



# Supervisor NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program  
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## Addressing Domestic Violence at Work

By Workplace Strategies for Mental Health

**Domestic violence becomes workplace violence or harassment when it occurs or spills over into the workplace. Often, employers do not see domestic violence as a workplace hazard. But it negatively affects the victim, co-workers and the organization.**

Employers and workers often believe that domestic violence is a personal issue, and that workplace parties can do nothing about it. This makes it even harder for a victim to ask for help.

People experiencing domestic violence often feel isolated. They may feel ashamed or worry their situation will compromise their employment. They may be afraid to say anything. Those who suspect an employee may be a victim of domestic violence are often afraid to approach this subject or intervene for many reasons. This further isolation increases the risk to those who experience domestic violence. Domestic violence could impact the workplace in the following ways:

- Reduced productivity and motivation
- Decreased worker morale
- Potential harm to employees, co-workers and/or clients
- Increased replacement, recruitment and training costs if victims are dismissed for poor performance or absenteeism
- Strained co-worker relations

### Organizational Strategies

As an overall workplace violence prevention policy, employers can take responsibility to:

**Identify warning signs:** Because people who experience domestic violence can be more likely to report it to a co-worker than to others in the workplace, all employees could be trained to recognize the [warning signs](#) and risk factors for domestic violence.

**Establish a support network:** Various people can offer support and assistance to employees experiencing domestic violence. Working together in a team which may include the supervisor, trusted co-worker, human resources, Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provider and union representatives may be a helpful approach to providing a supportive network.

**Develop a safety plan:** Workplaces can create individualized and workplace safety plans to address the situation. Plans can be reviewed and updated as circumstances change. After speaking to the employee and ensuring confidentiality, share the plans with anyone who needs to know to ensure safety. You can establish a safety plan by working with the employee to:

- Establish a restraining or protection order, and help them make sure all the conditions of that order are followed.
- Identify possible solutions. Follow up and check on how the solutions are working.
- Share a recent photo or description of the abuser. Alert others, such as security and reception, so they're aware of whom to look for.
- Relocate their work station so that they can't be seen through windows or from outside.

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- Don't include their contact information in publicly available company directories or website.
- Change their work phone number, have another person screen their calls, or block the abuser's calls/emails.
- Provide a well-lit parking spot near the building or escort the individual to their car or to public transit.
- Offer flexible work scheduling if it can be helpful.
- Call the police if the abuser exhibits criminal activity such as stalking or unauthorized electronic monitoring.
- Ensure that the victim and abuser are not scheduled to work at the same time or come into contact if both are employees, clients, customers, patients, vendors, or suppliers within the organization.
- Establish disciplinary procedures to hold the abuser accountable for unacceptable behaviour in the workplace if they work at the same organization.

### Protecting Employees

Starting a conversation about family violence with an employee can be difficult. Your role as an employer or supervisor is not to be a counselor, but rather to approach the employee in a professional, sensitive manner and find out what help is required and where the employee can find it.

When an employee tells you about abuse, it can help to make a strong statement of support such as, "No one deserves to be abused," rather than showing shock or dismay. When talking with an employee, your role is primarily to:

- Provide initial support.
- Discuss the specific steps that can be taken to help this employee in the workplace.
- Refer the employee to available resources in the community or to an employee assistance program.

When addressing the issue of family violence with an employee, ensure that you:

- Offer to meet in a private and confidential environment.
- Clearly identify any job performance problems you

have observed (e.g.: "I notice that you are having difficulty meeting your deadlines and you don't seem quite yourself. Is there anything I can do to help?").

- Express empathy that personal issues can interfere with work performance.
- Are aware that family violence victims and offenders can be of any gender; refrain from referring to abusers exclusively as "he".
- Use respectful language such as calling a person by their name or referring to the nature of the relationship such as "your partner," "your spouse," or "your friend"; avoid using labels such as "abuser".
- Are sensitive and avoid accusing, diagnosing, or drawing conclusions about the situation.
- Listen to what the employee has to say and support them to seek help.
- Offer company and community resources such as Employee Assistance Plan information or contact information for family violence prevention services and crisis line numbers.
- Develop a plan to help the employee maintain job performance and a strategy to implement it.
- Recommend that the employee speak to a trained counselor who can help develop a plan to deal with the issues; resources may include an employee assistance plan or crisis line counsellors and other domestic abuse prevention professionals in the community.
- Help the employee determine if the abuser's behaviour may put others in the workplace at risk. If it appears that others in the workplace might be in danger, work with the employee to execute a way that other staff can be kept safe without breaching confidentiality.

If you suspect an employee may be experiencing domestic violence **you can reach your EAP 24/7 by calling (800) 777-4114 for consultation.** Please remember your EAP is here to support you as managers, as well as all of your employees.

#### References:

<https://www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/resources/addressing-domestic-violence>