

The Impacts of Domestic Violence on the Workplace: A Discussion Guide

Introduction

Whether visible or not, domestic violence impacts every workplace. Abusive actions taken by harm-doers not only affect the safety and well-being of survivors at work, but their actions also harm the workplace as a whole. How workplaces respond to violence can shape the options victims have to remain safe at work and can contribute to whether the workplace has an effective culture of prevention, safety, and accountability.

This video, created by Futures Without Violence and its [National Resource Center: Workplaces Respond to Domestic and Sexual Violence](#), provides a basic understanding of how violence impacts survivors of domestic violence in the workplace, including impacts on their economic security, and introduces ways in which workplaces and employers can respond to and prevent these impacts.

This accompanying discussion guide is intended to foster a deeper understanding of the impacts of domestic violence on the workplace and to help workplaces identify simple changes they could make to improve the work environment for survivors of domestic violence as well as sexual assault, stalking, and sexual harassment.

In the Guide

Key Background for Facilitators	2	Discussion Guide	10
• Facilitation Notes	2	• Sharing the Video	10
• Power and the Workplace	2	• Small Group Discussion	10
• Difficult and Growth Conversations	4	• Large Group Discussion	12
• Materials Needed	4	• Closing the Discussion	14
• Community Agreements	5	• Next Steps	14
• Definitions	5	• Additional Resources	15
• Common Misconceptions	7	Appendices	16
• Key Facts	8		

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Key Background Information for Facilitators

Facilitation Notes

While this video strives to reduce the risk of re-traumatization, domestic violence is a difficult yet important issue to discuss and may resurface lived experiences of domestic violence or vicarious trauma.

When preparing to facilitate a workplace discussion around this video, be sure to identify related employer policies to share with participants – for example a sexual harassment policy, a comprehensive policy that addresses domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking, and retaliation policies; access to sick and safe leave, an employee assistance program, and accommodations available to survivors; and where, from whom, and how to seek help. In addition to workplace resources, share contact information for the Domestic Violence Hotline: 800-799-7233 and www.thehotline.org.

While preparing, you may find it beneficial to reach out to a local survivor-focused organization. These organizations usually have an employee or a volunteer that can 1) help you facilitate this discussion and 2) provide support for individuals who may experience re-traumatization. You can find survivor-focused organizations by state at [The Hotline](#) and/or [RAINN](#).

Finally, we want to encourage you and others preparing this conversation to practice self-care. You can find a self-care starter kit from the University at Buffalo School of Social Work [here](#).

Any questions can be directed to the National Resource Center team at workplacesrespond@futureswithoutviolence.org.

Power and the Workplace

Domestic violence is an abuse of power over another individual or individuals to control particular outcomes in a person's favor. When discussing this type of power-based violence, it is important to remain sensitive to other power dynamics that may be present in the room. Often these have to do with hierarchical structures that are inherent in the workplace, but can also manifest due to the various identities of individuals in the room. Historical, social, and cultural identities and biases we may hold can further impact these power dynamics.

As the facilitator, it is important to understand that any facilitated conversation that occurs in the workplace will mirror the power dynamics present in that workplace. This may impact those who join the conversation and their level of contribution. As you plan to facilitate the below conversation, consider your position within your workplace, your background, and how these existing dynamics might impact the conversation.

Questions to Consider

Do you hold a particular form of power within the workplace?

- Can you hire or fire somebody?
- Can you impact their pay?
- Do you have discretion as to their professional development?
- Do you write the schedule?

Will there be people with the above power in the conversation?

- How might this impact the conversation or comfort?
- Should this meeting be divided between supervisors and non-supervisors?
- If not possible, how do you plan to manage this conflict?

Might adding a co-facilitator help balance power dynamics that might be present?

Do you have the power to make any changes that the group might propose?

- Do you have a plan to outline what a timeline would be?
- Could you propose and effectuate a working group?
- Do you have access to people who hold the power to make proposed changes?

Is it appropriate to ask employees for their time in this way?

- Am I using their lunch hour?
- Are they being paid for their time?
- Is this a volunteer or "volun-told" conversation or an opt-in, paid opportunity?

Are people with similar backgrounds as you often aligned with holding social power? How might these identities impact people's willingness to participate in the conversation?

We are not asking you to change who you are, but, rather, to consider how your position may impact the willingness of participants to have an open and transparent discussion. You may find that you're unable to find another person to co-facilitate or facilitate on your behalf; and that is okay.

(Remember, you can reach out to a local survivor-centered organization to co-facilitate.) These questions will help you prepare for potential ways that power might manifest within this difficult conversation. Acknowledging that power dynamics are present and that community agreements are there to help each person bring their full, authentic self to the conversation can be incredibly powerful. **Not acknowledging these power dynamics can often manifest as the facilitator trying to hide something and can sow distrust; stalling the conversation before you start.**

Difficult and Growth Conversations

Leading a conversation about domestic violence requires intentionality, social and emotional intelligence, and flexibility. Contributing to the continued learning of adults requires you to create problem-focused and timely opportunities for them to build on their existing knowledge and their own experiences. Your job as a facilitator is to guide bottom-up discussion where the learners create their own understanding. It is not your role to lecture or be the only teacher in the room. However, it is your role to correct misconceptions, admit when you do not know something, and ask for thoughtful and respectful dialogue.

Participants in this conversation will arrive at the discussion with different levels of knowledge about or experience with domestic violence. Some participants are likely survivors of domestic violence – either in their past, supporting someone who is experiencing violence, or currently experiencing violence within their relationship. Unfortunately, some participants may even be a perpetrator of domestic violence. Regardless of their status as survivor or harm-doer, it is important to remember that some participants might be well-informed about the dynamics of domestic violence while others may believe persistent and problematic myths about domestic violence.

As a facilitator, maintaining a space for continued growth and learning while gently pushing back on problematic beliefs and attitudes is essential. All participants must follow the basic expectations of the Community Agreements below. If a participant violates the basic norms of a learning space, the conversation can be disrupted for the remainder of the participants.

If you notice that a participant wants to debate certain myths or ideals that are in opposition to organizational values, you are always welcome to invite them to have a more in-depth conversation after the facilitated discussion. This will allow you to acknowledge their participation while also creating a comfortable space for others. On the flip side, sometimes a problematic comment or aggressive interjection merits curiosity and a correction or reminder about community agreements. And still, other times, this could require the removal of a participant from a group.

Materials Needed

In Person	Virtual
Audio-visual equipment to play the video	The ability to share screen and sound
Whiteboard or large post-its and markers	Zoom Whiteboard, Google Slides, or another online tool that your organization uses

Handouts of: Discussion questions – Appendix C Relevant policies Resources – Appendix A	Links to: Discussion questions – Appendix C Relevant policies Resources – Appendix A
Community agreements either written on a whiteboard, large post-it, or projected PowerPoint slide	Community agreements shared via PowerPoint slide

Community Agreements

- Check in with your feelings
- Take care of yourself
- What’s learned here leaves here, what’s said here stays here
- One mic, one voice
- Give space, take space
- Speak for yourself/don’t speak for others
- Be present
- Assume good intentions, but own your impact
- Ask for clarification

Ask participants if they would like clarification on the community agreements or if there is anything they feel needs to be added. Finally, you will want them to verbally agree to uphold these community agreements.

Definitions

Dating Violence: violence committed by a person who is or has been in a social relationship of a romantic or intimate nature with the victim and where the existence of such a relationship shall be determined based on a consideration of the following factors: the length of the relationship; the type of relationship; and the frequency of interaction between the persons involved in the relationship ([DOJ](#)).

Domestic or Intimate Partner Violence: a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner. Domestic violence can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, psychological, or technological actions or threats of actions or other patterns of coercive behavior that influence another person within an intimate partner relationship. This includes any behaviors that intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorize, coerce, threaten, blame, hurt, injure, or wound someone. “Intimate partner” refers to both current and former spouses and dating partners ([DOJ](#)).

Sexual Violence: a range of acts and behaviors that constitute unwanted sexual contact: including lewd comments, sexual comments, an uncomfortable situation, unwanted touching, kissing, or forcing or attempting to force an individual to take part in a sex act, sexual touching, or a non-physical sexual event (e.g., sexting) when they do not or cannot consent ([NSVRC](#)). Includes **sexual assault:** any nonconsensual sexual act proscribed by federal, tribal, or state law, including when the victim lacks capacity to consent ([DOJ](#)).

Workplace-based Sexual Harassment: includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. These constitute sexual harassment when (1) submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment, (2) submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such individual, or (3) such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment ([Code for Federal Regulations](#)). The conduct does not need to be related to sexual desire. The perpetuation of negative stereotypes related to a person's biological sex may also be considered harassment.

Stalking: engaging in a course of conduct directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to fear for his or her safety or the safety of others or suffer substantial emotional distress ([DOJ](#)). Stalking can involve repeated visual or physical proximity, non-consensual communication, and/or verbal, written, or implied threats that would cause a reasonable person fear. Stalking can, and often does, take place in person, through a third party (proxy stalking), or via the technology/internet ([CDC](#)).

Harm-doer: often interchanged with "abuser," "batterer," "offender," or "perpetrator." We opt to use the term harm-doer during this guide to provide an understanding that often those who cause harm may have also been harmed. By focusing our language on the behavior rather than the character of the person, it helps individuals understand that those who cause harm have the capacity to learn, grow, and change.

Survivor: often interchanged with "victim," "victim/survivor," or "person who experienced harm." We opt to use the term survivor during this guide as it refers to someone who has taken steps to heal from the abuse they have experienced. While not all individuals will take these steps nor will all those who do refer to themselves as survivors, we find more hope in this term than the other options available.

Trauma: an event, series of events, or set of circumstances experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening with lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being ([SAMHSA](#)).

Vicarious Trauma: the cumulative effects of exposure to information about traumatic events and experiences, potentially leading to distress, dissatisfaction, hopelessness and serious mental and physical health problems ([Safe and Equal](#)).

Common Misconceptions

"Domestic violence is very rare. Nobody I work with would experience this at work or home."

- According to the CDC's National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey ([NISVS](#)), [almost 1 in 2 women \(47.3% or 59 million\)](#) in the United States reported experiencing contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking victimization by an intimate partner at some point in their lifetime.
- More than [40 percent \(44.2% or 52.1 million\) of U.S. men](#) reported experiencing contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime.

"Domestic violence is always physical. I would be able to tell when someone has been harmed."

- Domestic violence is characterized by dynamics of power and [control](#). Harm-doers exploit inequalities or vulnerabilities to maintain control over their partners. This can include physical violence but also includes a [variety of other forms](#) of control such as economic coercion, theft, verbal threats, emotional manipulation, legal threats, custody manipulation, and psychological abuse.
- Survivors [hide bruises](#) and abrasions and/or are practiced in telling stories about how they received these bruises or abrasions. Harm-doers often understand how to physically abuse their partner in ways that [do not leave marks](#) in places that are visible to most people.
- To understand the different dynamics of power and control, we've included a copy of the power and control wheel. **See Appendix B.**

"Both parties usually hold some responsibility."

- In relationships where abuse is occurring there usually is a [primary aggressor](#). While there is a variety of [trauma responses to violence](#), including protective violence, survivors of this dynamic are not responsible for the violence introduced into the relationship.

"Men do not experience domestic violence."

- Domestic violence is not about sex, it is about power and control. Men also experience domestic violence. Because sex is used as a method of organizing society, in many societies this provides a level of systemic power for men and subordination of all other people. This systemic power can be exploited to exert power over another person or group. This structure is often why our society assumes the sex of the survivor and harm-doer.

"You can rescue someone from domestic violence."

Ending an abusive relationship is a complex and individual experience. [Leaving is a process](#) not an event. There are a variety of factors that influence an [individual's decisions](#). Furthermore, research has shown that leaving a relationship is the [most dangerous time](#) for a survivor, significantly increasing the risk of homicide.

- As someone supporting a survivor, it is important to maintain communication with the survivor, even when it seems they are isolating from you. This ensures they know they have a support network if and when they decide to leave.

"False reports of domestic violence are common. Women lie."

- Domestic violence is a complex phenomenon to measure but false allegations are [very rare](#).
- Rather, prevalence of the experience is expected to far exceed the number of reports to the police in the United States for men and women.

"Domestic violence survivors bring 'drama' to the workplace."

- Harm doers bring complications to a workplace through their behavior. Their actions are not the responsibility of the survivor.
- Many domestic violence survivors do not report their experiences to their workplace, due to fear of retaliation. If a [survivor is disclosing](#) an experience of violence, they are acting as responsible employees with full lives outside of work. Domestic violence can spill over into the workplace, creating risk for co-workers. Thus, [working with a survivor to manage risk](#) is helpful and responsible.

"Domestic violence usually happens only once or twice."

- Domestic violence is characterized by patterns of [coercive control](#), calm (perceived from the outside), and [escalating violence](#). Usually, violence is part of a continuum of [escalating controlling behavior](#). Furthermore, domestic violence is [significantly underreported](#) and our understanding of the prevalence of behaviors is limited.

Key Facts

- Data from the [CDC's 2016/2017](#) National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Surveillance Survey estimated that more than 40% of American adults will experience some form of domestic violence in their lifetime.
- The same study estimated that 1.6 million women and 848,000 men reported missing at least one day of work due to domestic violence in the 12 months prior to the survey.

- A [2021 survey](#) found that survivors who received direct cash assistance reported an average of **\$7,176** in lost wages and income. They reported **\$3,842** in stolen wages or income.
- According to a [2018 study](#), the estimated intimate partner violence lifetime cost was \$103,767 per female victim and \$23,414 per male victim, or a population economic burden of nearly \$3.6 trillion over victims' lifetimes, based on 43 million U.S. adults with victimization history. This estimation was based in 2014 \$USD and costs include attributable impaired health, lost productivity, and criminal justice costs from the societal perspective.
- More than [18%](#) of survivors reported experiencing acts of domestic violence within the workplace.
- [83%](#) of survivors reported that intimate partner violence disrupted their ability to work.
- [37.7%](#) of disabled survivors reported losing their job as a result of violence. A [2018 survey](#) of survivors found that approximately 53% of survivors experienced job loss as a result of abuse.
- [Black women](#) and [immigrant](#) women also disproportionately experience domestic violence.

Discussion Guide

Sharing the Video

[1 minute, 30 seconds]

Instructions: Introduce the video. “This short video was created by Futures Without Violence’s *Workplaces Respond to Domestic & Sexual Violence* National Resource Center. This video highlights how domestic violence impacts people in their workplace and how employers can create workplaces that support survivors. This video includes depictions of abusive behavior which can be upsetting. We want you to feel empowered to care for yourself as needed.”

Prior to playing the video, share relevant workplaces policies and resources, self-care resources, as well as contact information for the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#). If you’ve invited a local survivor-focused organization, ask them to discuss their resources and that anyone can ask them to speak during or after the video and discussion.

Play [video](#).

Small Group Discussion

[30 minutes, including debrief]

Instructions: In small groups of four to six, have participants discuss each of the following questions in bold text (for question handout, **see Appendix C**). Each group should elect a note taker to share their feedback with the group as a whole. Allow for 20 minutes for small group discussion and 10 minutes for large group debrief.

The facilitator should provide the questions (via handout or link, Appendix C) and then ask if the group needs any clarification before breaking into small groups. If clarification is needed, use some of the key points and examples to help them understand the task at hand.

Small Group Discussion Questions

****Facilitator tip: practice framing the facilitation points as additional questions that you can ask the group to work through together.****

1. What was your initial response to the video? Was there anything specific that stood out to you?

Facilitation Points:

- It is ok if this is a new topic to you.
- Encourage curiosity about the impacts highlighted in the video.
- Share resources for survivors.

2. Were you surprised by the statistics shared in the video? Why or why not?

Facilitation Points:

- Validate participants level of knowledge or surprise.
- Use the common misperceptions section to make sure the group knows these additional facts.

3. Prior to the video, were you aware that the perpetrators of domestic violence will sabotage an employee's ability to work? What are some additional tactics you think perpetrators might use at the intersection of economic abuse and the workplace?

Facilitation Points:

- Sabotage can be:
 - direct: inhibiting a survivor from leaving the house (locking them in, refusing to provide transportation or money for transportation, not providing maintenance or actively causing destruction to a vehicle), reporting their work to law enforcement (if the survivor engages in sex work where it is illegal), constantly communicating with the survivor while at work, showing up to their workplace and causing a scene
 - indirect: disrupting childcare to make the survivor stay home from work, keeping the survivor up at night, hiding documentation so the survivor cannot gain legal employment
- Whether direct or indirect, sabotage as a form of economic abuse is about having power and control over the survivor, their finances, and their mobility.
- Additional tactics:
 - Preventing the survivor from getting a job, going to work, or demanding they quit their job
 - Sabotaging employment (as listed above)
 - Forcing the survivor to hand over their paychecks or only allowing them to have a shared account
 - Perpetrators of economic abuse will often coerce the survivor or use the survivor's information to apply for credit cards, obtain loans, or open financial accounts. This can lead to destroyed credit for the survivor. Employers who do a credit check as part of their background check may not understand how this can impact survivors seeking employment.

- Other examples:
 - Frequent and unwelcome calling and texting
 - Showing up at workplace
 - Harassing or threatening at work
 - Stalking
 - Stealing savings, income or paychecks
 - Coerced debt or credit card spending
 - Identity theft
 - Reproductive coercion (withholding birth control, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, etc.)
 - Threatening to take or harm children
 - Manipulating custody agreements
 - Limiting access to transportation
 - Disrupting educational and training opportunities
 - Injury

Debrief Instructions:

Have each group share what their group discussed, adding to the previous team's responses. Make sure all facilitation points are highlighted during the debrief.

It would be a great idea to either ask someone to capture notes or to capture notes as the facilitator. These notes can serve as the basis of a plan or presentation for workers or employers.

Large Group Discussion

[25 minutes]

Instructions: After debriefing the small group discussions, ask participants to take 3-5 minutes to write their personal responses to the prompt. Then spend the rest of the time discussing the question as a group. Make sure to provide community agreements for the discussion so people feel they are able to speak their mind. If there are power differentials present, please acknowledge this in the community agreements and provide an anonymous way for people to provide their feedback.

Large Group Discussion Questions

1. **The video discusses other burdens that may create additional barriers to a survivor accessing support. If we think about how our identities can impact our access to services, what other “burdens” might employees be carrying? How might this impact or exacerbate the domestic violence an employee is experiencing?**

Facilitation Points:

- A survivor's background can be used against them to create additional barriers to a survivor seeking supportive services.
- Often, these barriers are caused when various types of discrimination either erase a survivor, create unnecessary hoops for someone to jump through to access support, or when stereotypes cause a survivor to be unable to seek support due to misconceptions about an identity they may hold.
 - Examples:
 - A survivor may not have access to supportive services that are culturally and linguistically relevant.
 - Due to stereotypes and misconceptions that bisexual individuals are hypersexual, a bisexual survivor may not be believed when they share their story with their workplace or other reporting mechanisms.
 - Survivors of color are often erased in societal level discussions of domestic and sexual violence, thus making it more difficult for them to be listened to and provided culturally relevant resources.
 - Male survivors of domestic and sexual violence are often made the butt of a joke or said they should feel "lucky" for the attention and access. These jokes mean that male survivors may not feel comfortable accessing resources.

2. Of the actions listed in the video that workplaces can take, are there one or two that stood out to you as an opportunity for your workplace?

Facilitation Points:

- Many participants may not remember the specific examples listed in the video. If this is the case, please make sure the following are mentioned:
 - Trauma-informed management styles
 - Empathetic coworkers
 - Safety planning
 - Workplace accommodations
 - Sick and safe leave

- Providing a living wage
- Flexible scheduling
- Violence prevention and education

3. What might get in the way of taking this action? How could you discuss this with your employers?

Facilitation Points:

- This can be a difficult conversation to approach with a supervisor.
- As a facilitator, it is important to discuss how a collective approach might be easier than putting this conversation on an individual employee.
- This will take time and dedication.

4. Is there one thing you can commit to doing that will contribute to a safer workplace for survivors?

Facilitation Points:

- Welcome people to share, but do not require it.
- As a facilitator, be open and willing to share what you might commit to that will contribute to a safer workplace for survivors.

Closing the Discussion

As the facilitator, share your workplace policies and procedures (link or handout). Provide an overview for participants to find these documents as well as any resources they may need beyond Human Resources. Ask if there are additional questions.

If you are able, plan ahead so you have time free after the session in case people want to ask you questions without the other participants present.

Next Steps

Consider how you can better support survivors at your workplace. Please visit <https://www.workplacesrespond.org/> for more information.

Contact the Workplaces Respond to Domestic & Sexual Violence National Resource Center for curated, free support on how to implement strategies for your workplace:

<https://futureswithoutviolence.formtitan.com/WorkplacesTAForm#/>

Resources for Survivors

- National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233
- National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-656-4673

Additional Resources

- [Addressing the Impacts of Violence Trauma in the Workplace: Promoting Worker Wellness and Resilience through Trauma-Informed Practice](#)
- [The Top 10 Things Co-Workers Can Do right Now to Address Sexual Harassment in the Workplace](#)
- [Incident Prevention and Response Strategies](#)
- [Why Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, Stalking, and Sexual Harassment Are Workplace Issues](#)
- [Principles of Workplace Safety Planning](#)
- [Teen Economic Abuse](#)
 - See the [Teen Economic Abuse Project](#) with more information
- [Safe Leave](#)

Employee Resources

National Resources

National Domestic Violence Hotline	1-800-799-7233
National Sexual Assault Hotline	1-800-656-4673
Department of Labor - Worker Rights	https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/workers
Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)	https://www.osha.gov/ Hotline: 1-800-321-6742
Workplaces Respond National Resource Center	https://www.workplacesrespond.org/

State and Local Resources

Local Survivor Centered Organization:	Phone and website:
Statewide Department of Labor:	Phone and website:

Employer Resources

Human Resources Director:	Phone and email:
Department Supervisor:	Phone and email:
Ombudsman:	Phone and email:
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Director:	Phone and email:
Employee Assistance Program:	Phone and website:

Power and Control Wheel

A note about language: this model was created using grant funding from the Office on Violence Against Women. As such, the language reflects not only the funding source, but also the time in which it was created. Much has been learned since the creation of this model. While this particular wheel centers women as the victims, the concepts and behaviors can apply in any relationship. It is important to remember that anyone, regardless of their sex, can be the target or perpetrator of harm.



DOMESTIC ABUSE INTERVENTION PROGRAMS

202 East Superior Street
Duluth, Minnesota 55802
218-722-2781

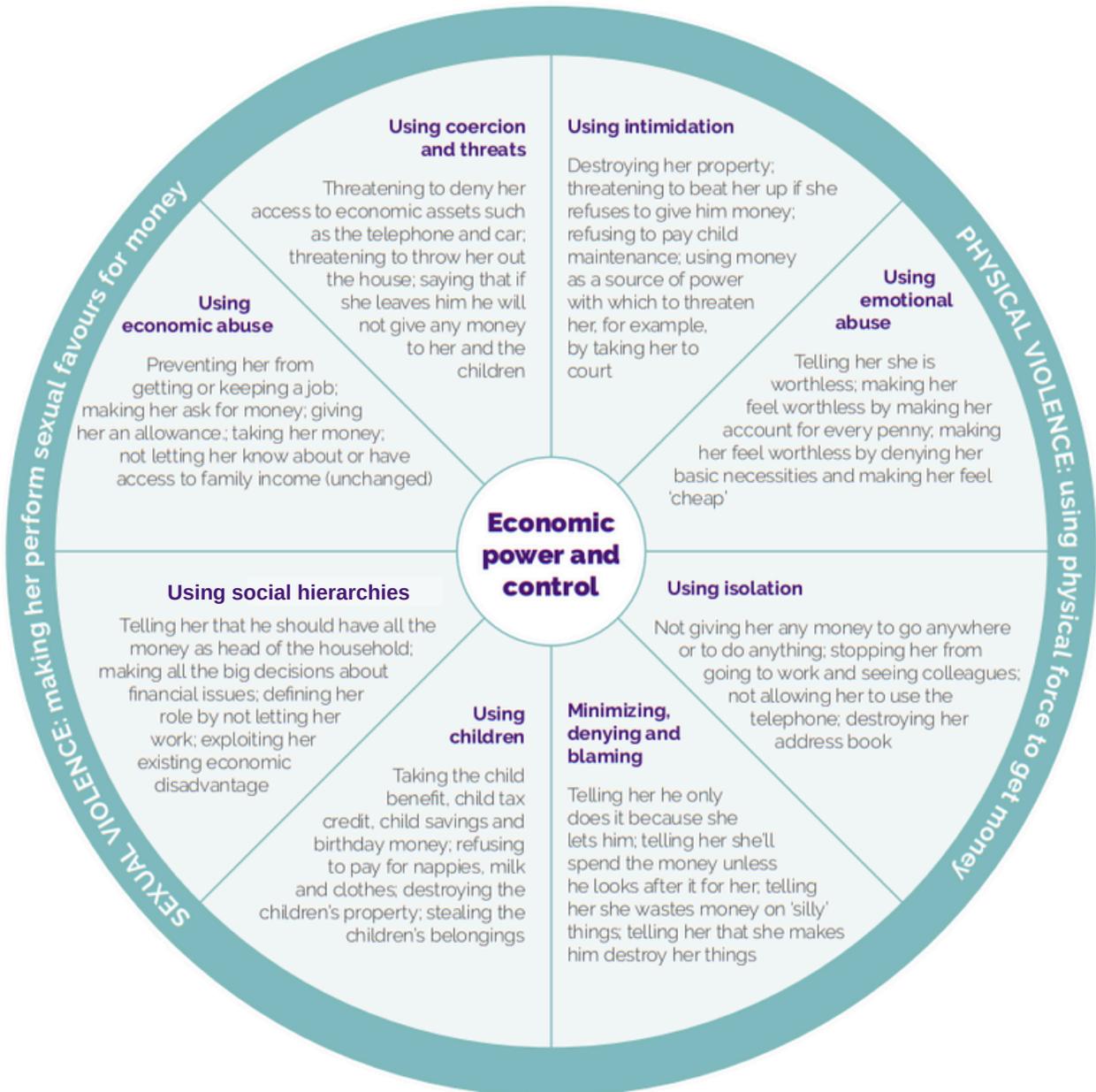
www.theduluthmodel.org

Power and Control Wheel



**SURVIVING
ECONOMIC
ABUSE**

The Economic Abuse Wheel (Sharp, 2008)



Adapted with permission from: DOMESTIC ABUSE INTERVENTION PROGRAMS, 202 East Superior Street, Duluth, Minnesota 55802, 218-722-2781 www.theduluthmodel.org

Sharp, N. (2008) 'What's yours is mine' *The different forms of economic abuse and its impact on women and children experiencing domestic violence*, Refuge

https://survivingeconomicabuse.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/SEA-Economic-abuse-wheel_final-1.pdf

The Impacts of Domestic Violence on the Workplace: Discussion Guide Question Handout



Small Group Discussion

1. What was your initial response to the video? Was there anything specific that stood out to you?
2. Were you surprised by the statistics shared in the video? Why or why not?
3. Prior to the video, were you aware that perpetrators of domestic violence will sabotage an employee's ability to work? What are some additional tactics you think perpetrators might use at the intersection of economic abuse and the workplace?

Large Group Discussion

1. The video discusses other burdens that may create additional barriers to a survivor accessing support. If we think about how our identities can impact our access to services, what other “burdens” might employees be carrying? How might this impact or exacerbate the domestic violence an employee is experiencing?
2. Of the actions listed on the video that workplaces can take, are there one or two that stood out to you as an opportunity for your workplace?
3. What might get in the way of taking this action? How could you discuss this with your employers?
4. Is there one thing you can commit to doing that will contribute to a safer workplace for survivors?