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What is Domestic Violence?

Domestic violence is widely understood to be a pattern of behaviour used by one person to gain power and control over another person with whom he/she has or has had an intimate relationship. The pattern of behaviour may include physical violence, sexual, emotional, and psychological intimidation, verbal abuse, stalking and using electronic devices to harass and control.

Anyone can be a victim of domestic violence, whatever his/her age, race, economic status, religion, sexual orientation, or education.

While men can be victims of domestic violence, women represent the overwhelming majority of victims.

Recognizing Domestic Violence

While there are numerous manifestations of domestic violence, the most common one in the workplace is harassment, either over the phone or in person. The following are a list of signs to help recognize domestic violence:

1. The victim may try to cover up bruises, appear sad, lonely, and withdrawn. They may also have trouble concentrating on a task, apologize for the abuser's behaviour, or appear nervous when the abuser is in the workplace.
2. The victim may make last-minute excuses or cancellations or use drugs or alcohol to cope.
3. The victim may miss work frequently or more often than usual with no explanation.
4. The abuser may interfere with the victim at work by phoning or emailing repeatedly, or by watching or stalking the victim.
5. The abuser may display jealous or controlling behaviour by arriving at the workplace for no reason, asking other employees questions about the whereabouts of the victim or threatening the victim.
6. The abuser may attempt to prevent the victim from getting to work by physically restraining her or interfering with her transportation.

Reasonable Precautions

It is important to deal with each situation on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the needs of the individuals involved.

Together with the Safety & Disability Administrator, the Principal/Supervisor and the employee will create a safety plan unique to the individual's situation. The plan will look at increased safety measures that can be implemented in the workplace.

Privacy While Protecting Employees

Sometimes the employer's duty to take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances to protect employees may outweigh an individual's expectation for privacy. In other words, the victim's privacy may need to be balanced against ensuring the safety of others.

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Communicating on a “need to know” basis will ensure that information about a domestic violence situation is kept confidential or restricted to a minimum number of employees. (For example, only those who are directly responsible for ensuring the safety of those employees who may be at risk.) Involving the victims in communication decisions may lessen the impact. For example, discuss who needs to be informed, what information will be communicated, expectations of confidentiality, and what the consequences will be for others if confidentiality is breached. Caution should be exercised to ensure that the victim’s safety is not compromised.

What you can do to Help or if an Employee Discloses Abuse

If warning signs of domestic violence are noticed, or if an employee discloses abuse, here are some things you can do:

All Employees:

- Talk to the victim privately about what you or others have seen. Express concern for her safety.
- Assist with reporting the incident to the Principal/Supervisor or Safety and Disability Administrator.
- Provide information on help that is available and offer referrals to appropriate agencies (ex. Shelters, Assaulted Women’s Helpline, Counselling, Employee and Family Assistance Program).
- Let the victim know that you will need to call the police if violence occurs at the workplace.

Principal/Supervisors should also:

- Help the victim develop a safety plan that takes into consideration safety at the workplace.
- Implement security measures and explore alternative work arrangements to increase safety.
- Assure the victim you are available to talk at any time and that support is available.
- Recognize that the victim knows the most about the violence and they may deny the signs of domestic violence.
- Let the victim know as the Supervisor you are responsible for workplace safety. Ask the victim to tell you if safety in the workplace becomes a concern.