

## **Recognize and respond to domestic violence in your workplace**

### **The Occupational Health & Safety Act**

All workers have the right to be safe at work. The Occupational Health & Safety Act requires employers to protect employees from being hurt or threatened by domestic violence in the workplace:

If an employer becomes aware, or ought reasonably to be aware, that domestic violence that would likely expose a worker to physical injury may occur in the workplace, the employer shall take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances for the protection of the worker. (Section 32.0.4)

Obligations under the Act - Everyone has a role to play

- Employers must ensure compliance
- Supervisors ensure a safe working environment
- Workers must report workplace violence

### **EVERY PRECAUTION REASONABLE: A whole organization approach to Make It Our Business**

#### **1. RECOGNIZE:**

All workers should be able to recognize warning signs and risk factors of domestic violence

#### **2. RESPOND:**

All workers should be aware of their legal responsibilities and know how to respond safely

#### **3. REFER:**

All workers should be aware of available services and supports inside the organization and in the community

#### **4. REPORT:**

All workers should be aware of formal and informal reporting procedures

#### **1. RECOGNIZE**

- Warning signs

- Abusive behaviour
- Risk factors

### **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).

Domestic violence occurs in a couple relationship; past or present. This includes same sex relationships. People from all ages, cultures and walks of life can experience domestic violence.

### **What are the warning signs?**

#### **Warning signs that someone may be experiencing abusive behaviour can include:**

- Obvious injuries such as bruises, black eyes, broken bones, hearing loss — these are often attributed to “falls,” “being clumsy,” or “accidents”
- Clothing that is inappropriate for the season, such as long sleeves and turtlenecks — also wearing sunglasses and unusually heavy makeup
- Uncharacteristic absenteeism or lateness for work or works extra hours to avoid being at home
- Change in job performance: poor concentration and errors, slowness, inconsistent work quality
- Uncharacteristic signs of anxiety and fear
- Requests for special accommodations such as requests to leave early
- Isolation; unusually quiet and keeping away from others
- Emotional distress or flatness, tearfulness, depression, and suicidal thoughts
- Minimization and denial of harassment or injuries
- An unusual number of phone calls, strong reactions to those calls, and reluctance to converse or respond to phone messages. Others in the workplace may take insensitive or insulting messages intended for the colleague experiencing abuse
- Sensitivity about home life or hints of trouble at home — comments may include references to bad moods, anger, temper, and alcohol or drug abuse
- Disruptive personal visits to workplace by present or former partner or spouse
- Fear of job loss
- The appearance of gifts and flowers after what appears to be a dispute between the couple which may include physical violence

Warning signs should raise a red flag. Ask questions, don't jump to conclusions.

### **What are the warning signs of abusive behaviour?**

Someone who is behaving abusively at home may be “invisible” as an abuser at work. Perhaps they are an excellent worker, manager, professional who does not reveal

overtly violent behaviour in the work environment. These are some warning signs of abusive behaviour:

- Is absent or late related to conflict at home
- Calls or contacts their partner repeatedly during work
- Bullies others at work
- Blames others for problems, especially their partner
- Denies problems
- Cannot take criticism and often acts defensively when challenged
- Acts like they are superior and of more value than others in their home
- Controls their partner or ex-partner's activities

### **When is a situation high risk?**

Research has shown that there are common risk factors present in cases of domestic homicide.

They include:

- Actual or pending separation
- A history of domestic violence
- Obsessive behaviour
- Depression of the perpetrator
- Prior threats / attempts of suicide
- The level of violence is increasing
- Stalking behaviour
- Victim has intuitive sense of fear
- Threat to kill
- Perpetrator unemployed
- Prior attempts to isolate victim from family and friends
- Seek expert advice for safety planning and to determine the level of risk or threat from your local women's shelter or the police

These risk factors indicate a more dangerous situation, especially when they appear in combination. Seek expert advice for safety planning and to determine the level of risk or threat

## **2. RESPOND**

- Understand
- Interrupt isolation
- Have a 'See it - Name it - Check it' conversation

### **Understanding Isolation as a Dynamic of Domestic Violence**

People experiencing domestic violence are often isolated in varying ways. People witnessing abusive behaviour are impacted and often become isolated when they sit

alone with their concerns because they think it is a private matter. As abusive situations escalate, so too does the isolation for everyone involved. The more isolation; the greater the risk of serious harm.

### **Interrupt Isolation to Increase Safety**

Do NOT sit alone with your fears and concerns when you know or suspect a co-worker is being abused. Seek support and advice for yourself. Share your concerns with a supervisor in your organization who has been trained on domestic violence or find a community agency that has expertise.

**With your Co-worker:** Approach the person with genuine care and concern. You do NOT have to 'solve' the problem to be an important support.

### **Talking with a Co-Worker you suspect is being abused**

Co-workers are often aware of the signs of abuse, but they may not know what to do about it. Warning signs don't automatically mean abuse, instead they are a red flag. Pay attention to your concerns. Don't jump to conclusions. If the person is someone you know, you may be the best person to interrupt their isolation and talk with them.

## **THREE STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO TALK WITH A CO-WORKER**

### **See it – Name it – Check it –**

#### **1. SEE it!**

Pay attention when your 'gut' tells you something is NOT right. Recognize the warning signs of abuse.

#### **2. NAME it!**

"I am concerned about you." Name the warning signs you have seen. Overcome your hesitation to help. Do NOT jump to conclusions.

#### **3. CHECK it!**

Ask questions. "Are you ok?" "Do you want to talk?"

#### **Here are a few SNCit examples:**

"I overheard your partner yelling at you on the phone. Are you ok? Do you want to talk?"

"I've noticed that you've had trouble meeting your deadlines lately. Is there something bothering you? Do you want to talk about it?"

"I noticed the bruises you have. I'm worried about you. Are you ok?"

"You looked upset after that phone call today. I'm here if you want to talk."

Remember that it is not your role to be a therapist or to 'fix' the situation.

Reaching out, showing concern and offering support can make a big difference. You want to open a door for support. Your co-worker may be more comfortable if you can talk in a private setting such as a closed office or an area away from others where you cannot be heard or seen.

## **What to say if your co-worker discloses abuse**

### **HELPFUL THINGS YOU CAN SAY:**

- “I care about you”
- “I believe you”
- “It’s not your fault”
- “I’m worried about your safety”
- “I will support you and your decisions”

### **ALSO**

- Suggest speaking with a supervisor to find out what supports are available at work
  - Offer to go with your co-worker
  - Be prepared with information about where to find help at work and in your community
  - Talk about the importance of safety planning - provide the “I Need Safety and Support at Work” brochure and encourage your co-worker to make a safety plan. There are professionals who can help. Contact your local women’s shelter or contact the Domestic Violence Coordinator of your police service.
  - Assure your co-worker that the employer must provide protection and that there can be no reprisals for disclosing domestic violence
- **IF THERE IS IMMEDIATE DANGER – CALL 911**

Workplaces can create an individualized custom workplace safety plan to address the situation of the worker. Update the plan as circumstances change. Share the plan with anyone who needs to know about the situation in order to ensure safety. Seek expert advice for safety planning from your local women’s shelter or the police.

## **Overcome Your Hesitation to Help**

“This must be really difficult for you. It’s normal to have a lot of conflicting emotions.”

## **What to say if your co-worker denies the abuse**

Most people don’t want to talk about abuse. They may be afraid of and/or feel protective toward the person who is acting abusively. It is hard to ask for help. If the person you are worried about denies the abuse and you are still concerned:

### **Points of Concern**

You feel it is none of your business.

### **Points to Consider**

Abusive relationships only get worse without intervention. Violence is

You don't know what to say.

everyone's business.

Saying you care and are concerned is a good start.

You might make things worse.

Doing nothing is more likely to make things worse.

You are afraid the violence will turn on you and threaten the safety of the workplace.

Let the police know if you receive threats.

You are worried about maintaining confidentiality in the workplace.

The new law says you have to balance confidentiality and safety. You must take every precaution reasonable given the circumstances to protect the worker.

- Assure them they can talk to you anytime
- Keep the lines of communication open
- Ask them to read the warning signs and risk factors in this brochure
- Show compassion; do not allow yourself to become frustrated or angry
- It can be hard to understand the decisions of others, but they should be respected
- If you have immediate concerns about safety, call the police
- Have an informal conversation with your supervisor or human resources, "this may be nothing, but I am worried about..."

### 3. REFER

You can help your co-worker by finding out what supports are available regarding domestic violence in your workplace and in your community. Consult your workplace policy to gather names and contact information.

#### **FOR HELP AND SUPPORT IN THE COMMUNITY:**

**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**

### 4. REPORT

- Focus On Safety
- Formal and informal reporting

You have a duty to report if there is a clear threat to the workplace or an incident of domestic violence occurs at work. You must tell a supervisor or someone who is designated as the safety coordinator.

If you know or suspect that children are being abused, you must contact the Children’s Aid Society. Make sure your co-worker understands that this is your legal obligation.

Your workplace policy may require or encourage reporting even if you do not see a clear danger to the workplace. Check your policy to understand your responsibilities.

### **ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR SUPERVISORS AND EMPLOYERS**

Supervisors and employers have additional specific responsibilities under the provisions of the Occupational Health and Safety Act to protect workers and ensure compliance.

For more information, visit [www.makeitourbusiness.com](http://www.makeitourbusiness.com).

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.

### **Canadian Workers Experiences of Domestic Violence**

**33%** Experienced domestic violence.

**35%** Have at least one co-worker who’s experiencing, or has experienced domestic violence.

**12%** Have at least one co-worker whom they believe is being abusive, or has been, to a partner.

### **Of those who’ve experienced domestic violence:**

**54%** Said it continued at work.

**82%** Said it negatively affected their work performance.

**38%** Said it affected their ability to get to work

### **ABUSIVE ACTS AT OR NEAR WORKPLACE**

**53.5%** DV continued at work

**46.5%** DV did not continue at work (or no response)

<b>40.6%</b>	abusive phone calls/text messages
<b>20.5%</b>	stalking/harassment near workplace
<b>18.2%</b>	abuser physically came to workplace

<b>15.6%</b>	abusive email messages
<b>14.5%</b>	abuser contacted co-workers/employer
<b>2.2%</b>	other

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