



Domestic violence survivors often encounter stigma around their experiences: they may feel that they are to blame or that there is no place for discussing or getting support in the workplace. However, organizations are working towards decreasing the stigma and creating safe and open workplaces where employees feel supported.

This month, we sat down to discuss ways of decreasing the stigma with Kristin Tanner, the Supervisor for the Counseling and Advocacy Program at **Haven House**, a facility providing domestic violence counseling, support groups, and other supports for domestic violence survivors. Tanner walked us through the most important advice she has for employees who want to create a supportive workplace for domestic violence survivors and decrease the stigma around getting support.

### **Avoid Judgement**

If a co-worker comes to you to talk about a situation in which they have concerns about their partner's control, anger, jealousy, or in which they express fear of their partner, Tanner advises the first thing you can do is listen to a co-worker's experience without judgement. It is important not to have preconceived notions about their experience, even if you have experienced domestic violence yourself, because every case of domestic violence is different.

One way to avoid judgement is not to question your co-worker's decision-making or be critical of their actions. Ask questions about how they are feeling, and show your co-worker

that you trust their discernment skills in this complicated situation. Taking a non-judgmental stance does not mean you are not helping or are enabling the situation. You are giving them a space to process, speak about their trauma safely, and feel empowered to take control.

### **Listen, Don't Advise**

Another way to help: be careful about giving advice. Tanner says that often people outside the situation urge the survivor to leave the abuser, thinking that is the most proactive solution. We care for our co-workers, and we don't want to see them go through this kind of trauma, so it may seem like a logical step for the survivor to take. However, Tanner emphasizes that since the most dangerous time for a survivor is when they decide to leave the abuser, you should refrain from giving directive advice. "It is dangerous to direct the survivor," Tanner says, "especially if the survivor does not have certain steps in place to ensure their safety upon acting on their decisions."

### **Know the Resources**

When it comes to domestic violence, there is never a quick fix or easy solution. When you resist the urge to fix, and just focus on listening, you are not guiding them into a decision that may be unsafe. "The best thing you can do for them is to hear them out," Tanner reminds us, "and then direct them to community resources where they can access support from professionals trained in safety planning for survivor of domestic violence." See the box below for resources to share.

**EAP:** If you or a co-worker is experiences a domestic violence situation, free and confidential counseling is available through EAP. There are many convenient locations in the area of Buffalo, and counselors can refer you to other community resources. Our 24/7 crisis Counseling Hotline is always available for non-emergency concerns, just call the general EAP number at 716-681-4300.

**Haven House:** Haven House provides domestic violence counseling, support groups, emergency sheltering, and non-residential programs. The trained professionals on site help victims create safety plans, support systems, and are sensitive to the changing needs of domestic violence victims. They can be reached by contacting EAP, or you may call them directly at (716) 884-6000.