



Victim Services of Waterloo Region

Workplace Violence Fact Sheet no. 4

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a pattern of behaviour in which one intimate partner uses physical violence, coercion, threats, intimidation, isolation and emotional, sexual or financial abuse to control the other partner in a relationship. Stalking or other harassing behaviour is often an integral part of domestic violence. When this pattern of behaviour causes the abuser to follow their partner to work it becomes workplace violence.

This violence is frightening not only for the abused partner, but for their coworkers and clients/customers as well. Employers often hesitate to get involved over concerns of employee privacy. However, what happens on work property is of concern to the employer and must be addressed. Businesses are responsible for protecting their employees from harm, regardless of the relationship between the victim and the offender.

Observable signs of possible victimization...

- ❑ Tardiness or unexplained absences.
- ❑ Frequent and often unplanned use of leave time.
- ❑ Anxiety.
- ❑ Lack of concentration.
- ❑ Change in job performance.
- ❑ Disruptive phone calls or email.
- ❑ A tendency to remain isolated from coworkers or reluctance to participate in

social events.

- ❑ Discomfort when communicating with others.
- ❑ Disruptive phone calls or email.
- ❑ Sudden or unexplained requests to be moved from public locations in the workplace, such as sales or reception areas.
- ❑ Frequent financial problems indicating a lack of money.
- ❑ Unexplained bruises or injuries.
- ❑ Noticeable change in use of make-up (to cover up injuries).
- ❑ Disruptive visits from current or former intimate partner.
- ❑ Sudden changes of address or reluctance to divulge where they are staying.
- ❑ Inappropriate clothes (e.g. sunglasses worn inside the building, turtleneck worn in the summer).
- ❑ Acting uncharacteristically moody, depressed or distracted.
- ❑ In the process of ending an intimate relationship, break-up seems to cause the employee undue anxiety.
- ❑ Court appearances.
- ❑ Being the victim of vandalism or threats.

Take care to ensure that the offender, not the victim, is punished. While it is easy to fire the employee, it is better to protect the victim and their coworkers. For legal and ethical reasons, do not jump right to firing the employee.

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Steps to Protect Domestic Victims at the Workplace

1. Find out that the threat exists. A supportive work environment will facilitate this. Coworkers, not management, are most generally confided in. Encourage disclosure when safety is at risk.
2. Provide training for your employees to be more aware of and sensitive to the signs of domestic violence. Ensure that training is broad, not based only on females being abused by males.
3. Train security and management in how to assist victims of domestic violence most effectively.
4. Draw on both internal (EAP, company counsellor etc.) and external resources (police, psychologist etc.) for assistance.
5. Examine any domestic violence threat or incident, as you would any other threat, to determine the best means of intervention.
6. Involve law enforcement.
7. Keep in close contact with the victim during the assessment, to protect their safety and be able to gain valuable information about the offender.

Please contact our office to obtain a listing of resources within the Region of Waterloo for victims of domestic abuse.

We can also obtain resources for areas outside the Region if necessary.

Other Options for Assistance

- ❑ Referring the employee for emotional, legal or financial counselling, either through the company's own employee assistance structure or from outside practitioners.
- ❑ Ascertaining if the employee has sought or obtained a protective "stay away" court order against an abusive partner or other harasser.
- ❑ Obtaining a court order to prevent the abusive partner or other harasser from attending the workplace.
- ❑ Adopting policies that will allow a worker time off for purposes such as going to court to seek a restraining order/peace bond or appearing to testify in a criminal trial.
- ❑ Reviewing the employee's work space and modifying it, if necessary, to make sure that a possible assailant cannot get there.
- ❑ Acting consistently with the employee's privacy rights and wishes, take measures to inform other employees (security guards, secretaries, receptionists and telephone operators, etc.) so they can block an abuser's calls or make sure they are kept out of the workplace.
- ❑ Discuss with the victimized employee possible protective procedures for them to utilize outside of the workplace (e.g. looking at safety for other places they go – home, daycare, school etc.).

The next fact sheet in this series will address violence against health care workers and small business concerns.



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