



Family Violence and the *Workplace*



Family Violence *and the Workplace*

Victims and abusive persons come to work — and sometimes the violence follows them.

What happens at home affects people's performances at work. What happens at home can affect the safety and work climate of your workplace. Family violence can affect everyone in the workplace — employers, employees, co-workers and clients.

If an otherwise valuable member of your team has become less productive, or late or absent more frequently, it could be that something at home is causing the problem.

Until a few years ago, family violence was a taboo topic only addressed by close family members, law enforcement or the courts. No one spoke about it in the workplace. It is now clear that companies must take steps to educate employees and help those impacted by family violence.¹

What is in this booklet

The information in this booklet will help you recognize family violence when you see signs of it at work, and know what to do about it. In this book, you will learn:

- Why family violence matters to your business
- Signs that an employee may be living in a violent home or abusing family members
- Safety issues for the workplace
- What you can do

Definition of family violence

Family violence is the abuse of power within relationships of family, trust or dependency that endangers the survival, security or well-being of another person. It can include many forms of abuse including spouse abuse, senior abuse and neglect, child abuse and neglect, child sexual abuse, parent abuse, and witnessing abuse of others in the family. Family violence may include some or all of the following behaviours: physical abuse, psychological abuse, criminal harassment/stalking, verbal abuse, sexual abuse, financial abuse, and spiritual abuse.²

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“We saw pictures of [our co-worker] on the news and we heard the story of how she had literally thrown her child out the door right before her husband shot her dead.

“As a work team, we felt sick. We knew he had hurt her many times and we knew she was trying to leave him. He had called [our worksite] that morning asking to speak to her. We were happy to say she wasn’t there. It made us feel like we were protecting her. We were glad she had the day off and wouldn’t have to talk to him because his calls always upset her.

“When we heard he’d gone to the house and killed her, we were devastated. We will always wonder what we should have done differently. But, awful as it is to admit, there is a little piece of relief, too. What if she had been on duty that day? What if he had brought the gun to work?”²¹

Why should a workplace be concerned about what happens at home?

Family violence is a serious problem. Like many other workplace health and safety issues, family violence can affect a business and its bottom line.

Performance: What happens at home can affect people’s performance at work. Employees living in violent homes may:

- be absent more often
- have lower individual productivity and contribute to lower overall productivity within the organization
- increase an organization’s costs.

Safety: If an employee has a violent partner, that partner may cause disruptions in your workplace and threaten employee safety — not only the safety of the abused employee, but of co-workers as well. If an employee is a violent partner, that employee may be using your workplace as a base for harassing the abused partner.

Under Alberta’s Occupational Health and Safety legislation, employers must provide a safe worksite. Providing a safe worksite includes ensuring employees are safe from acts of violence or harassment by co-workers and members of the public.

Good business practice: More and more employers are recognizing that the personal well-being of employees is important to an organization’s success and are implementing family violence policies in their workplaces. Addressing an issue that affects productivity, safety and liability makes good business sense. It also demonstrates good corporate citizenship in the community. As well, employers who have implemented family violence policies report an unanticipated benefit: an increase in staff morale. Employees appreciate this demonstration of concern for their safety and health.

Abuse and violence in family relationships do not happen “just once.” Once an act of abuse occurs, a barrier has been broken and the risk of further abuse is higher.

To an outside observer who is not aware of what goes on behind closed doors, family violence may appear to be an isolated incident. In fact, abuse happens over months and years. As it continues, it almost always becomes more frequent and more severe.

EXAMPLES OF SOME FORMS OF ABUSE

Abuse can take many forms and all are meant to increase the abusive person’s power and control over the abused person. The most visible form of abuse may be physical abuse, but less visible forms can be just as harmful. These forms, like psychological or financial, are a danger sign that there is a risk for physical violence.

Physical, psychological, sexual and financial abuse have all happened in situations of family violence.

Physical abuse is meant to cause pain, injury and fear. Physical abuse includes a wide range of assaults by the abusive person such as hitting, hair pulling, biting, kicking, pushing, choking, burning and shaking. Physical abuse can also include locking or tying someone up, or preventing someone from getting medical help.

Psychological abuse causes emotional pain, injury and fear. Instead of physical assaults, the abusive person uses emotional or mental methods. This includes name-calling, put-downs and controlling the person’s activities and contact with other people. Psychological abuse also includes **intimidation** tactics such as stalking, harassing and threatening to harm, or actually harming, people or animals.

Sexual abuse includes the abusive person forcing a person to kiss or touch them; touching a person who does not want to be touched or in places the person does not want to be touched; forcing intercourse and other sexual activities; forcing the person to look at someone's private parts, sexual pictures or videos; and sexualized comments, jokes or conversations. Sexual acts are abusive if the abused person finds them unsafe, unwanted, humiliating or painful.

Financial abuse limits the resources of the abused person in order for the abusive person to have control over things that affect the victim. Financial abuse includes questioning a person's purchases, using or taking money (such as a paycheque) from a person without asking, spending recklessly without consulting the partner, forcing someone to sell or give up his or her home or possessions and forcing someone to pay for something unwanted.

While both men and women can be victims of these forms of abuse within their families, statistics show that women are more likely to suffer physical, sexual and financial abuse. Women also experience a significantly higher number of physical injuries because of abuse. Men experience physical abuse, too. Some abused men comment that they find the emotional abuse worse than the physical.¹⁰

Abusive behaviours are always a choice. Abusive people are responsible for their actions, no matter what their background or past experiences are. An abusive person may blame the victim, but the victim is not responsible for the actions of the abusive person.

Signs that an employee may be affected by family violence

Not all people affected by family violence show these signs, and not all these signs necessarily mean family violence. However, watch for a pattern. If a person shows several of these signs, that pattern is a clue that some sort of problem could affect his/her performance on the job. Family violence is one of the possibilities.

VICTIMS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE MAY SHOW THESE SIGNS...

DIRECT SIGNS THAT MAY INDICATE FAMILY VIOLENCE:

- have injuries like bruises, black eyes or broken bones, often explained by "falls," "accidents" or "being clumsy"
- wear clothing that is not appropriate for the season, such as long sleeves and turtlenecks in summer, or wear heavy makeup (may be covering injuries)
- have an increased number of phone calls, e-mails or faxes; have a strong reaction to these calls or a reluctance to talk with the caller
- experience disruptive visits to the workplace by a present or former partner
- refer to bad moods, anger, temper, alcohol or drug abuse by partner
- receive insensitive or insulting messages
- minimize or deny harassment or injuries
- receive flowers and gifts after what appears to be an argument between the couple.



Did you know...

- *The World Health Organization has declared that death and disability caused by violence makes it one of the leading public health issues of our time.⁵*
- *Three studies have shown that woman abuse alone costs billions of dollars in Canada each year. No comparable estimates have been made for male abuse, but there are clear indications that its cost to our society's productivity is significant. Eleven per cent of male spousal violence victims have reported that they had to take time off work as a result of physical abuse between intimates.⁶*

Did you know...

- *In the 2004 General Social Survey, Alberta had the highest reported rate of spousal assault among Canadian provinces (10 per cent of women and seven per cent of men).⁷*
- *According to federal statistics released in 2006, Alberta has the second highest rate of spousal homicide of all provinces in Canada with an annual average of 6.1 homicides per million spouses.⁸*

Did you know...

- Psychological abuse can escalate to, or coincide with, physical abuse. For example, five-year rates of physical violence in current relationships were ten times higher among men who reported emotional abuse than men who did not.¹¹
- In Canada, 21 per cent of women abused by a marital partner were assaulted during pregnancy with 40 per cent reporting that the abuse began during pregnancy.¹²
- In Canada, exposure to family violence is the second most common form (after neglect) of maltreatment of children and youth — 28 per cent of all reported and verified cases of child abuse or neglect.¹³
- About seven per cent of older Canadians reported experiencing some form of emotional or financial abuse by an adult child, caregiver or spouse.¹⁴

It is now accepted in the business community that employers have both a legal obligation and a social responsibility to prevent and respond to violence against their employees. Confronting the impact of violence in your company will:

- benefit the community at large
- maximize employee productivity
- limit legal liability.¹⁵

INDIRECT SIGNS THAT INDICATE STRESS, WHICH COULD BE A RESULT OF FAMILY VIOLENCE:

- be absent or late for work more often (could indicate disruptive incidents at home)
- show signs of anxiety, fear, emotional distress or depression
- show a change in job performance, such as poor concentration, more errors, slowness or inconsistent work quality
- make special requests, such as leaving early
- be withdrawn, unusually quiet or keep away from others
- have irrational fears about losing the job (job loss could be even more disastrous for someone in an abusive situation)
- show no outward signs, but use enormous energy to maintain the appearance that all is well.

PEOPLE WHO ABUSE FAMILY MEMBERS MAY SHOW THESE SIGNS...

DIRECT SIGNS THAT MAY INDICATE FAMILY VIOLENCE:

- show defensive injuries such as scratch marks (may have been injured by someone fending off an attack)
- call, e-mail or visit a spouse repeatedly during work hours
- make derogatory comments that show contempt, lack of respect or lack of consideration for his/her partner.

INDIRECT SIGNS THAT MAY INDICATE A RISK OF FAMILY VIOLENCE:

(characteristics shared by many abusive partners)

- be abusive towards, or bully, others at work
- be extremely rigid and controlling
- blame others for problems
- be absent or late for work more often
- have a sense of entitlement to authority or privileges
- deny there are problems at home.

People who abuse other family members may be charming to outsiders. People outside the family may find it hard to believe this person could abuse other family members. However, the charm may be a form of control and manipulation.

How can a workplace respond?

TAKE A PROACTIVE ROLE

1. Understand the problem

- Ensure managers and staff know the facts about family violence and how it can affect a business, in order to help them plan and implement family violence policies.
- Teach all managers and employees to recognize signs of abuse in employees.
- Consider delegating a manager whom employees can approach. Employees who are impacted by family violence will first go to people they trust, such as a co-worker or supervisor. These people can then approach the manager who will have necessary information.

2. Provide information to employees

- Take a proactive role. Remember that prevention is always better than a cure.
- Conduct education sessions for all staff to help them understand the effects of family violence on victims, abusive people, their children and other family members, as well as on the workplace. Make sessions mandatory, so all staff will attend. Include information about how to respond and where to get help if a staff member becomes aware that a co-worker is affected by family violence.
- Make information, such as posters, pamphlets and brochures, available to staff.
- If your organization has a human resources department, share information on family violence as part of new employee orientation or occupational health and safety updates. In smaller organizations, information can be shared less formally during staff meetings or in the coffee room.
- Get help from union representatives in proactively sharing information with their membership. With appropriate information, union stewards may be a helpful source of support to employees who are experiencing family violence. If stewards are sensitive to the issues, they may be able to assist an employee in feeling supported and/or protected at work.

3. Offer referrals to local services

- Ensure staff is aware of services in the local area, such as counselling services, shelters and programs for people who abuse family members.
- In communities where few resources like this are available, provide flexible hours or help with transportation so employees can access programs and services.

4. Practice prevention

Develop proactive policies that outline how issues of family violence will be addressed in the workplace. These policies could include:

- flexible leave for employees trying to relocate or dealing with court issues
- flexible shifts (where possible) for victims of abuse
- appropriate referrals to help within your organization as well as community resources
- increased worksite security, such as relocating offices for at-risk employees or ensuring they are accompanied to and from their vehicles.

Lead by example

- Eliminate workplace behaviours that put employees down.
- Treat employees with respect and show no tolerance for staff abuse or bullying.

Support community programs that focus on preventing family violence and/or bullying.

Create your own programs and partnerships with community agencies. Canada and the United States have a number of proactive partnerships that benefit community-based family violence prevention services and enhance the image of the partner corporations. (See web links on page 10 of this booklet.)



“One of our employees has these unexpected absences that sometimes last for days. She is the receptionist for our office, so it causes a problem. Someone has to cover for her and then everything else gets backed up. If it doesn’t change she’s going to lose her job. We can’t afford to have someone in her position that can’t be relied on.

“She comes back with stories of catching some horrible flu-bug or of falling or banging into something and hurting herself. She even shows us healing bruises and once she had stitches. It just doesn’t seem to add up. I wish I knew how to ask her what is really going on in her life.”²¹

IF YOU THINK SOMEONE AT WORK IS BEING ABUSED

1. Gently probe the issue

- Always be respectful.
- You might say something like, “I have noticed you seem distracted lately and not like your usual self. I am concerned about you and wonder how I can help.”

2. If abuse is disclosed, listening is the first step

Show concern and be supportive. You might say:

- “I am concerned for your safety.”
- “You are not responsible for what your partner has done to you.”
- “You do not deserve to be abused.”

3. Provide information or link the person to a source of information

- If there are children in the family, remind the person that the children are affected by family violence too. (See box: “Being exposed to anger and violence affects children’s brain development” on page 7.)
- Let the person know that family violence is a crime and encourage the person to seek protection from the law.
- Provide information about company resources.
- Provide information about community resources. (Sources of information are listed on page 10.)

4. Check immediate and longer-term safety

- Ask if the person has a way to be safe right now.
- Suggest a safety plan or connect the person to someone who can help with planning immediate and longer-term safety. (See “Five parts of a safety plan” on page 9.)

5. Respect the person’s right to make decisions

- It takes time for people to realize they are being abused or are being abusive. It takes time to move from realization to deciding the best thing to do next.
- Do not tell the person what to do. Respect the person’s ability and responsibility for making decisions at the person’s own pace.

6. Stay safe

- Do not try to intervene physically with the abusive person. If someone is getting violent, call security or the police.
- Do not confront the abusive person directly. That may increase the danger to you and to the person being abused.
- Do not leave phone or e-mail messages at the person’s home where the abusive person may find them.
- If an abused person chooses to leave the relationship, make sure the person knows this is an extremely high-risk time. Provide support and suggest that the person get help from police or another knowledgeable source to plan for safety. (See box: “Plan for safety” on page 8.)
- If an abused person chooses to leave the relationship, do not offer to go to the family home and get belongings, or to have the person stay with you. You and the abused person would both be at risk of being harmed by the abusive person.
- In Alberta, a person who is being abused may request an emergency protection order. An abused person (or the abusive person) may ask police for an escort into the home to get his/her belongings. The abused person can contact local police for assistance in obtaining an emergency protection order or other legal means of avoiding contact with the person who is abusive.

Did you know...

- *Fifty-eight per cent of Canadians who were stalked by a current or former spouse within the previous five years also reported being the victim of spousal violence.¹⁶ This was especially true for female victims of intimate partner stalking (61 per cent), though this figure was also high for male stalking victims (48 per cent).¹⁷*
- *In half of all ex-partner homicides against women between 1991 and 1999, the woman was killed within two months of leaving the relationship.¹⁸*

7. Follow up

- Follow up with your company's human resources department or your supervisor to inform them of the abuse. They may be able to help connect the person to resources in the organization or the community. They also may be able to arrange some flexibility in the person's work to help the person deal with the situation at home.
- Know procedures in your workplace that ensure the safety of the victim and of other employees.

IF YOU THINK SOMEONE AT WORK ABUSES FAMILY MEMBERS

- Be respectful. Do not judge the person.
- Do not reinforce the behaviour in any way. Do not call the person names or use insults or threats. That may increase the risk of harm.
- Do not try to intervene physically with an abusive person.
- Maintain that there is no excuse for violence.
- Provide information about company and community resources that might be helpful. If your company has an employee assistance program that covers the cost of some counselling, let the person know how to access that service. If not, let the person know about programs or services in the community.
- Indicate that you are concerned for the abusive person's well-being.
- Contact your supervisor or your human resources department.

BEING EXPOSED TO ANGER AND VIOLENCE AFFECTS CHILDREN'S BRAIN DEVELOPMENT¹⁹

Sometimes people in abusive homes think their children are not affected by the abuse. But children are affected, even if the abuse happens in a different room and even if the children are supposed to be asleep. As long as children live in an abusive environment, the trauma will affect their brain development, their emotions and their behaviour.

Brain scans show that living in an abusive, angry environment affects children's brain development. That, in turn, affects every other aspect of their development.

Children in abusive environments use much of their brain to watch for danger. Less of their brain is available for healthy growth and development. This affects their physical, emotional and mental development. It affects their ability to learn, and their ability to form healthy relationships.

If you or someone you know at work is in an abusive home situation, be aware of the impact on children, and make the well-being of children a priority.

“I remember the first co-worker who asked me if my fat lip was caused by my ex-husband. He may have felt that it didn't do any good, or that he was wrong to ask. But by asking that question, he planted a seed in my mind that what was happening to me wasn't right.”⁴



Get help

HELP IN AN EMERGENCY

If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, phone 911.

If you suspect that a child may be abused, neglected or exposed to family violence, phone your local Child and Family Services Authority, the Child Abuse Hotline at **1-800-387-KIDS (5437)** or the police.

Protection orders

- **An Emergency Protection Order** provides legal protection to victims of family violence. An emergency protection order can order an abuser not to go to places where the victim regularly goes, and not to communicate with the victim. The order can allow the victim to stay in the home and order the abuser to leave. It can also address other conditions necessary to provide for the immediate protection of the victim.

Police and Children's Services caseworkers can apply for an emergency protection order on behalf of a child or adult victim of family violence, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Victims can apply for an emergency protection order at a provincial court during business hours. *Know Your Rights: Alberta's Protection Against Family Violence Act (PAFVA)* information sheet is available at www.familyviolence.gov.ab.ca.²⁰

- **Restraining orders and peace bonds** are other court orders to stop an abusive person from contacting a child or adult. Police or a police-based Victim Services Unit can provide information about how to apply to a court for one of these protection orders.

Supports for Albertans fleeing abuse

- Alberta Works can help eligible Albertans find jobs and cover basic living costs. Phone **1-866-644-5135**, toll-free in Alberta, or **780-644-5135** in Edmonton for more information.

PLAN FOR SAFETY

If an employee or co-worker lives with a partner who has ever been violent, the violence could happen again at any time. In this situation, he or she will need a plan to get to a safe place quickly.

If the person decides to leave the relationship, even temporarily, he or she needs to know that **separating is one of the most dangerous times in an abusive relationship**. The abusive partner is losing control of the abused individual and will do everything possible to get control back. There is an increased risk of harassment, threats, psychological abuse and violence.

This does not mean people should stay and tolerate the abuse. It does mean they need to assess the risk to self and children, and plan how to stay safe in the community and at work.

Encourage the person to get help creating a safety plan. Phone the 24-hour Family Violence Info Line at **310-1818**, toll-free in Alberta, for information about community resources that can help with safety planning.

FIVE PARTS OF A SAFETY PLAN IF YOU ARE IN A SITUATION OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

1. **Tell people** you trust that you are in an abusive relationship.
 - Talk to them about how they can help you and your children to be safe.
 - At work, being safe may include telling your employer of the increased risk from your partner. You may need to be moved to a workstation in a more secure location within the building, and out of sight to those entering the building. It may also mean asking for an escort to and from your vehicle, or asking to change shifts so that your work patterns are different from usual.
2. **Plan where you can go** if you need to leave home in a hurry.
 - Look for places that are open 24 hours where you can be safe while you call for help.
 - If you plan to go to someone's home, arrange this ahead of time. This way, if you arrive with no notice, they will know to let you in, lock the doors and ask questions later. (Do not plan to go to the home of a relative or friend where the abuser might think to look. That could put you all in danger.)
 - Make sure you have car keys, gas in the vehicle, bus or taxi fare, or other means of transportation.
 - Know the route to get where you are going.
 - Have a backup plan in case you are not able to get to the place you planned to go.
 - Arrange ahead of time with someone at your workplace to call you if you do not arrive on schedule for work. Give a backup number or relative's name to contact if you cannot be reached at home.
3. **Memorize emergency numbers** such as the police, the taxi company or your faith community contact. Learn the numbers so you do not have to take time to look them up in a crisis.
4. **Pack a small bag** and put it in a place where the abusive person will not find it. Include things you will need, such as:
 - cash
 - debit or credit cards
 - health care cards for you and your children
 - car keys or access to transportation
 - identification like a driver's license, passport, etc.
 - prescription drugs or medications
 - copies of any no-contact orders.
5. **If there are children**
 - Pack items that will meet children's immediate needs.
 - Tell the children exactly what they should do in an emergency. Teach them how they will know it is an emergency, where they should go and what they should do when they get there.

“Physical abuse, the odd confrontation was two or three times. What I felt was emotional and mental [abuse]. There was never any threat that she would do me physical harm. She got angry enough a couple of times where there was physical [abuse]. She hit me once and gave me a black eye, but I never felt it as a threat. This fear of failure is maybe more important to a man than the threat of physical violence.”³

RESOURCES IN THE COMMUNITY

- For information about resources available in your community to assist with family violence issues, phone the 24-hour Family Violence Info Line at **310-1818**, toll-free in Alberta.

INFORMATION

- Visit www.familyviolence.gov.ab.ca for information and links to a variety of family violence resources.
- **Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS)** website is the provincial gateway for career, learning and employment information and services in Alberta. The site is provided through a provincial government partnership of Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry, Alberta Education, and Alberta Advanced Education and Technology.

The ALIS website has tip sheets about many topics, including family violence and the workplace. Find *Prevent Family Violence — A Supportive Workplace Can Help* at www.alis.gov.ab.ca/tips and click 'On the Job – Health and Wellness.'

- **Create your own programs and partnerships** with community agencies. The following websites contain information that may be helpful:
 - The Retail Council of Canada has encouraged employers to be aware of, and deal sensitively with, issues around family violence that can affect their staff (www.retailcouncil.org).
 - The Bullying Institute of Canada (and the United States) has also done research that draws links between bullying in the workplace and violence in the home (www.bullyinginstitute.org).
 - The Corporate Alliance to End Partner Violence (United States) is a non-profit organization working to reduce costs and consequences of family violence at work (www.caepv.org).
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- 21 The quotes throughout this booklet are from Albertans who have experienced the impact of family violence in their workplace.



Alberta Children's Services
Prevention of Family Violence and Bullying
6th Floor, Sterling Place
9940 - 106 Street
Edmonton, AB T5K 2N2
Family Violence Info Line: 310-1818
www.familyviolence.gov.ab.ca

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