

## **I need safety and support at work**

### **How to Keep Yourself Safe and Supported when Domestic Violence follows you into the Workplace**

Are you being abused by your partner or former partner?

Is the abuse affecting you at work?

Are you worried about how to stay safe at work?

You have a right to be safe at work. Your employer has legal obligations to help keep you safe

### **What is domestic violence?**

Domestic violence is a pattern of behaviour used by one person to gain power and control over another with whom they have or have had an intimate relationship. Occupational Health and Safety Council of Ontario.

Sometimes victims do not recognize the warning signs or realize the danger they are in. It is also common to deny that the violence is happening. People often feel ashamed at finding themselves in an abusive relationship. It is hard to admit or ask for help.

Domestic violence tends to increase over time, becoming more serious and more frequent. If you feel scared of your partner or ex-partner, reach out. A safety plan can help keep you safe.

### **Domestic violence can affect your work performance**

Protect your job. Your employer cannot help you if they do not understand what is happening to you.

If you tell them about the abuse, they can help you get the support you need so that you can stay safe and keep your job.

### **DOCUMENT EVENTS:**

- Make a record of how the domestic violence is affecting you at work: dates, times, details (where, what happened, what was said, any witnesses)
- Save abusive e-mails and text messages
- Save and print out copies of Facebook messages in case the sender deletes their account

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

- One third of workers have experienced domestic violence.
- Over half of those reporting domestic violence experiences indicated that at least one type of abusive act occurred at or near the workplace.

- More than 80% of these workers reported that domestic violence negatively affected their performance, most often due to being distracted, or feeling tired and/or unwell.
- More than a third of workers report working with a co-worker they know or believe is has experienced, domestic violence.

### **Your abusive partner or ex-partner may try to keep you away from work**

- Hides or steals your car keys or transportation money
- Hides or steals your workplace identification card, badge or uniform
- Rips or destroys your clothing
- Prevents you from getting the children ready for school on time
- Does not show up for childcare
- Physically restrains you or confines you
- Lies if the workplace calls to ask where you are, says that you are sick, out of town or looking after a sick child

### **Your abusive partner or ex-partner may interfere with your work**

- Stalks you at work or going to and from work
- Calls you at work to harass you
- Leaves voice mail messages that threaten or harass you
- Sends you electronic messages that threaten or harass you
- Is very jealous or accuses you of having an affair with a co-worker
- Shows up at your workplace to disturb or threaten you, your co-workers, your supervisor or other people
- Threatens to harm you, your children, your pets, your friends, or themselves
- Physically hurts you
- Destroys property that belongs to you or your workplace

### **A safety plan can help to protect you at work**

You have a duty to take reasonable care to protect yourself. Your employer has a duty to make accommodations to keep you safe and to help you feel supported.

A safety plan might include these measures:

- Obtaining a protection order
- Providing a recent photo or description of your partner or ex-partner
- Moving your work station to a less visible location
- Removing your name from all records and directories accessible to the public
- Having someone screen calls
- Changing your phone number
- Blocking your partner or ex-partner's emails
- Installing a panic button in your work area
- Getting a well-lit, priority parking spot near the building
- Having someone escort you to and from your vehicle or public transportation
- Getting a cell phone with a pre-programmed 911 security feature

- Arranging a schedule that is less predictable
- Working from home or another work site
- Taking a leave of absence

Together, you and your employer can ask local experts for help. Start by asking for help from your supervisor or your union representative.

**The most dangerous time** is just before, during or after a separation! Even though separating can make you safer in the long run, you need a good safety plan as you go through the separation process.

### **Signs of increasing risk**

Experts have identified a number of risk factors for severe injury and domestic homicide. The ten most common risk factors are:

- History of domestic violence
- Actual or pending separation
- Obsessive behaviour displayed by perpetrator
- Perpetrator depressed
- Prior threats/attempts to commit suicide
- Escalation of violence
- Victim had intuitive sense of fear
- Prior threats to kill victim
- Perpetrator unemployed
- Prior attempts to isolate victim

If these risk factors apply to you, seek expert advice from your local women's shelter or the police

### **Balancing your privacy and your safety**

Sometimes the best way for your employer to protect you is by telling other people about your situation. If you are in danger, your safety is more important than your privacy. The law says that your employer can only share the information that will protect you and/or your coworkers from being injured. Your employer will have to ask, "Who needs to know? What do they need to know so that they can help keep you safe and secure?"

### **What to do if your abusive partner is also a co-worker**

- If you and your partner/ex-partner work for the same employer. Your employer can:
- Separate your work activities, possibly to different locations, shifts, etc.
- Limit access, protect your privacy
- Assess risk and do safety planning
- Consult experts

## **What to do if your employer is your partner who is abusing you**

If your employer or supervisor is the person who is abusing you, find someone else at work that can help you.

If you feel unsafe in your workplace and have no one else to turn to, get help from a local agency or the police. If the abusive partner has been violent or has threatened or stalked you, call the police. Ask to speak to the Domestic Violence Coordinator.

## **What if your employer is not supportive?**

Employers have legal obligations under the Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Act to prevent and protect workers from domestic violence in the workplace.

If your employer treats you unfairly or fires you because of domestic violence, you may be able to get your job back or make a claim for compensation. It is very important to get employment advice as soon as possible. Contact a lawyer or a local legal clinic.

## **Your Union can support you**

If you work in a unionized environment, your union can provide support. The union can help you to identify and access supportive services, both in the workplace and in the community. They may be able to help you to negotiate a flexible schedule, time off or other workplace accommodations. There may be articles in the Collective Agreement that can help to protect you.

If your abusive partner is your supervisor, you may be able to file a grievance. If your abusive partner is a co-worker and is abusing or harassing you at work, you can also file a grievance. If your partner is a member of the union, the union will have to provide representation for both you and your partner. Unions are taking the problem of domestic violence very seriously and while they will ensure a fair process, they will not make excuses for abuse.

“We’ll be redoubling our efforts to negotiate supports—like paid leave for domestic violence—in collective agreements, and ensuring union representatives are trained to provide the right kind of support in the workplace,” Canadian Labour Congress president Hassan Yussuff.

**Men and women can be abused or abusive in their relationships. Statistics Canada tells us that women are more likely to experience serious forms of violence and abuse and more likely to be injured or killed**

## **You can get help**

If you are being abused, do not ignore the situation. Domestic violence will not go away or get better on its own. Doing nothing puts you in greater danger. Getting help early can protect you from serious harm

**CONTACT:**

**The Assaulted Women's Helpline**  
**1.866.863.0511**  
**TTY 1.866.863.7868**  
**Mobile: #SAFE (#7233)**

The Domestic Violence Coordinator of your local police service  
If you are in immediate danger, call 911

**Please remember:**

- You are not alone.
- You are not to blame.
- You have a right to be safe