

Working from Home

Many of us typically spend more of our waking hours with our coworkers than our families. As a result, we often build strong and trusted relationships through work. These relationships are critical as interactions with coworkers may be the only connection vulnerable workers have with the outside world, even if these interactions are limited to video chats, emails, and phone calls. Whether you suspect a coworker is experiencing violence at home or a coworker has disclosed abuse to you, there are ways you can virtually provide support.

1. Recognize

This is a time of significant stress which can be traumatic for all workers but puts survivors at increased risk of violence. All workers may be exhibiting some signs of trauma which can impact their job performance and are compounded by the challenges of balancing job duties and family obligations. As a result, it may be difficult to recognize if someone is experiencing violence at home or is simply having a very normal and expected reaction to the pandemic and “new normal” of social distancing and isolation.

Be mindful of unexplained changes in behavior that may be signs of something more serious. For example, perhaps a worker suddenly stops using video conferencing because of fear of exposing physical signs of injury or because their partner is monitoring them in the background, or perhaps a coworker’s writing style or correspondence no longer sounds like them because an abusive partner is reading and editing their emails. These are potential indicators for the need for intervention or connection to the survivor.

2. Routinely Check-in with Employees

Throughout periods of remote work, regular check-ins can help provide a sense of normalcy and connection to the outside world to break through the isolation. Check-in on your coworker to listen and support.

3. If you are a Manager, Supervise with Compassion and Understanding

Adjust your leadership style to center and prioritize employees’ needs. Recognize that employees’ needs vary and care should be taken to understand and respond according to those needs.

The measures taken to contain the spread of the pandemic, such as isolation, social distancing, and the inability to have close contact with friends and family outside of the household, is traumatic for many of us, but can exacerbate the effects of underlying or current trauma a survivor experiences. Think about ways, as a manager, you can alleviate any pressure work responsibilities may add to the survivor’s environment. For example, can the survivor work intermittently or on long-term projects?

Managers should routinely check-in with the individuals they supervise, inquire about their needs and well-being, listen with empathy, offer support, and remind them of available workplace resources that may help (such as Employee Assistance Programs). The use of video calls can enhance a manager’s ability to “see” employees and help assess any concerns or issues.

During team meetings share information pertinent to support workers' and their families' physical and mental health – such as workplace leave policies and potential accommodations – and identify community resources in case they or someone they know is in need of help.

4. Be a Safe Communicator

Be aware that phone conversations, emails, and text messages may be monitored by an abusive partner. Expressing that you believe someone is experiencing violence and that you are concerned about their safety may unintentionally expose that individual to serious harm. Providing information broadly to all employees enables you to reach those in need without singling them out specifically.

5. Refer to Local Programs and Promote Safety

If someone you supervise or work with discloses that they are experiencing abuse at home, assess their immediate safety through a series of yes or no questions to limit the possibility that an abuser may overhear your conversation.

For example, rather than “How can I help?” ask: “Would you like me to give you the number for the Domestic Violence Hotline via text?” or “Do you need me to call the police?”

It is important to recognize that safety may look different during this time as we are all navigating an unfamiliar and challenging situation and environment. Domestic violence programs can help individuals experiencing violence explore their options and create safety plans, but remember that these programs and first responders have also been impacted by the pandemic. While their capacity and operations may be limited, most programs are still open and are the best resource for survivors. See “Resources for Victims of Partner Violence.”

If the individual determines that it is no longer safe for them to remain in their home, provide information on sick and safe leave policies and other workplace accommodations, along with local community resources so they can leave their homes and seek safety without jeopardizing their job.

6. Safely Interrupt or Intervene

Every situation of violence differs and requires different responses. As supervisors and coworkers, there are ways we can interrupt or intervene to support a colleague, even during a pandemic. The increased frequency of work-related video conferences and calls may be prime opportunities to check-in and assess a colleague's safety, and – if necessary – interrupt or intervene.

For example, you and your colleague can agree on a code word that will alert you that they need an interruption from you or an outside intervention from the authorities. One code word or phrase could mean “please call the authorities.” Another code word or phrase could mean “please call me on the phone so that I can move to another room for safety.” Depending on the situation, these may be able to interrupt violence in the moment. However, it is crucial for your coworker who is experiencing violence to have total control and final say over if and how they would like you to interrupt or intervene.

Workplaces play a critical role in supporting employees who are experiencing violence at home. While supporting remote workers who are experiencing abuse presents unique challenges, it is not impossible. Recognize this is a time of high uncertainty and trauma, continually check-in on the physical and mental well-being of your colleagues, share and remind employees about available workplace and community resources, and, if safe and requested, help survivors working from home access safety.

More information regarding Tips for Managers and Supervisors can be accessed [here](#).

Source: Workplaces Respond to Domestic and Sexual Violence, WHEN WORK IS SAFER THAN HOME, Supporting Workers Experiencing Violence during the Pandemic, <https://www.workplacesrespond.org/page/covid19supportingworkers/#workingfromhome>