



You are not alone

Talking with a Perpetrator who is an Employee

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There may be situations in which both the abused partner and the perpetrator of domestic/intimate partner violence are your employees. If you feel unsafe starting a conversation with someone perpetrating violence, contact a professional for help. Safety is your primary concern and you should not put yourself or anyone else in your organization in a situation that seems unsafe.

You may become aware that an employee is using work hours and/or equipment such as telephones and emails to harass a partner. If your employee makes threats or commits acts of violence in the workplace, it is important to take immediate action. First, take steps to ensure the safety of the workplace. Review the safety planning section of the site for suggestions on how to handle a situation when two employees are involved in a domestic violence situation with each other.

Be alert to the possibility of domestic violence if you hear the following:

- "I have a drinking problem."
- "I need an anger management course."
- "I'm not handling stress at work."
- "My partner says I need help."
- "My partner and I are fighting a lot."
- "My partner and I need counselling."
- "My partner is not coping and is taking it out on me."
- "The kids are out of control and my partner's not firm enough."
- "I'm depressed/anxious/stressed/not sleeping/not coping/not myself."
- "I feel suicidal (or have threatened or attempted suicide)."
- "I'm worried about my rage at work, in the car, at football, etc."

If a suspected perpetrator presents a problem such as drinking, stress or depression, but does not refer to any abusive behaviour, these are useful questions to ask:

- "How is this drinking/stress at work/depression affecting how you are with your family?"
- "Do you find yourself getting angry with your partner?"

- "When you feel like that, how do you behave?"
- "Do you find yourself shouting/smashing things?"
- "Have these arguments ever become physical?"
- "Have you ever pushed or hit your partner?"
- "You must be worried about the effect this is having on you, your relationship with your partner and your children?"
- "It sounds like you want to make some changes for your benefit and for your partner/children. What choices do you have? What can you do about it? What help would you like to assist you to make these changes?"

If there is further indication that domestic/intimate partner violence may be an issue, other useful questions to ask include:

- "It sounds like your behaviour can be frightening; does your partner say they are frightened of you?"
- "How are the children affected?"
- "Have the police ever been called to the house because of your behaviour?"
- "Are you aware of any patterns – is the abuse getting worse or more frequent?"
- "Do you feel jealous and question your partner about where they go or who they see?"
- "How do you think alcohol or drugs affect your behaviour?"
- "What worries you most about your behaviour?"

If your employee confides or confirms that they are being violent at home, or you otherwise become aware that your employee is abusing a partner, you might try the following:

- If there is immediate danger, call the police or worksite security
- Reinforce your organization's accountability measures for abusers in the workplace
- Be direct about what you have seen but avoid making judgments
- Point out that you are talking to the individual because you are concerned about both parties in the relationship (and any children they may have)
- State that this behaviour needs to stop. Explain what actions your employee must take according to company policy and the consequences if such steps are not followed
- Refer your employee to professional, community, or workplace resources, such as your Employee Assistance Program, but don't force the employee to seek help and don't argue about the abuse
- Keep communication open and look for opportunities to help or connect them with community resources.

Consult with Legal and/or Employee and Labour Relations, as required.

You can open a conversation by saying things such as:

- "I appreciate you coming forward with this. There are community resources and counsellors that can help you. Would you like me to connect you with them now? Is your partner hurt? Do we need to get them some help? "

- "I'm concerned. It's clear that you feel a lot of anger and tension over this. What can we do to make sure nobody gets hurt? "
- "No matter how angry you are at your partner, there are ways to talk about that anger without being violent."
- "I know you believe they started it, but you are choosing to respond with violence. No one can make you be violent or abusive. It doesn't have to be this way."
- "You can get help. You can learn to control the way you react. There are other people who have been where you are and can help."
- "Would you like me to call a counsellor now?" Point out that you are not qualified to help directly, but can help your employee connect with trained professionals.

Keep the personal safety of yourself and your employees' top of mind and do not physically intervene in a violent situation or try to mediate relationship issues.

Good practice in working with perpetrators of domestic/intimate partner violence:

All people engaging with perpetrators should adopt the following constructive good practice responses:

- Be clear that abuse is always unacceptable and that it may constitute criminal behaviour
- Be clear that abusive behaviour is a choice
- Be respectful, but do not appear to be supportive of their abusive behaviour
- Be positive, it is possible for perpetrators to change if they recognize that they have a problem and take steps to change their behaviour
- Be clear that you might have to speak to other agencies if there are grounds to break confidentiality
- Be aware that on some level the perpetrator may be unhappy about their behaviour
- Be aware and tell the perpetrator that children are always negatively affected by living with domestic/intimate partner abuse, whether or not they witness it directly
- Be aware, and convey to the perpetrator, that domestic/intimate partner abuse is about a range of controlling behaviours, not just physical violence
- Be aware of the likely costs to the perpetrator of continued abuse (arrest, loss of relationship, negative impact on children) and assist them to see these

Sources:

1. Worksafe BC. Addressing Domestic Violence in the Workplace: A Handbook for Employers. 2012.
2. Refuge and Respect. Domestic violence resource manual for employers, 2nd Edition. 2010.