

Tips on Talking to an Employee About Family Violence

Knowing how to start a conversation about family violence with an employee can be difficult. Your role as an employer or supervisor is not to be a counsellor, but rather to approach the employee in a professional, sensitive manner and find out what help is required and where the employee can find it.


When an employee tells you about abuse, make a strong statement of support such as, “no one deserves to be abused.” When talking with an employee, your role is primarily to:

- provide initial support
- discuss the specific steps that can be taken to help this employee in the workplace
- refer the employee to available resources in the community or to an employee assistance program

When addressing the issue of family violence with an employee, ensure that you:

- offer to meet in private
- clearly identify any job performance problems you have observed (ex: “I notice that you are having difficulty meeting your deadlines and you don’t seem quite yourself. Is there anything I can do to help?”)
- express empathy that sometimes personal issues can interfere with work performance
- are aware that family violence victims and offenders can be of either sex; do not always refer to abusers as “he”

- use respectful language such as calling a person by their name or referring to the nature of the relationship such as “your partner” or “your boyfriend”; avoid using labels such as “abuser” or “batterer”
- are sensitive and avoid accusing, diagnosing or drawing conclusions about the situation
- listen to what the employee has to say and support her/him to seek help
- reassure the employee that her/his situation will not adversely affect how she/he is regarded by the company, unless there are any continued employment issues
- offer company and community resources such as employee assistance plan information or contact information for family violence prevention services and crisis line numbers
- develop a plan to help the employee maintain job performance and a strategy to implement it
- discuss the need for a protection plan in the workplace; help the employee understand how your security people (where available) may be able to support a workplace protection plan
- recommend that the employee speak to a trained counsellor who can help develop a sound plan to deal with the issues; resources may include an employee assistance plan or crisis line counsellors and other domestic abuse prevention professionals in the community

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- help the employee determine if the abuser's behaviour may put others in the workplace at risk
 - if it appears that others in the workplace might be in danger, discuss the extent to which the employee's confidentiality can be maintained

Adapted from: safe@work coalition

www.safeworkcoalition.org/workplacepolicy/approaching.html