



Domestic violence in the workplace – for departments and separate agencies

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Domestic violence in the workplace – for departments and separate agencies

Of all reported violent crimes in 2015 in Canada, Statistics Canada reported that more than one quarter (26%) resulted from domestic or family. Almost 67% of family violence victims were women and girls. Domestic violence often follows a victim and/or survivor to work. While the workplace can often act as a safe and positive environment for victims, the issue of domestic violence can have serious implications for the workplace.

It can cause reduced employee productivity and motivation, loss of focus, increased absenteeism, replacement and/or recruitment costs, decreased employee morale, potential harm to employees, co-workers and/or clients and liability costs if another employee is harmed. The abuser may come to the workplace to continue the abuse, mislead employers or co-workers, damage the employer's property or threaten other employees.

We are reaching an important milestone regarding safer workplaces in federally regulated industries. Changes to the *Canada Labour Code*, forthcoming regulations, and new frameworks are helping us prevent incidents of harassment and violence from occurring, respond effectively to these incidents when they do occur; and support victims and survivors, and employers in the process.

Changes to the Canada Labour Code, Part II

Since July 2018, there has been increased attention in federal workplaces to support domestic violence victims and survivors, in large part, through the changes to the *Canada Labour Code*.

We have a responsibility and obligation under the *Canada Labour Code*, Part II, to protect and prevent against harassment and violence in the workplace; this covers all forms of violence including domestic violence.

Recent changes to the *Canada Labour Code* include ten (10) days of leave per year - of which five (5) days are paid - for victims of family violence.

In 2019, Treasury Board and several unions agreed to go a bit further and provide ten (10) days of paid leave to employees who are victim of domestic violence within the Core Public Administration and separate agencies. This was as a result of a recommendation from a joint working group struck in 2017 to study potential workplace practices to support employees affected by domestic violence following the negotiation of a memorandum of agreement.

Figure 1: Domestic violence

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a behavioural pattern that can include...

Violence & intimidation
physical, emotional, sexual, psychological

Verbal abuse

Technology-facilitated abuse

Economic abuse

Threats using children, property, or pets

Stalking

Its signs may not be visible yet there can be serious workplace implications

Loss of focus
Reduced Motivation

Lowered Morale
Increased Absenteeism



For the Victim
& Survivor...



Safety & Security
is critical as domestic violence can be life threatening



Privacy & Confidentiality
are a matter of safety & respect



Disclosure
Is a challenge for many reasons (stigma, safety) and requires trust

▼ Figure 1 - Text version

Domestic violence is a behavioural pattern that can include...

- violence and intimidation (physical, emotional, sexual, psychological)
- verbal abuse
- technology-facilitated abuse
- economic abuse

- threats using children, property, or pets
- stalking

Its signs may not be visible yet there can be serious workplace implications

- loss of focus
- reduced motivation
- lowered morale
- increased absenteeism

For the victim and survivor...

- safety and security is critical as domestic violence is life threatening
- disclosure is a challenge for many reasons (stigma, safety) and requires trust
- privacy and confidentiality are a matter of safety and respect

Ways to support domestic violence victims

There is an important opportunity to leverage the momentum of federal mental health and workplace wellness initiatives, though these are distinct issues. Through education, awareness and outreach, the work being done through these initiatives are helping to de-stigmatize mental health and related issues and has encouraged increased disclosure among affected employees.

Use existing channels

Following the negotiations of paid leave for a large number of employees and in an attempt to encourage disclosure, Deputy Heads and Heads of Agencies may want to take steps to promote employee awareness of domestic violence issues through existing channels, such as:

- health and safety programs
- departmental intranet websites
- other internal programs and communications activities
- harassment and violence prevention awareness campaigns

Develop or adapt supporting mechanisms

Consider developing or adapting supportive policies, practices and programs that deal with domestic violence when it enters the workplace.

More specifically, with respect to safety, Deputy Heads may want to establish a safety protocol with regards to when domestic violence enters the workplace, as part of their occupational health and safety Building Emergency and Building Emergency and Evacuation Team (BEET) protocol.

That could include adding safety and security components to employee training toolkits, departmental websites and to domestic violence departmental safety plans such as individual plans and safety planning at work.

An individualized workplace domestic violence safety plan could include:

- explain leave provisions
- documentation of incidents
- accommodate alternative work arrangements
- establish safe entrance and exit to and from vehicles
- necessary screening of abusers for security purposes
- develop response system if employee does not come to work

- necessary protection from abusers who work in the same workplace
- provide information with respect to legal, counselling, and other resources
- notification of employees regarding the potential for violence in the workplace
- establish safety by reviewing practices such as: work emails, phone calls and social networking

Ramp up your institution's awareness, education and training

The proposed *Workplace Harassment and Violence Prevention Regulations* mandate training on harassment and violence in the workplace.

Offer training to all employees to build a basic understanding of domestic violence and their associated rights, obligations and options. Training may include a short online course to establish a basic foundation of knowledge on domestic violence (definitions, stats, causes, symptoms, legislation and policies, case studies).

As a next step or phase, offer training on possible signs of domestic violence including how to speak to employees in domestic violence situations and to provide information on available support services. This could include sensitivity training to support employees who could be currently working alongside colleagues experiencing domestic violence or at some time in the future, as well as on measures to take if experiencing domestic violence themselves.

Currently, specific training on the issue of domestic violence is very limited. There are courses available which touch on harassment and violence prevention in the workplace that could be a start to promote awareness.

Related links

Help for victims

- Call 9-1-1 in emergency situations
- Contact your departmental [Employee Assistance Program](#)
- Access [Shelter Safe](#), which helps women and their children seeking safety from violence and abuse by connecting women with their nearest shelter
- Learn more about [stopping family violence](#), and find supports and services in your area

Related reading

- [Support, training and guides on domestic violence in the workplace](#)
- [Domestic violence in the workplace – for employers](#)
- WorkSafe BC: [Addressing Domestic Violence in the Workplace: A Handbook for Employers Outside of B.C.](#)
- Public Services Health and Safety: [Addressing Domestic Violence in the Workplace](#)

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