



You are not alone

Overcoming Stigma and Encouraging Disclosure

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Unfortunately, there is still a lot of stigma around domestic/intimate partner violence. Most people are uncomfortable talking about it, including those experiencing it. To encourage people experiencing domestic/intimate partner violence to come forward, employers, supervisors, unions and Joint Health and Safety Committees/Health and Safety Representatives should work together to increase confidence in workplace supports, decrease stigma and encourage general discussion about this prevalent issue.

Overcoming Our Hesitation to Help

Domestic/intimate partner violence thrives when abused partners are isolated and many cultures have promoted a "mind your own business" attitude. Many of us learned to be hesitant about becoming involved in situations of domestic/intimate partner violence. Here are other ways of looking at some common concerns:

Table 1 Points of Concern and Points to Consider

Points of Concern	Points to Consider
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You feel it's none of your business 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It could be a matter of life or death - violence is everyone's business
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You don't know what to say 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Saying you care and are concerned is a good start
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You might make things worse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Doing nothing is more likely to make things worse
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You are afraid the perpetrator's violence will turn on you and threaten the safety of the workplace 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform the police if you receive threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It's not serious enough to involve the police 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Police are trained to respond to situations like this and they also know how to bring in other resources from the community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You are worried about maintaining confidentiality in the workplace 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Occupational health and safety legislation requires workplaces to both consider safety and respect privacy of employees The law requires employers to take every

Points of Concern	Points to Consider
	precaution reasonable in the circumstances to protect the worker

Open discussions about domestic/intimate partner violence decrease the risk for everyone in the workplace. If your employees feel comfortable bringing forward information about potential threats or violent behaviour, then both employers and co-workers will be better prepared to recognize potential risks and prevent a workplace incident.

People experiencing abuse might choose not to disclose if they:

- Fear losing their job
- See it as a personal/private matter
- Fear being humiliated by the perpetrator
- Are too ashamed to speak about it
- Feel co-workers, supervisors or union representatives are friends of the perpetrator
- Fear being held responsible for the domestic/intimate partner violence
- Fear that the perpetrator will be harmed
- Fear that the perpetrator will seek revenge
- Believe that the employer doesn't care and has no time for domestic/intimate partner violence problems
- Do not feel safe in the work environment/have concerns about confidentiality
- Do not trust the employer
- Are worried about cultural taboos (e.g. bringing shame or dishonour to the family)
- Do not recognize or want to recognize the experiences as abusive
- Believe that the abuse is their fault
- Fear being judged and seen as weak
- Are worried because the perpetrator also works for the organization

People experiencing abuse might choose to disclose if they:

- Have a sympathetic supervisor, co-workers or union representatives who are willing to listen, and they feel safe in their work environment
- Need someone to confide in and talk to
- Want to explain their decreased work performance, increased absences or tardiness
- Need time off from work for court appearances or medical appointments
- Want to confirm supervisor, co-worker or union representative suspicions
- Want to explain reasons for calling in sick, appearing upset at work or having physical injuries and bruises
- Want to explain past/future phone calls or visits from the perpetrator
- Want to warn the workplace that the perpetrator may show up there
- Are afraid for their safety
- Want support to call the police or other helpers
- Know their rights and want justice

In a healthy workplace where difficult topics can be discussed, people are more likely to notice when a co-worker is in distress and a person experiencing domestic/intimate partner violence can more safely disclose their situation. Have open discussions with your employees to improve workplace safety.

Non-disclosure

Be aware that an employee may choose not to disclose information about domestic/intimate partner violence during a first discussion. If this is the case, inform the employee that if they would like to discuss any matters that might be affecting them in the future, either yourself or a nominated contact is available to provide support.

Sources:

1. Worksafe BC. Addressing Domestic Violence in the Workplace: A Handbook for Employers. 2012.
2. Make It Our Business. Guidelines for communicating with employees at risk of workplace domestic violence. 2010.
http://makeitourbusiness.ca/sites/makeitourbusiness.ca/files/MIOB_Guidelines_Communicating_w-Employees.pdf
3. Refuge and Respect. Domestic violence resource manual for employers, 2nd Edition. 2010.