

Occupational Health & Safety Council of Ontario (OHSCO)
WORKPLACE VIOLENCE PREVENTION SERIES



**Domestic Violence Doesn't Stop
When You go to Work:**

How to get Help or Support a Colleague who may Need Help



If you are experiencing abuse at home or at work, you are not alone. Whether you are a victim or a concerned colleague, people in your workplace and community can help. This brochure describes the warning signs of domestic violence and the steps you can take to get the help you need or offer support to someone at work who needs it.

Domestic violence

Domestic violence is a pattern of behaviour used by one person to gain power and control over another with whom he/she has or has had an intimate relationship. This pattern of behaviour may include physical violence, sexual, emotional and psychological intimidation, verbal abuse, stalking and using electronic devices to harass and control.

Who are the victims of domestic violence?

Anyone can be a victim of domestic violence, whatever their age, race, religion, sexual orientation, economic status or education. The abuser may be a current or former spouse or intimate partner, relative or friend.

Domestic violence can occur between:

- current or former intimate partners;
- adults or adolescents;
- people of all racial, economic, educational and religious backgrounds;
- people in heterosexual and same-sex relationships who are:
 - living together or separately,
 - married or unmarried,
 - in short- or long-term relationships.

While men can be victims of domestic violence, women are the overwhelming majority of such victims.

Is domestic violence common?

Between 2002 and 2007, Ontario reviewed 230 domestic violence-related deaths (142 women, 23 children and 65 men).

- Most male deaths were abuser suicides after killing or attempting to kill their partners or ex-partners.
- The victims were female in 92 per cent of the cases, and the abusers were male in 92 per cent of the cases.
- The most common risk factor in domestic homicide was actual or pending separation.

The Annual Report of the Ontario Coroner's Domestic Violence Death Review Committee noted that the victims were female in most cases, and the abusers were male. For this reason, this brochure uses "she" when referring to victims and "he" when referring to abusers.

Warning signs of domestic violence*

If you've seen these behaviours, or done some of these things yourself, it may be time to take action:

Abuser

- He puts her down.
- He does all the talking and dominates the conversation.
- He checks up on her all the time, even at work.
- He suggests he is the victim and acts depressed.
- He tries to keep her away from family and friends.
- He acts as if he owns her.
- He lies and exaggerates to make himself look good.
- He believes he is superior and more important than others in his home.

Victim

- She is apologetic and makes excuses for the abuser, or sometimes becomes aggressive and angry.
- She is nervous when the abuser is nearby.
- She is sick more often and misses work.
- She tries to cover bruises.
- She makes excuses at the last minute when she cancels or postpones meetings with friends/family members.
- She tries to avoid friends and family on the street.
- She seems sad, lonely, withdrawn and afraid.
- She uses drugs or alcohol to cope.

*Note: Research relating to domestic violence warning signs and risk factors has focused on abusers who are male and victims who are female. It is not known whether the same warning signs would apply in situations where the abuser is female and the victim is male, or where the abuser and victim are the same sex.

Signs of high risk

The danger may be greater if:

Abuser

- Has access to her and her children.
- Has access to weapons.
- Has a history of abuse with her or others.
- Has threatened to harm or kill her if she leaves him, saying things like, "If I can't have you, no one will."
- Threatens to harm her children, her pets or her property.
- Has threatened suicide.
- Has hit and/or choked her.
- Is going through major life changes (e.g. job, separation, depression).
- Is convinced she is seeing someone else.
- Blames her for ruining his life.
- Doesn't seek help for his behaviour.
- Has trouble keeping a job.
- Takes drugs or drinks every day.
- Watches her actions, listens to her telephone conversations, reads her emails and follows her.
- Has little or no respect for the law.

Victim

- Has just separated or is planning to leave.
- Fears for her own life and for her children's safety.
- Is in a custody battle, or has children from a previous relationship.
- Has injuries that she is hiding from others.
- Is involved in another relationship.
- Has no access to a phone away from work.
- Faces other obstacles (e.g. does not speak the language, is not yet a legal resident of Canada, lives in a remote area).
- Does not have family or friends outside work.

Many deaths related to domestic violence in Ontario happened when the relationship was ending or following separation. If you have an abusive partner and have recently separated or are thinking about it, reach out for help. Talk to someone you trust.

Take stalking seriously. Stalking has been identified as one of the primary risk factors for attempted and actual murder of female partners in intimate relationships. Even if you have a restraining order, there is no guarantee that the abuser will respect it. Let the police and your employer know if you are being stalked or if a restraining order is breached.

How domestic violence can affect you at work

Domestic violence doesn't stop when you leave for work. It can follow you into work, or continue there if your abuser works in the same organization.

Here are some ways abusers may try to control you outside the home.

Attempt to prevent you from getting to work or looking for work, by doing things like:

- Interfering with transportation by hiding or stealing your car keys or transportation money.
- Hiding or stealing your identification cards.
- Threatening deportation if you are sponsored.
- Failing to show up to care for your children.
- Physically restraining you.

Interfering with you while at work by:

- Phoning you often or sending lots of emails.
- Stalking and/or watching you.
- Showing up at the workplace and pestering your co-workers with questions about you (where you are, who you're with, when you will be back, etc.).
- Lying to co-workers (you're sick today, you're out of town, you're home with a sick child, etc.).
- Threatening co-workers ("If you don't tell me, I'll...").
- Verbally abusing you or your co-workers.
- Displaying jealous and controlling behaviours over your relationships with others such as coworkers.
- Destroying your or the organization's property.
- Physically harming you and/or co-workers.

Remember that both the victims and their work colleagues can be harmed by such behaviour.

Recognizing the behaviours, tactics and signs of domestic abuse is not always easy, even if you are living with them. Domestic abuse is much more than physical violence, and victims in abusive relationships consistently report that the situation gets worse over time.

How to help a colleague

Here are some suggestions on how to support a victim:

- Talk to her about what you see and assure her that you are concerned. Tell her you believe her and that it is not her fault.
- If she is reluctant to tell you about the abuse right away, you could gently say, “I’ve noticed you seem upset and I’m concerned about you and your safety. Please know that when you are ready, I’m here for you.” Be patient; she may open up to you in time.
- Let her know you are concerned for her and her children’s safety and that help is available. Abuse doesn’t go away; it increases over time.
- Listen in a non-judgemental way to what she says, being careful to show concern and support and not suggest an action she could take.
- Encourage her not to confront her partner if she is planning to leave. Her safety must be protected.
- Let her know that you or she can call the Assaulted Women’s Helpline, your local shelter, or, in an emergency, the police. Offer to support her when she talks to her employer.

Here are some suggestions for supporting an abuser:

- Choose the right time and place to have a full discussion.
- Approach him when he is calm.
- Be direct and clear about what you have seen and note that his behaviour is inappropriate.
- Tell him that his behaviour is his responsibility. Avoid making judgmental comments about him as a person. Don’t validate his attempt to blame others for his behaviour.
- Inform him that his behaviour needs to stop and that he can seek help from the Employee Assistance Program or community counselling.
- Tell him you are concerned about the safety of his partner and his children.
- Never argue with him about his abusive actions, nor intervene physically. Recognize that confrontational, argumentative approaches may make the situation worse and increase the risk to a victim.
- Let your supervisor or employer know if you suspect that one of your colleagues is being abusive.
- Call the police if you think the victim’s safety is in jeopardy.
- **Always keep yourself safe. Don’t get into the middle of an assault. Call the police in an emergency.**

Colleagues can best help a victim by maintaining her trust, keeping confidence and being concerned for her safety. Talk to her, let her know you believe her and encourage her to get help.

Speaking to the abuser may feel difficult. You may be afraid his violence will turn to you or your coworkers. However, be sure not to ignore the abuser’s behaviour because doing nothing could make it worse. Police and counsellors are trained to respond to violence. Reach out for help if you have safety concerns.

Asking your employer for help

Employee safety is a priority for your employer. By working with you, an employer can minimize the risk of violence.

Your employer is in a position to help you. Your employer should maintain your confidentiality on a need-to-know basis but may be able to take some steps to protect you and your co-workers. Here are some actions you can take:

- Ask your employer for help in creating a safety plan that considers your needs at work.
- Keep your employer informed of all threats and abusive actions.
- Ask if your calls can be screened or if you can change your phone number and/or have your abuser's emails blocked.
- Ask for priority parking near the building or escorts to public transportation or your vehicle.
- Ask to be relocated and that your new location not be disclosed.
- Explore alternative work arrangements (e.g. adjust start and finish times) so your work pattern becomes less predictable.
- Provide a recent photo or description of the abuser to security/reception so they can identify him.

Once an employer becomes aware that domestic violence has or could enter the workplace, the employer must take steps to protect all workers, including the victim.

Other things you can do to increase your safety:

- Get counselling through your Employee Assistance Plan, community-based therapists, a local women's shelter or the Assaulted Women's Helpline.
- Keep a record of all incidents of abuse (include date, what was said and/or done, who witnessed it) and keep all threatening voice messages and emails.
- Mention your workplace in protection/restraining orders; tell your employer and provide them with copies of such orders.

For more information, see the brochure titled Domestic Violence Doesn't Stop When Your Worker Arrives at Work: What Employers Need to Know to Help.

Your safety is vital. If you are concerned about your safety or the safety of those around you, call the police.

Additional safety actions

Ask for help. Getting support is important if you or any colleagues are being abused. If you don't feel you can tell someone at work about your situation, call your Employee Assistance Plan for counselling. You can also turn to your local women's shelter for a range of services including counselling, safety planning, shelter and legal advice.

Another option is the Assaulted Women's 24-hour Helpline (1-866-863-0511 and TTY 1-866-863-7868). They can help you develop a safety plan, find space in a local women's shelter, or connect you with other services in your community. The service is anonymous and confidential and the toll-free number won't show up on your phone bill. Services are available in up to 154 languages.

If you are a concerned colleague, the helpline can also support you. They will discuss the signs of abuse and give you practical advice on ways to help. You can also get more information through www.NeighboursFriendsandFamilies.on.ca. This website explains how to help women at risk of abuse, how to talk to men who are abusive and how to plan for safety.

For more information about the services of the Assaulted Women's Helpline visit: www.awhl.org.

If you are concerned about your immediate safety, call the police.

All persons in Ontario, including professionals who work with children, must promptly report to a Children's Aid Society (CAS) when they have reasonable grounds to believe that a child is or may be in need of protection. If you have concerns, contact your local CAS. You can supply details without having to provide identifying information. They will tell you if you need to make a formal report.

This brochure was developed in partnership with the Ontario government, Ontario Women's Directorate, and the Occupational Health and Safety Council of Ontario and with input from the Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children.

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