

# Domestic Violence in the Workplace



## What is domestic violence?

The term *domestic violence* describes a range of behaviours or actions taken by a person to control and dominate another person. Domestic violence is characterized by abusive, coercive, forceful, or threatening acts or words used by one member of a family, household, or intimate relationship against another. Other commonly used terms to describe similar behaviours include family violence, intimate partner violence, and spousal violence.

Domestic violence occurs in all sectors of society, regardless of age, gender, marital status, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, culture, or ethnicity.

Many workers and employers still believe that domestic violence is a personal issue and is none of their business. However, the effects of domestic violence often extend outside the home. Domestic violence can enter the workplace when an abuser attempts to harass, stalk, threaten, or injure a victim at work.

People experiencing domestic violence are often isolated due to shame and fear and may be reluctant to ask for help. The silence surrounding this kind of violence can put a workplace at risk. Research shows that workplaces can and do make a difference in contributing to the safety and well-being of those experiencing domestic violence.

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## Examples of domestic violence:

- **Physical abuse** includes the use of physical force (hitting, slapping, pushing, kicking, burning, cutting, stabbing, etc.) and threats of harm or homicide.
- **Psychological abuse**, also referred to as emotional or verbal abuse, includes using insulting language and name-calling, isolating a victim from family and friends, displaying jealous behaviour, and threatening to leave a relationship or to commit suicide if a victim refuses to co-operate or tries to end the relationship.
- **Sexual abuse** includes unwanted touching or sexual activity, dominating decision-making about contraception, and controlling the victim's choices about pregnancy and sexual health.
- **Financial abuse** includes denying a victim access to finances and using money to control someone's freedom or behaviour.
- **Spiritual abuse** includes using religion or spiritual beliefs to control a person's behaviour or choices.

While the types of abuse may differ, the motivation is ultimately the same: control of the victim by the abuser.



*All forms of abuse are unacceptable. Many are against the law.*

In 2007, over 40,000 incidents of spousal violence were reported to police across Canada, accounting for 12% of all police-reported violent incidents.

From 1999–2004, an estimated 183,000 British Columbians were victims of spousal violence.

The social, emotional, and financial costs of violence are difficult to measure, but current research estimates the cost of domestic violence in Canada at \$6.9 billion per year.

Being aware of potential signs of domestic violence can help you to take appropriate measures to prevent it from escalating in your workplace. You may notice that an employee or co-worker is less productive than usual or see changes in social behaviour. Research on violence against women has shown that some of the

more visible signs of abuse might indicate an escalation of violence that could enter a workplace.

This table includes some signs to be aware of. You may notice others.

Work productivity	Social behaviour	Escalating abuse
An employee is:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having trouble concentrating</li> <li>• Often arriving late</li> <li>• Missing work more frequently than usual</li> <li>• Less productive</li> <li>• Making excuses for poor work performance</li> <li>• Receiving frequent phone calls and emails from a partner/family member</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behaving differently than usual</li> <li>• Appearing withdrawn and isolated</li> <li>• Engaging in fewer social activities than usual</li> <li>• Making last minute cancellations</li> <li>• Using drugs and/or alcohol to cope</li> <li>• Apologizing for a partner's/family member's behaviour</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appearing flustered by incoming phone calls or emails from a partner/family member</li> <li>• Trying to cover up bruises and scratches (e.g., wearing long sleeves or turtleneck tops in summer)</li> <li>• Showing signs of strangulation – this is a major risk factor for future homicide of women</li> <li>• Receiving unannounced visits from a partner/family member at work</li> <li>• Acting nervous when a partner/family member shows up at the workplace</li> <li>• Being followed to/from work by a partner/family member</li> </ul>