



Domestic Violence and the Workplace

How does domestic violence show up in the workplace?

Domestic violence is any form of abuse, including physical, psychological, financial, or sexual in a context of an intimate relationship. Domestic violence impacts one in three employees. It can occur in the workplace through harassing phone calls, stalking, threats, making the workplace unsafe for both the employee at risk and their co-workers. The physical and mental health effects of abuse can also impact the employee's job performance.



Did you know?

The most common trauma symptom survivors experience during work hours is flash backs.

Why is Domestic Violence a workplace issue?

Domestic violence does not just occur inside the home but often spills over into the workplace. It can lead to issues of workplace safety, employee retention, absenteeism, and low productivity. These impacts can affect both the employee and their co-workers. In fact, 43% of employees experiencing domestic violence have had to leave a job due to safety concerns.

What are employers in Ontario required to do?

- The *Occupational Health and Safety Act* requires that employers take every reasonable precaution to protect the safety of their employees, including developing a workplace harassment and workplace violence policy, and protecting the physical safety of an employee if the employer knows, or should know, that domestic violence is occurring while the employee is at work.
- The *Ontario Human Rights Code* requires that employees are free from harassment in the workplace. The Code also protects employees who are experiencing a disability (such as mental health issues caused by domestic violence) from discrimination at work and requires employers to accommodate employees to the point of undue hardship.
- The *Employment Standards Act* entitles many employees to various kinds of leaves if the employee or their child is experiencing, or is under the threat of experiencing, domestic violence, is ill or injured, or if there is another urgent matter.



How should employers address domestic violence?

- Create a workplace policy on domestic violence disclosures and responses, and incorporate these into existing harassment policies.
- Source and display local domestic violence helplines and resources, including organizations that offer specialized services for different communities or in different languages.



Tip:

You can find local and specialized services at www.211ontario.ca.

- Develop or get advice on developing a safety plan for employees at risk of domestic violence. Engage your health and safety committee.



Tip:

A local domestic violence shelter can help create a safety plan for an employee.

- Offer flexible work practices around schedules and preferred safe ways to contact employees to increase employee safety.
- Raise awareness and facilitate training on domestic violence.



Tip:

Domestic violence agencies can often offer information sessions.

- Provide training to management on the needs of employees experiencing trauma.



Tip:

Mental health agencies can offer training on trauma.

- Highlight Domestic or Sexual Violence Leave during the onboarding of employees.
- Include information on Domestic or Sexual Violence Leave in Employee Handbooks, handouts and in staff meetings.



Did you know?

Not everyone is impacted by domestic violence in the same way. Racialized women may face stigma and stereotypes when they disclose domestic violence in the workplace. In addition, their experiences of abuse can remind them of their experiences of racism in the workplace. Racialized women may prefer services and support from peers and may wish to access services that are culturally appropriate.