

Finding a Balance: Responses to Members Who Perpetrate Violence

Unions have a difficult job. On the one hand, unions need to take a stand against domestic and sexual violence and stalking and communicate to members that violence, both at home and at work, is not acceptable. On the other hand, union stewards and officers have the Duty of Fair Representation – an obligation to represent all members including those who have employment problems related to violent behavior.

Is it possible to send a message that domestic and sexual violence and stalking are not acceptable, while also representing a violence perpetrator in a job jeopardy situation?

Responses to Members Who Perpetrate Violence

When a member perpetrates domestic and/or sexual violence against another member or employee and it affects the workplace, what steps would you take first? Stewards and officers have several issues to consider when this type of situation arises. An effective approach might include the following steps, in this order.

- Consider the safety of all members
 - Is anyone at risk of being attacked or is the member who is a victim feeling threatened? After consulting the victim, take action to protect the member or employee and other coworkers.
 - Don't rely on promises from the perpetrating member. People who perpetrate violence tend to deny the violence and even if they intend to stop, they may still act violently.

- Refer both parties
 - Refer the perpetrating member to appropriate services to learn how to stop being violent.
 - Refer the member who is a victim to local domestic and/or sexual violence resources for assistance in dealing with the violence. Community domestic and sexual violence services can assist the member in making a personal safety plan and collaborate on workplace safety plans.
- Check to see if the member who is the victim needs any workplace advocacy
 - Does the member need time to go to court or to meet with a lawyer, doctor, or counselor?
 - Has the member's work performance been affected and is advocacy needed?
 - Is the member being blamed for the situation and discriminated against as a result?
 - Contact the member's steward and offer whatever support is needed to help stabilize that person's situation.
- Fulfill your Duty of Fair Representation (DFR) responsibilities
 - Remember that domestic or sexual violence or stalking is not just a "fight" between two members. Although both members deserve representation, the perpetrator needs to know that his or her behavior is wrong and will not be tolerated.
 - Remember that the member who is a victim has a right to be free from violence, abuse and harassment at work.
 - Fulfill the DFR responsibilities, while emphasizing the need for the perpetrator to get help.
- Make a statement

- Make a statement that the union does not support any type of violence for any reasons.

Adapted from "Domestic Violence: A Union Issue. A Workplace Training Kit for Unions", Urban, B.Y. & Wagner, K.C. (2000), San Francisco, CA: Futures Without Violence.

Workplaces Respond provides technical assistance to workplace stakeholders seeking to better prevent and respond to domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and harassment impacting the workplace. Scan this QR code to access the Resource Center.



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