Workplan: Workplace Domestic Violence Prevention



The Canadian Labour Congress states one in three workers have experienced domestic violence and over 80% of domestic violence victims report their work performance was negatively affected. A report from the Department of Justice Canada, Research and Statistics Division, estimates Canadian employers lose almost $80 million annually from the direct and indirect impact of domestic violence.

In the United States, one in every four women and one in 9 men will experience domestic violence in their lifetime, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The Department of Labor reports that victims of domestic violence lose nearly 8 million days of paid work per year in the U.S., resulting in a $1.8 billion loss in productivity for employers.

A study done by the Society for Human Resource Management, found 65% of companies don’t have a formal workplace domestic violence plan in place even though 16% of organizations have had a domestic violence incident in the past five years.

According to Workplaces Respond to Domestic & Sexual Violence, employer initiatives to prevent and respond to domestic and sexual violence and stalking in the workplace should cover:

1. Safety audits to prevent potential perpetrators’ access to the workplace and employees;
2. Threat assessments in collaboration with employees experiencing violence; and
3. Supportive responses in the aftermath of a violent incident.

1. **Conduct a Security Audit**

Work with law enforcement or a professional security company to determine safety and security issues. Check for the items below and other issues specific to your situation:

- Can non-employees enter the workplace without presenting identification,

using an access code or access card, or interacting with security?

- Are employee work schedules, contact information and home addresses easy for anyone to access?
- Does the parking lot, and/or the path to the nearest public transportation, have adequate lighting?
- Are there areas of the workplace where employees are isolated or alone for long periods of time?
- Are there safety issues specific to workers who have responsibilities outside the formal workplace?

2. **Employee-Centered Threat Assessments**

Upon learning that an employee is facing a potential threat, you should immediately work with the threatened employee and HR to develop a safe and effective response guided by the employee's needs.

To protect against the workplace impacts of domestic and sexual violence and stalking, workplaces can engage in threat assessments, which are a set of strategies or pathways that provide information about individuals who might pose a risk at a point in time.

Threat assessments can discern the:

- Exact nature and context of a threat and/or threatening behavior;
- Identified target (general or specific);
- Apparent motivation behind the threat, and
- A perpetrator's background, including work history, criminal record, mental health history, and past behavior on the job.

Regular threat assessment is necessary because threat level is never fixed and can change over time. For this reason, constant threat assessment is a must.

- If an employee knows a potential perpetrator, the employee typically has the greatest insight into their behavior, which means they often can provide considerable guidance in protecting themselves and the workplace.
- If an employee does not know a potential perpetrator, supervisors, with the help of HR, should work with the threatened employee to assess the level of danger and take protective action.

Apply the following principles when working with an employee to assess a potential threat:

- Ask about and assess facts relevant to the threat. To preserve privacy, limit personal questions about the history between the victim and perpetrator to only those that help uncover the potential risk.
- Keep confidential any information provided by the victim whenever possible, only sharing specific facts with those who need to know to implement safety measures.
- Do not advise the employee about personal safety issues away from work. If the employee has a relationship with the perpetrator, do not tell the employee what to do about the relationship.
- Refer the employee to qualified local services for victims to ensure that the employee receives appropriate information and assistance, including safety planning.

- If your Employee Assistance Program offers help for domestic abuse victims, share the information with the employee. It’s a good idea to share this information with all employees.

3. **Support the Employee**

Don’t blame or hold a victim responsible for a perpetrator’s threats or violent actions. An employee who is facing a potential threat may also need workplace accommodations to address their own particular safety issues, such as a Protective Order, also known as a Restraining Order. Depending on the extent in which a potential threat has been directed towards a workplace, you may consider consulting with the affected employee and obtaining the order in the employer’s name or a no-trespass order covering the work site.

Other accommodations to consider include:

- Obtaining the affected employee’s permission to provide relevant details about the potential perpetrator (such as a picture, physical description, license plate number, or vehicle make/model) to security personnel, reception staff, and other employees.
- Relocating the affected employee to another work area or altering their work schedule until the direct threat is over.
- With the affected employee’s input and permission, remove the affected employee’s contact information from directories and websites.