

KEEPING
YOU AND
YOUR JOB
SAFE



INFORMATION FOR WORKERS EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE





WHAT IS FAMILY VIOLENCE?

Domestic violence can take many different forms including intimidation, coercion or isolation, emotional, physical, sexual, mental, financial and spiritual abuse. If you feel scared of a partner, ex-partner or a family member, you may be experiencing domestic violence.

Domestic violence can also occur between people in an intimate relationship who do not live together, between people in same-sex relationships, between carers and the person in their care and between people in relationships. Men can also be victims

of domestic violence.

The violence tends to increase over time, becoming more serious and more frequent. It harms both the victim and others including children who witness the abuse.

Data collected by the world health organization and amnesty international show that one out of three women has experienced violence and that violence is the leading cause of death amongst women aged 16 to 44. It is estimated that 70% of this violence occurs in the family. Around 60% of affected women are scared and ashamed, and suffer in silence, without taking any steps to break the circle of violence. This has a negative impact on their health, their self-esteem, and their productivity at work.

Domestic violence is a complex problem of large dimensions which affects people from all regions, professions, and social backgrounds around the world. It is about power and control.

IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE A WORKPLACE ISSUE?

It can be. Work may be where you feel safe and respected and what is happening at home has no impact on your performance or safety - it is a private matter. But domestic violence can impact on you at work in the following ways:

- being prevented or delayed from getting to work
- being harassed or intimidated at work
- distressed or crying at work
- struggling to manage your workload and deadlines
- covering up what is happening

Domestic violence can be stressful, upsetting and distracting. It can make it hard to perform your duties and can also be a workplace safety risk.

Domestic violence impacting at work

If domestic violence is affecting your attendance, performance and safety at work then it is important that you get legal protection as soon as possible [and that the workplace is included as a protected place – amend if this is not the legal arrangement in your country].

Legal position

Insert here the legal position in your country.

Should I tell my employer (supervisor/manager) about what is happening?

You only need to tell your workplace about things that directly affect or impact on your work.

Is the abusive person:

- constantly calling, emailing or texting you at work
- following you to or from work
- making threats to harm you or your co-workers at work
- threatening to tell your boss embarrassing personal information
- coming into or hanging around your workplace to intimidate you

If any of these things are happening, you should tell your workplace. Your job and your safety might be at risk.

Another thing to consider is whether you need to negotiate time off to organise temporary safety measures such as changes to your working times and patterns, or attend appointments with support services, your child's school, your bank or to go to court.

Telling your workplace may be difficult, but being upfront about your situation may make it easier if the abusive person tries to cause trouble for you at work.

The capacity to stay financially independent is very important in surviving domestic violence and so remaining employed is vital.

Attitudes to domestic violence vary: some workplaces are supportive, providing paid leave and flexible working arrangements. Others are less supportive or not supportive at all or may not be aware of the issue.

Generally it's better to get advice from your union before raising the issue at work. Your union representative or the medical staff at the workplace may also assist you in raising the issue.

IT'S IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THAT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS NOT YOUR FAULT AND YOU SHOULD NOT FEEL ASHAMED. YOU HAVE A RIGHT TO FEEL SAFE AT HOME AND SAFE AT WORK.

Keep Records

Make a record of how the family violence is affecting you at work: dates, times, details (where, what happened, what was said, any witnesses).

This will help you if you decide to report any incidents to the police and would provide evidence to a court if necessary.

SAFETY AT WORK

Workplaces have a duty to ensure health and safety. Workers have a duty to take reasonable care to protect their own safety.

You can talk to your workplace about what it can do to assist you to be safe and keep doing your job. Safety planning can include things like:

- having someone walk you to your car or transport when you leave work
- asking your workplace to notify relevant staff not to tell anyone information about your location or movements
- making sure you're not left alone at a work location with public access
- providing a photo of the abusive person to front desk staff, so that they can identify them and call the police if necessary

Check your workplace health & safety policy: many workplaces have one. Your workplace may also have a policy on workplace violence.

Abusive calls, texts and emails

A supportive workplace can assist in protecting you from abusive calls and emails. Your workplace may already have policies and procedures on this. Options include:

- report calls or text messages containing threats of harm to the police (and workplace security) immediately. Note the time, date, length and content
- screen calls and voicemail – can someone else answer your phone?
- block or divert emails so you don't have to see them. Some email software (such as outlook) allows you to create 'rules' to automatically divert or block emails from any email address
- notify the abusive person's workplace if they are harassing you from their workplace as they are misusing work time/resources
- don't respond to abusive messages from your work email account or phone. This could be a breach of your work contract or workplace communications policy
- save abusive emails and text messages.



- save and print out copies of facebook (and similar social networks) messages (in case the sender deletes their account)
- police can trace calls and order phone records

Again, it's important to keep good records of any abusive phone calls, text messages or emails.

If I tell my workplace, will it be kept confidential?

Workplaces usually have policies about what information goes on your personal file. Your file is likely to include information about attendance, performance and conduct. If your workplace has specific rights and entitlements for workers experiencing family violence it is likely to be committed to confidentiality. If you disclose domestic violence to your workplace, you should ask for it to be kept confidential and not communicated to other people unless necessary for legal or safety reasons.

What if I'm being prevented from getting to work (or coming in late)?

If you have to miss work or are late due to domestic violence, you should call to tell your workplace you are unable to attend or will be late. If you don't turn up, they could assume you've quit. If you don't feel safe to tell your workplace why you're late or can't attend, you should speak to the union first.

What if my job is being threatened (performance management)?

If you have received a warning about performance issues, or you think you could lose your job, you need to contact the union as soon as possible.

Taking these steps may also be helpful:

- keep a written record of all performance related conversations with managers. Try to get managers to put their concerns and issues in writing
- ask for copies of any performance reviews (if relevant)
- keep a copy of workplace policies and procedures, such as disciplinary policies. Keep these records in hardcopy at home or in your car, don't leave them at work (just in case you do lose your job, and can't access the workplace).
- if management ask you to have a 'chat' or meeting about your work, ask whether you can have a support person present and for time to prepare
- discuss the meeting with the union in advance of the meeting so you are prepared
- take detailed notes during the meeting
- try to stay calm and polite in dealings with co-workers and management

What can i do if my employer treats me unfairly at work or sacks me?

If your employer treats you unfairly or tried to sack you because of your experience of domestic violence, contact the union immediately.

Where can i get support and advice?

The workplace is often the safest place from where to access advice and assistance as you can gather the information without fear of discovery or interruption.

Your union representative should also have a list of the support services offered in your area and can refer you to appropriate organisations that deal with family violence.

Your union representative may be trained in assisting members with domestic violence issues.

Any medical staff at the workplace could also provide additional support.

Your employer may have a policy on domestic violence. That would provide further information and, ideally, name trained contact people who can assist.

AGAIN, YOUR UNION REPRESENTATIVE CAN ADVISE YOU ON THESE MATTERS.

Acknowledgements

With grateful thanks to Ludo McFerran,
Project Manager
Safe at home, safe at work
Australian domestic and family violence clearinghouse
Web: www.dvandwork.unsw.edu.au

