

Domestic Violence: At risk 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? This booklet explains how to ask for help at work, and what your employer must do to protect you. It also tells you where you can get more information about domestic violence.

Everyone in the workplace and community has a role to play in helping to prevent domestic violence. Reach out. There is support in your workplace and in your community.

What is domestic violence?

Domestic violence is also known as woman abuse, intimate partner abuse, family violence, wife battering or partner violence.

You are being abused if your intimate partner tries to have power and control over you. Your abuser may constantly and regularly threaten you, may intimidate you or manipulate you, or may use violence to hurt you. It is not always easy to recognize abusive behavior and tactics, or the signs of domestic violence. Even victims do not always recognize the warning signs.

Your abuser may do one thing or several things to make you afraid and to make you do what they want you to do. They may try to harass and control you by using

- physical violence,
- sexual, emotional or psychological intimidation,
- verbal abuse,
- stalking, or
- electronic devices.

The longer abuse continues, the worse it gets. Most abusers try to control their victims with emotional abuse before they are violent. Pay attention to **all** signs of abuse, even if your abuser has not been physically violent in the past.

Who are the victims and abusers?

- A victim of domestic violence may or may not be living with the abuser. She may or may not be married to the abuser. She may be a current or former partner of the abuser.
- The abuser is not always male, but when the victim is female the abuse is more severe. Compared with male victims, female victims of domestic violence are
 - twice as likely to be stalked
 - more than twice as likely to be injured
 - three times more likely to fear for their life, and
 - twice as likely to be the targets of more than 10 violent episodes.ⁱ
- When domestic violence escalates to the point of murder, almost all of the victims (92%) are female and almost all of the murderers (92%) are male.ⁱⁱ
- Most reported abuse occurs in heterosexual relationships, but it can occur in same-sex relationships

Warning signs that your abuser might kill you

If there is violence in your relationship, you are in danger. Your partner's violence may quickly become more serious. You can keep yourself safe by understanding what puts you at risk. Research has helped us to find out when domestic violence has ended with death. The most common reasons are:

- the victim was separated from the person who killed her, or she was getting ready to separate from him
- the couple had a history of domestic violence
- the level of violence had been increasing
- the abuser had shown signs of being obsessive, including stalking the victim
- the person who killed their spouse was depressed
- in the past, the abuser had threatened to kill the victim.ⁱⁱⁱ

Are any of these true for you? Be very careful! You may be at risk of being killed by your abuser.

Remember that **the most dangerous time** for women separating from an abusive partner is just before she leaves, when she leaves and just after she leaves! Even though separating can make you safer in the long run, you need to be very careful when you decide to separate and as you go through the separation process. To protect yourself, get help. Call the Assaulted Women's Helpline at 1.866.863.0511 or TTY 1.866.863.7868 or your local women's shelter.

What you can do about abuse

Get help. Now, more than ever before, there is help for abused women. In your community you can get help from:

- the local women's shelter
- the sexual assault centre for your community
- the local Police, who may have a Domestic Violence Coordinator
- your family doctor, walk-in clinic or naturopath
- the Health Unit for your community

To find any of these supports, call the Assaulted Women's Helpline at 1.866.863.0511 or TTY 1.866.863.7868.

The Assaulted Women's Helpline is a free, 24-hour crisis line for abused women in Ontario. The service is anonymous and confidential. It is offered in many languages. The toll-free number will not show up on your phone bill. The helpline can

- help you make a safety plan
- find space for you in a local women's shelter, or
- connect you with other services in your community.

For more information, visit www.awhl.org . Or call The Assaulted Women's Helpline at 1.866.863.0511 or TTY 1.866.863.7868

Do not leave unless you have a safety plan

Never assume that you are safe because you are planning to leave a violent relationship or because you have just left. It is true that leaving can make you safer in the long term. But the most dangerous times for you are just before you leave, when you leave, and just after you leave.

If you are planning to leave, you **must** make a safety plan. Your local women's shelter or the police can help you. A safety plan outlines all the things you can do to stay safe, and to keep your children safe. For more information about safety planning, read the Neighbours, Friends and Family brochure, Safety Planning for Women Who are Abused.

If you want to talk to someone about safety planning call The Assaulted Women's Helpline at 1.866.863.0511, or TTY 1.866.863.7868. They offer a 24-hour telephone crisis and support line.

If you are in danger, call 911 or the local police.

Domestic violence at work

Many of us think that domestic violence only happens in the home. But domestic violence affects women at work. Research tells us that:

- 54 % of domestic violence victims miss three or more days of work a month.^{iv}
- 25% of employees have experienced domestic violence.
- 22 % of workers report that they have worked with someone who has been a victim of domestic violence.^v

Domestic violence often follows victims to work. Most women (70%) suffering from domestic violence are victimized at work. The most common things that abusers do are:

- calling over and over to harass the victim, and
- showing up at the workplace to harass the victim.

If you get a protection order, peace bond or restraining order, make sure that it mentions your workplace. Tell your employer about the orders. Give your employer copies of the orders.

Abuse can affect how well you do your work. If this happens, you may need help so you can protect your job. Your employer cannot help you if they do not understand why you are having trouble doing your work. If they do not know why you cannot do your work, they may take steps to deal with your poor work performance. On the other hand, 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.

What your abuser may do to you at work

Here are some things your partner or ex-partner may do to you at work. Any one of these could be a sign that you need help to stay safe at work. Get help if your partner or ex-partner:

- 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 email 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 himself.
- Physically hurts you.
- Destroys things that belong to you or your workplace.

What your abuser may do to keep you away from work

Your partner or ex-partner may also make it difficult for you to get to work and to be on time. Get help if your abuser:

- 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 keeps you captive.
- Lies if the workplace calls to ask where you are. Your abuser may say that you are sick, out of town or looking after a sick child.

You may need help from your employer if:

- you have a restraining order that includes the workplace, or
- your partner knows where you work, and you are planning to leave him or have just left him.

For more information about abuse, the Neighbours, Friends and Families brochure, How You Can Identify and Help Women at Risk of Abuse.

How your employer can help

Starting June 15, 2010, all employers in Ontario **must** protect workers from domestic violence at work. They must also develop policies and programs to help workers who are victims of domestic violence. Your employer must make sure that the workplace is safe. They must investigate and deal with incidents and complaints of workplace violence and harassment.

The law now says that employers must protect you from being or threatened by your abuser in the workplace. Your employer must protect you from a person who:

- uses force against you in a way that **could hurt** or **does hurt** you physically;
- **tries to use force** that could hurt you;
- **says or does** something that you can **reasonably interpret as a threat** to hurt you.

Once your employer knows that domestic violence could enter the workplace, they **must** protect you and your co-workers. Your employer may not be able to protect you if they do not know about the domestic violence. By telling your employer you can get help before the situation becomes more serious and more dangerous.

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 from being injured.

Your employer must respect your privacy and keep the information you shared confidential. This means that they can only share information with people who need to know. 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 when you ask for help at work

- Talk with someone you trust. Ask them to support you. Ask them to respect your choices, not to judge you and not to tell you what to do.
- Ask for help finding supports at work and in the community.
- Think about what will help you be safer, less stressed and more supported at work.
- Make a list of the people you can trust and the supports that can help you. Keep the list in a place where you can easily find it.
- Tell your employer that you are being abused and may need help to stay safe at work. You could talk to:
 - Your supervisor
 - Another manager or supervisor
 - The security office or personnel
 - Co-workers
 - Union representative
 - Human Resources
 - Joint Health and Safety Committee
 - The Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
- Tell your employer each time you are threatened.
- Keep a record of all incidents. Keep a record of how the abusive behaviour affects you and your work.
- Create a safety plan. Work with your employer and get help from your local police service or women’s shelter. The Assaulted Women’s Helpline can also help. Call toll-free at 1.866.863.0511 or TTY 1.866.863.7868.

What help and protection to ask for

In case your abuser comes to the workplace

- Get a cell phone that has 911 or the local police on speed dial, or other security features. You may be able to get a cell phone through SupportLink. Call toll-free 1.888.579.2888 to ask if you are eligible.
- Ask for a well-lit parking spot near the building.
- Make sure that your employer knows what is in protection orders, such as peace bonds or restraining orders.
- Make sure that security or reception has a recent photo or description of your abuser. They need to know who to look for.

To make it hard for your abuser to find you at work

- Ask a co-worker or your supervisor to screen your calls.
- Ask for a new phone number.
- Ask your employer to block e-mail from your abuser.
- Ask your employer to remove your contact information from listings and directories that the public can see.
- Ask about working a flex-time schedule.
- Ask your employer to be flexible with your work arrangements.
- If you work in a place that visitors can easily see, ask to work somewhere else. Ask to be moved away from the front reception or any windows that people can look in.

Who else might report the abuse?

The law says that your co-workers must tell the employer about domestic violence if they believe domestic violence could happen at the workplace. If your co-workers think someone is in immediate danger, they should call the police.

More and more, neighbours, friends, family and co-workers are learning to recognize the warning signs of abuse. They are learning that they can help stop the violence. The sooner they get help, the more likely they are to protect women and children from being killed by their abuser. For this reason, your employer may encourage co-workers to report all of their concerns about domestic violence. You should never experience negative reprisals because your employer finds out you are experiencing domestic violence.

Ontario laws also say that anyone who knows or suspects that children are being abused must tell the Children's Aid Society. The law is clear. Everyone is responsible for protecting children from abuse.

What to do if your abuser is also a co-worker

If your abusive partner or ex-partner is also a co-worker you will need to be very careful and take steps to avoid domestic violence in the workplace. Your abuser should not use workplace resources to harass, stalk or abuse you. Your employer and co-workers should not stay silent about abuse. They should not ignore the abuse. If your abuser threatens you or talks about you disrespectfully, someone must tell him that he cannot act that way.

What your employer should do about an abusive co-worker:

- Make the abuser accountable for being abusive in the workplace. The employer should use disciplinary procedures to do this.
- Keep the abuser away from you in the workplace. For example, your employer should not schedule both of you to work at the same time. They should have you work at different sites, if possible.
- Know what is in protection orders, such as peace bonds or restraining orders.
- Enforce the terms of protection orders that mention the workplace.
- Call the police if the abuser is violent.
- Call the police if the abuser breaks criminal laws, for example if they stalk you or violate your privacy in the workplace.
- Tell other employees to call police if there is danger. They should not try to stop or prevent violence.
- Give both you and the abuser information about where to get help. See the Make It Our Business Suggested Guidelines on Community Resources and Services

What to do if your employer is abusing you

If your employer or supervisor is the person who is abusing you, find someone else at work that can help you. Talk to them. If you are in a unionized workplace, you might be able to file a grievance. 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 abuser has been violent or has threatened or stalked you, call the police.

Keep a record of when the abuser is violent in the workplace. Keep a record of any time you were stalked. Keep a record of any time the abuser threatens you.

For more information, read the Make It Our Business Suggested Guidelines on Community Resources and Services.

What to do if you don't want your employer to know

- Get help in the community. You can
 - Talk with local women's shelter or sexual assault centre.
 - Use the computer at your local library to get information from domestic violence websites. You can find useful information at Neighbours, Friends and Families, Shelternet and Springtide Resources.
 - Call The Assaulted Women's Helpline at 1.866.863.0511 or TTY 1.866.863.7868.
- Talk to the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), if your workplace offers this.
- Create a safety plan. Get help from the EAP, the police, the women's shelter in your community or use the information you found online.
- Use your vacation or annual leave time for appointments and court appearances.
- Use vacation or annual leave time to go to medical appointments or counseling for yourself or your children.
- Use your employer's flex-time policies. Ask for flexibility in your schedule, shift or other work arrangements.

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.

If you are in danger, call 911 or the local police.

Please remember:

- You are not alone.
- You are not to blame.
- You do not deserve to be abused.

Everyone in the workplace and community has a role to play in helping to prevent domestic violence. You can get support in your workplace and in your community. Pay attention to warning signs of abuse.

For more information on domestic violence at work and what to do about it, visit www.makeitourbusiness.com or www.neighboursfriendsandfamilies.ca.

This booklet is part of the Make It Our Business campaign by the Centre for Research & Education on Violence against Women & Children in the Faculty of Education at the University of Western Ontario.

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i Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile (Ottawa: Statistics Canada; Cat. No. 85-224-XPE, 2000): 12, 14, 18.

ii Ontario Domestic Violence Death Review Committee. (2008). Annual report to the Chief Coroner. Toronto, ON: Office of the Chief Coroner.

iii Ontario Domestic Violence Death Review Committee. (2008). Annual report to the Chief Coroner. Toronto, ON: Office of the Chief Coroner.

iv Zachary, M 2000, Labour Law for Supervisors: Domestic Violence as a Workplace Issue, Supervision, vol. 61, no. 4, 23 - 26

v Corporate Leaders on Domestic Violence and America's Workforce on Domestic Violence surveys are available at http://www.caepv.org/about/program_detail.php?refID=34.