

Domestic Violence in the Workplace



Why employers should care about domestic violence

54%
*of domestic
violence victims
miss three or
more days of
work per
month.*

This fact sheet explains why it makes good business sense for employers to care about domestic violence. The social, emotional, and financial costs of domestic violence are difficult to measure, but current research estimates the cost of domestic violence in Canada at \$6.9 billion per year.

Domestic violence can:

- Affect employee productivity
- Lead to absenteeism
- Affect workplace morale
- Create substantial costs for employers
- Put an entire workplace at risk

Domestic violence has serious impacts on the health of victims and their families as well as on the health care system. Physical health effects include injury, disability, chronic pain, and problems related to alcohol and substance abuse. Impacts on mental health include depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicide attempts. Victims of domestic violence often require medical attention and hospitalization.

People who witness violence also suffer mental health consequences, making co-workers vulnerable as well. Increased absenteeism and sick time, and decreased work productivity stemming from domestic violence could result in high costs to your organization. The social and emotional costs are even greater.

What can employers do?

Employers can create a workplace atmosphere that encourages those experiencing domestic violence to come forward and sends a clear message that violence will not be tolerated.

It can be overwhelming to think about the effects of domestic violence. The economic and social costs can seem too big for one person or a single workplace to tackle. Don't get discouraged. Everything you do as an

employer to support victims of domestic violence makes a difference. Any contribution — even something as simple as hanging a poster or displaying information about domestic violence resources — has an effect, not only for the victimized employee, but for their co-workers and your entire workplace. Everything we do adds up and we all benefit from promoting safer, healthier workplaces.



Here are some steps you can take to make your workplace safer:

Establish clear policies and procedures

- Create a policy about domestic violence in the workplace.
- Develop a workplace safety plan for dealing with domestic violence.
- Consult with the Joint Health and Safety Committee or a health and safety representative, as well as trained professionals to:
 - Establish a process for employees to report threatening situations they have experienced or witnessed in or around the workplace.
 - Establish a process to notify supervisors and managers of the situation, the plans that have been developed, and to keep them informed of new information.
 - Establish processes for reviewing policies and procedures regularly.
- Design policies for flexible work hours, extended leaves of absence, and workplace relocation for victims of domestic violence.
- Assign responsibility to appropriate staff who will report to the police any acts or threats of violence, or stalking that occurs in the workplace. Know when threats and/or incidents of violence must be reported and/or investigated in accordance with the *Workers Compensation Act (sections 172 to 177)* and the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation (s3.4).
- Develop accountability measures for abusers working in your organization.

Provide support for victims and co-workers

- Display educational materials around your workplace, such as posters, information cards, and fact sheets.
- Encourage open discussion about domestic violence as a social issue (not specific employee cases).
- Develop clear and consistent messages — make it clear that your workplace will not tolerate violence in any form.
- Discuss individual needs and resources with affected employees (e.g., enhanced security, flexible work schedule, time off, temporary leave, and protection orders such as restraining orders, peace bonds, or bail conditions).

Employers are not expected to be experts in domestic violence or to counsel employees. However, the suggestions outlined can help you support a worker experiencing domestic violence.

For more information and resources, visit www.worksafefbc.com/domesticviolence.