

What is Family Violence?

The term family violence generally refers to violence inflicted by one family member against another. This can be violence between spouses, intimate partners, parents and their children, siblings, or even extended family members. The family violence that most often spills over into the workplace is abuse in intimate partner relationships, including boyfriend-girlfriend, husband-wife or same-sex partners.

Family violence is an abuse of power within relationships of trust or dependency. It always involves the use of power by one person to control another in a hurtful way. Violence takes many forms,

including: psychological abuse, emotional abuse, physical violence, neglect, sexual abuse, financial abuse, abandonment, harm to pets or destruction of property. Family violence does not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, socio-economic status, education, sexual orientation, employment or age. It takes place across all sectors of our society.

The people most vulnerable to abusive relationships are people who are traditionally perceived to have less power and control, including: children, women, older adults and persons with disabilities. While family violence is not caused by personal or job stress, alcohol use or tough economic times, these often contribute to the problem.

Common Types of Abuse

Examples of Abusive Behaviours

PHYSICAL

Unwanted physical contact includes: slapping, pinching, punching, pushing, kicking, hair-pulling, burning and cutting.

SEXUAL

Unwanted sexual contact includes: sexual touching, forced sex and humiliating acts, offensive and unsolicited sexual comments, controlling birth control practices, or being forced to watch or take part in sexual acts involving third parties.

PSYCHOLOGICAL/ EMOTIONAL

Occurs when a person subjects or exposes another to behaviour that is psychologically harmful. This involves willful infliction of mental or emotional anguish by threat, humiliation, or other verbal and non-verbal behaviours.

FINANCIAL

The use of finances or other resources to control behaviour.

Recognizing the Signs and Impacts of Family Violence

Family violence can be difficult to recognize. People who abuse their partners often do so in ways that leave no visible signs. When there are visible signs of abuse, victims may try to cover the evidence or make excuses for resulting behaviour or incidents. While it is very important to watch for signs of abuse, it is equally important to avoid drawing conclusions without speaking directly to the employee.

Possible Signs of Abuse

- bruises, cuts, broken bones, sprains and scarring
- expressing fear for own safety and that of children
- tries to hide injuries with clothing or make-up
- appears tired and not paying attention to fundamental needs such as eating regularly
- difficulty concentrating at work
- displaying dramatic change in manner of dress, mood or physical appearance
- avoids any form of confrontation
- has difficulty making firm decisions
- may experience panic attacks
- has difficulty developing and maintaining relationships
- excluding self from activities outside of work

What Victims May Experience

- difficulty performing tasks due to injury/distraction
- the need to hide truth of abuse
- self-blame
- fear of attention
- inability to disclose to anyone
- self-destructive behaviour
- excessive coping behaviour: over-eating, smoking, substance abuse or gambling
- obsessive-compulsive behaviours
- change of sleep and eating patterns resulting in energy loss
- loss of self-esteem, negative self-image or fear of success
- depression
- mental health issues develop from repeated exposure to crazy-making behaviour
- humiliation and/or shame
- constant fear of not having enough money to cover expenses

Impact on Performance at Work

- reduced productivity due to injury/distraction
- lies to co-workers and fears people will find out about the abuse
- fears working alone
- reluctant to perform certain tasks
- overly sensitive to any form of touching or closeness
- isolates self from co-workers
- difficulty focusing on tasks and not completing work in a timely manner
- needs time alone (often goes to washroom or works behind a closed door)
- receives frequent, inappropriate phone calls or visits to the workplace by abuser, trying to monopolize victim's time
- reluctant to pursue career development
- late for work, has no lunch
- wears outdated clothes

How Abuse Affects Others at Work

- co-workers sense something is wrong but do not know how to confront issue
- co-workers feel deceived, creating tension and distrust
- co-workers have to make accommodations for injured worker
- co-workers see similar pattern of behaviour repeated over time and become desensitized to abuse
- co-workers try to cover for the victim, causing uneven distribution of workload
- others in the workplace may be at risk of violence by abuser
- co-workers try to help victim by diverting abuser