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DJC CONSULTING, COACHING & TRAINING, LLC



Behind Closed Doors

Recognizing and Addressing Domestic Violence in the Workplace





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“Domestic violence doesn't always show up in the ways we expect.”



”

POLL

Your Experience



Recognizing the Red Flags

When we talk about domestic violence in the workplace, people often picture bruises, frantic phone calls, or someone afraid to go home.

That was not my story.

Domestic violence isn't always physical. And more often than not, the damage goes far deeper than anything you can see.



Defining Domestic Violence



Domestic violence is a pattern of behaviors used to maintain power and control over another person in a close relationship.

These behaviors can be physical—but they can also be emotional, psychological, verbal, financial, digital, or sexual.”





WHAT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE REALLY LOOKS LIKE

- Physical
- Emotional & Psychological
- Financial
- Verbal
- Digital/Technological
- Sexual

Most survivors don't just experience one type of abuse. These often overlap.

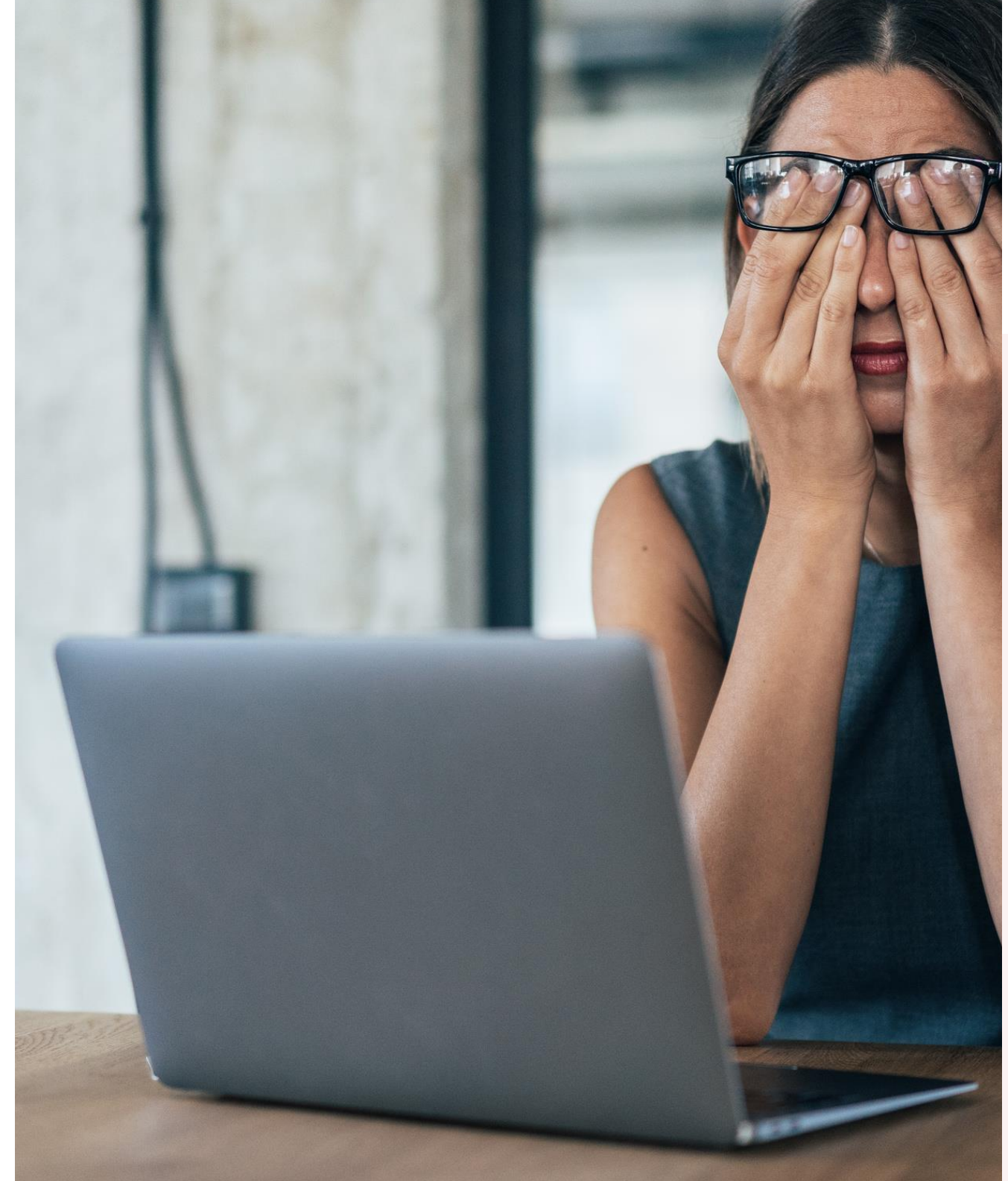


Red Flags

BEHAVIORAL SHIFTS

1. Change in demeanor
2. Attendance issues/extreme fatigue
3. Decline in performance or frequent small errors
4. Interpersonal changes

And then there is the perfect employee....



But not all signs look like a struggle

What you might overlook

- A high achiever who avoids personal topics entirely
- Someone who seems extra polished or cheerful - but never vulnerable
- An employee who's emotionally "off" some days - quiet, tired, or blank- because they were up all night defusing chaos at home
- Fluctuations in mood or energy that seem unpredictable but are explained away



Understanding the Psychology

Stockholm Syndrome

This term, coined by [Swedish psychiatrist Nils Bejerot](#), describes the psychological response where victims in captivity or abusive situations develop positive feelings towards their abusers, even sometimes feeling sympathy for them.

Trauma Bonds

Another term for this phenomenon is "trauma bonds," which highlight the strong emotional connection that can develop between a victim and their abuser, often rooted in a need for survival and the perception of kindness or favor from the abuser.

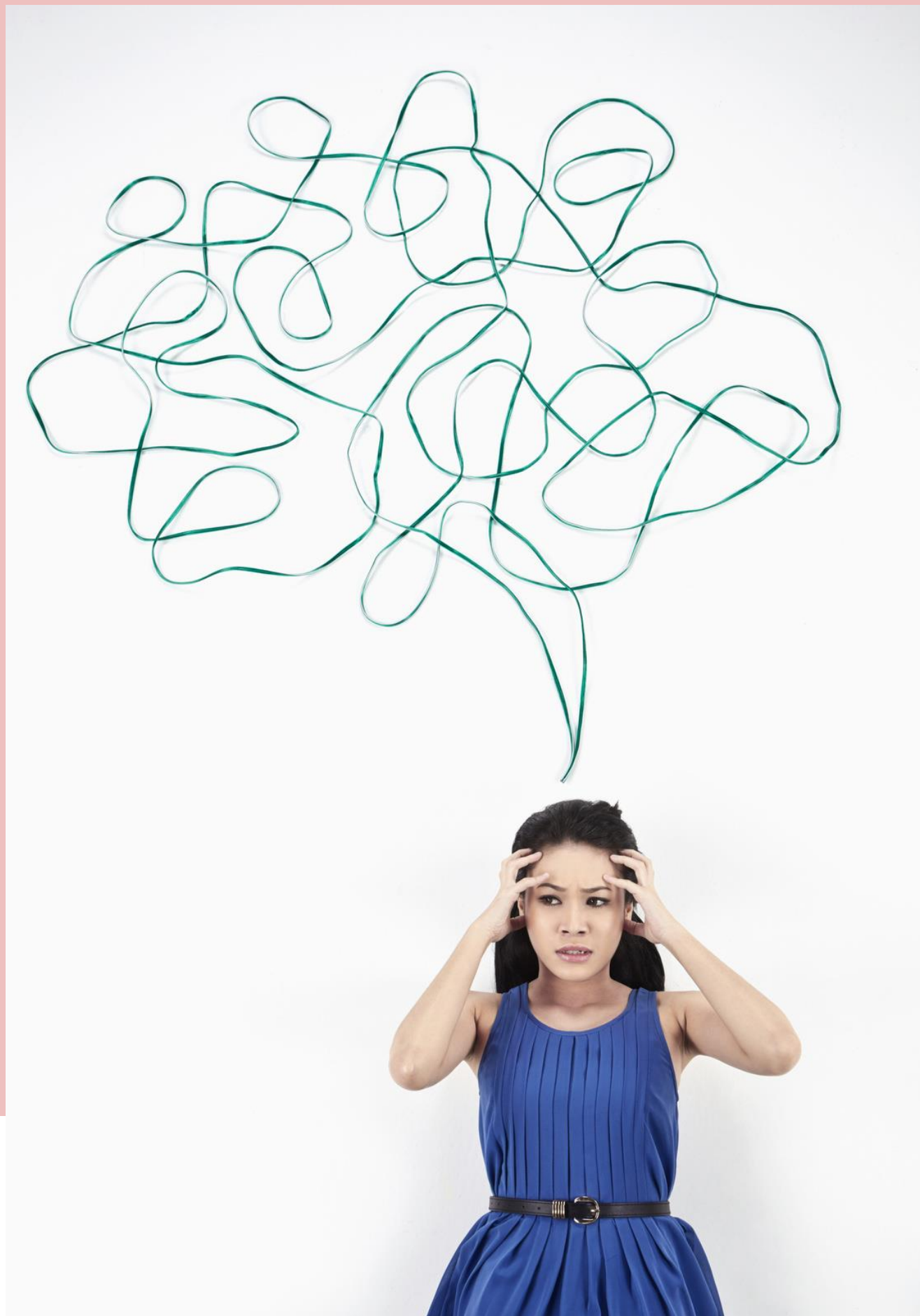
Coping Mechanism

Stockholm syndrome is often seen as a way for victims to cope with the trauma of their situation, potentially as a way to survive or maintain a sense of control within the power imbalance.

Potential Symptoms

- Rationalizing the abuse
- Attraction to the abuser
- Defending the abuser
- Basic decency translated to exceptional kindness
- Feeling powerless to leave





THIS CONVERSATION
CAN BRING UP A LOT-
THOUGHTS, MEMORIES,
EMOTIONS.

In the chat, **share one word** that
captures how you're feeling right
now.

Examples: Confused, Curious, Grateful,
Heavy, Numb, Sad, Triggered,
Compassionate





WHEN THERE ARE NO
OBVIOUS

Signs

When Everything Looks Perfect



The Struggle isn't Always Visible

THE REAL RED FLAG

might be the absence of one

So what can you look for, when there's nothing obvious?



- A colleague who never says anything negative about their personal life - **ever**
- Someone whose positivity feels too perfect or overly polished
- An employee who takes no time off, never asks for help, always goes above and beyond
- Someone who avoids vulnerability or emotion, even in safe spaces
- A shift you can't quite explain - more tired than usual, just a little "off" but still delivering



Widening Our Lens

Domestic Violence Doesn't Look One Way

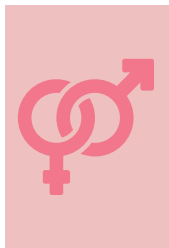
- We often picture a woman as the victim - but men, nonbinary individuals, and LGBTQ+ partners are also affected
- Unconscious gender bias can cause us to overlook male survivors or dismiss subtle red flags
- A man who's emotionally flat, withdrawn, or avoids personal topics may be silently enduring abuse
- Survivors don't always "look" like victims - perfectionism, detachment, or stoicism can all be masks
- Let's widen our lens and challenge assumptions about who needs support

”

POLL

*What Holds You Back From
Speaking Up?*

Let's Look at the Stats



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AFFECTS ALL GENDERS

Nearly 1 in 2 women and more than 2 in 5 men in the U.S. have experienced intimate partner violence in their lifetime.

[BreakTheCycle.org](https://www.breakthecycle.org)



PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE IS WIDESPREAD

Nearly half of all women (48.4%) and men (48.8%) in the U.S. have experienced psychological aggression by an intimate partner.

[Domestic Violence Center of Chester County](https://www.dvcc.org)



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HAS SIGNIFICANT ECONOMIC IMPACT

Domestic violence incidents cost the U.S. economy approximately \$8.3 billion each year in medical expenses, legal costs, and lost productivity.

CDC



HIGH PREVALENCE AMONG PREGNANT WOMEN

Annually, about 325,000 pregnant women face domestic abuse, with pregnant women experiencing the highest rate of domestic violence compared to other demographics.

NCADV



NAVIGATING SENSITIVE CONVERSATIONS

How to Say Something When You're Not Sure What to Say

THE GUIDING PRINCIPLE:
EMPATHY OVER ASSUMPTIONS

**You're not here to fix anything. You're not here to investigate.
You're here to notice, to care, and to open a door. That's it.**



Conversation Starters That Create Safety



Start with an observation and care, not a confrontation.

"I've noticed you seem a bit more tired than usual lately - how are you doing?"



Normalize care, don't sensationalize the situation.

"You've been on my mind - just checking in. Anything you need?"



Affirm strength while offering space.

"You're such a steady presence here. I just want to make sure you're getting the support you give everyone else."

What NOT to Say

Avoid questions that...



Assume Abuse

“Are you being hurt at home?”



Push Disclosure

“Tell me what’s going on - really.”



Minimize Feelings

“I’m sure it’s not that bad.”



If They Do Disclose...

Listen without interruption.

“Thank you for trusting me with that.”

Believe them.

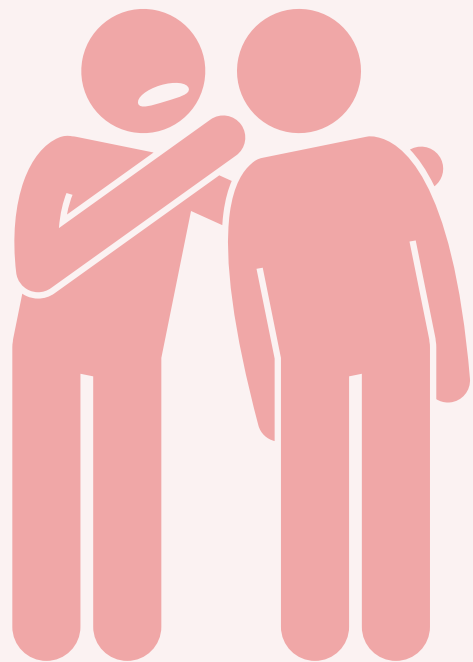
“I’m so sorry you’re going through this.”

Avoid trying to fix or diagnose.

“You don’t have to go through this alone. Can I help you find support?”

Connect them to resources (EAP, HR, National DV Hotline)

Respect their agency. Never pressure them to report or take action.



Legal & Ethical Responsibilities When You Suspect, But Don't Know

SUPPORTING WITHOUT DISCLOSURE

What You Can (and Can't) Do

Know What You're Not Legally Required to Do



Unless you are:

In a state with specific mandates (e.g., for healthcare workers, therapists, or schools),
or
Aware of an immediate safety risk to others at work (e.g., a threat to bring violence into the workplace),

You are not legally required to report suspected domestic violence.

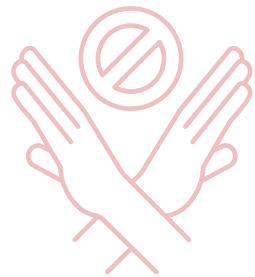
Forcing someone to talk or trying to investigate could violate ethical responsibilities

But Here's What You Can Ethically and Compassionately Do



CREATE A SAFE SPACE

- Let them know you're a resource if they ever want to talk
- Maintain confidentiality unless there's a direct safety threat
- Offer support, not pressure



BE CLEAR ON BOUNDARIES

- Don't promise you'll keep something confidential *if* they disclose imminent danger
- But do affirm: *"What you share with me stays between us unless someone's safety is at risk."*



DOCUMENT BEHAVIORS, NOT SUSPICIONS

- HR best practice: If you're concerned, document observable behaviors (e.g., attendance, performance shifts), not your personal theories
- This creates a clear, unbiased trail in case intervention becomes necessary later



PROVIDE RESOURCES WITHOUT WAITING FOR DISCLOSURE

- Add domestic violence resources to general wellness materials
- Keep hotline numbers visible in break rooms or employee portals
- Mention support options in *all* one-on-ones - not just reactive ones

Legal Tip:



SAFETY THREATS VS. PERSONAL DISCLOSURES

If someone mentions:

- Threats from a partner to come to the workplace
- Fear of being followed or stalked
- Violence that may endanger coworkers

Then you may have a duty to act - both to protect others and under OSHA's general duty clause to provide a safe workplace.

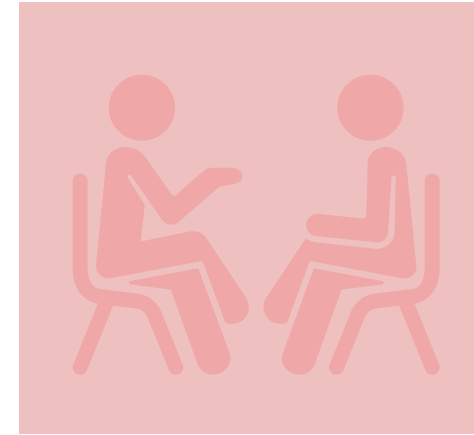
Implement Policies & Foster a Culture of Support



From Silence to Support - What Victims Need to Become Survivors

1

Train Managers in Trauma- Informed Response



Instead of being told
“don’t talk about it,”
imagine being asked,
“What support do you
need as you return?”

- Equip leaders with the tools to respond to disclosure - or visible distress - with empathy, not avoidance
- Include domestic violence in manager training modules alongside harassment and mental health response

2

Create Leave Policies That Include DV-Specific Language



Rather than using their own sick time, to handle medical or legal issues and coping with PTSD.

- Ensure your policy explicitly states that time off for court, medical care, or recovery related to domestic violence is protected and available
- Align policies with state laws (like CA Labor Code §230) and make them visible - not buried in handbooks



3

Allow Reasonable Accommodations for Survivors



Victims may be unaware that they may have PTSD warranting accomodation or reassignment

- Acknowledge that domestic violence can trigger conditions protected under the ADA (like PTSD)
- Offer modified schedules, remote work, or workspace changes when needed - without requiring disclosure of trauma details



4

Establish Documentation Practices Rooted in Dignity

Consult legal counsel to ensure documentation remains factual, unbiased, and confidential where appropriate



Keep in mind that workplace documentation may be subpoenaed

- Internally, encourage HR and managers to document observed behaviors, not personal suspicions or judgments
- Avoid language in write-ups that could be used to discredit an employee in a future legal dispute (e.g., “appears unstable”)
- *Employers should assume any workplace documentation may be subpoenaed in court proceedings related to domestic violence*



5

Normalize Support Resources Without Waiting for Disclosure



Don't leave it up to the survivor to ask for what resources are available

- Include DV support resources in onboarding, staff meetings, EAP reminders, and wellness communications
- Don't wait for a crisis—normalize these conversations as part of your company's wellness strategy



6

Use Clear, Respectful Language in Policy Documents

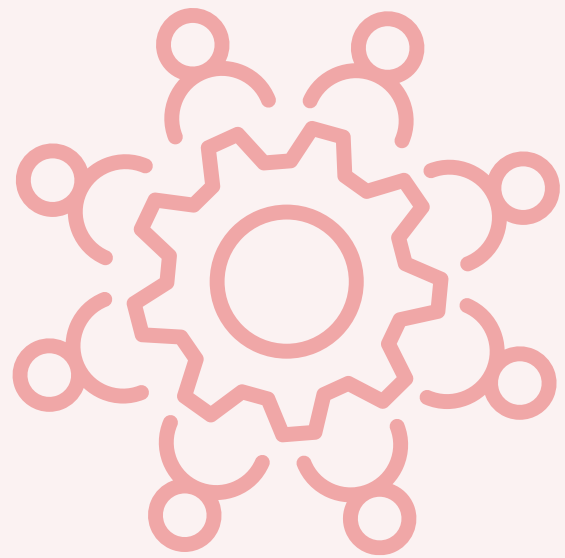


Remember who we are writing these documents for - hint: it's not the organization

- Include the term “survivor” (not just “victim”) in written materials
- Avoid phrases like “proof of abuse” as a prerequisite for accessing support or time off
- Provide clear steps on how employees can seek help confidentially



The Signal That Saves Lives



- Policies alone won't change culture, but they are the foundation survivors rely on to rebuild their lives.
- When someone is walking through trauma, they are looking for a signal that says: 'We believe you. You matter here. And you don't have to navigate this alone.'
- And that signal can't just come from a poster in the breakroom or a check-the-box training. Because the most powerful thing a workplace can do... is prove - in policy and in practice.



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My Gift to You

Creating a Safe Workplace: Domestic Violence Awareness & Response Guide for HR Leaders



Scan this QR code



Or go to

<https://talk.ac/drjolenechurch>

and enter this code when prompted

DOORS

Questions?

