

# Safe for the Holidays

## Tips to Support Survivors of Domestic & Sexual Violence during the Holiday Season

**The holiday season is demanding - traveling, buying gifts, hosting, and more.**

**Although stress can bring out the worst in us, stress is not an excuse for violence.**

According to the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, survivors may need additional emotional support during the holiday season, especially if they are unable to be with their family, friends, or faith community. Financial and other seasonal demands may also aggravate existing family strains.

Safety planning is also crucial around the holidays. For example, holiday events and family gatherings may increase the possibility that survivors unexpectedly encounter the person who used violence against them.<sup>1</sup>

### **If the holidays are taking an emotional toll...**

#### **Acknowledge your feelings**

It's ok not to feel happy just because it's the holiday season.

#### **Reach out**

Consider talking to a trusted friend or colleague, [connecting with your agency's employee assistance program](#), or contacting the [domestic violence hotline](#) or [sexual assault hotline](#).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, Domestic Violence and The Holidays Technical Assistance Guidance, <https://vawnet.org/sites/default/files/assets/files/2016-11/TAGuidance-DVHolidays2011.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Mayo Clinic, Stress, depression and the holidays: Tips for coping, <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress/art-20047544>.

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Coworkers, supervisors, and managers are in a unique position to sense that a colleague may be struggling. To create a safer space for voluntary disclosure and to better support and refer a colleague who may be experiencing domestic & sexual violence, consider the following conversation starters:

## **I've noticed...**

If you notice worrisome changes in your colleague's disposition and feel comfortable sharing your concerns, take care to converse with them privately, use "I statements," keep to the facts, reserve judgment, and honor their confidentiality to the greatest extent possible. Also recognize that they may be defensive or unable to share what they are experiencing—honor their choice.

## **What are you most concerned about?**

Allow your colleague to guide the conversation and focus on topics most important to them. Listen carefully. If your colleague reveals abuse to you, take it seriously, believe in them and let them know that you do. You could say, "Your situation sounds dangerous and I'm concerned about your safety."

## **How can I support you?**

Refrain from making judgments and giving advice. Ask what you can do to help. For starters, share relevant workplace policies and resources available through [your agency's employee assistance program](#), and - if appropriate - refer your colleague to the [domestic violence hotline](#) or [sexual assault hotline](#). If your colleague denies abuse, let them know that you are still concerned and available to talk more about it at a different time.

## **How can we help make you feel safer and thrive at work?**

Supervisors play an important role in helping survivors access reasonable accommodations, such as flexible scheduling, relocating to another work station, changing contact information, and enhancing security protocols. Supervisors may also facilitate a work plan so that a survivor's work performance and employment status are not impacted or compromised as a result of violence. Keep in mind that there are risks with every decision a survivor makes. Your understanding and support can help minimize those risks.

## **Would you like to check-in again?**

Many survivors need time and space to access help on their own terms. Respectful reengagement creates a safer space and signals that they are not alone.

Adapted from Workplaces Respond, Starting the Conversation, <https://www.workplacesrespond.org/resource-library/starting-the-conversation>, and OPM Work-Life, Meaningful Conversation Starters.

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