Half of Life: A Resource Manual" at <http://www.vcu.edu/vcoa/abuse.htm>

VCU Project to Reduce Violent Crimes Against Women On Campus: 804-827-2417 (Gay Cutchin)

Coordinated community response to address needs of students and the University in responding to domestic-sexual violence and stalking

Victim Services: 327-8843 or 827-1200

Offers various VCU, local, state and national domestic violence resources

Virginia Family Violence and Sexual Assault 24-hour Hotline: 1-800-838-8238