



# Family Violence and the Workplace

## Information Sheet

**Family violence** is the abuse of power within relationships of family, trust or dependency that endangers the survival, security or well-being of another person.<sup>1</sup>

### Get Help

**If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, phone 911.**

If you suspect that a child may be abused, neglected or exposed to family violence, phone your local Child and Family Services Authority, the Child Abuse Hotline at **1-800-387-KIDS (5437)** or the police.

For information about family violence resources available in your community, phone the 24-hour Family Violence Info Line at **310-1818**, toll-free in Alberta, or visit **[www.familyviolence.alberta.ca](http://www.familyviolence.alberta.ca)**.

### Why should a workplace be concerned about family violence?

**Family violence does not stay at home.** Victims of family violence, and people who abuse family members, come to work. They bring their problems with them. That can affect a business and its bottom line.

**Performance.** What happens at home can affect people's performance at work. Employees living in violent homes may be absent more often and have lower individual productivity.

**Safety.** If an employee has a violent partner, that partner may cause disruptions and threaten employee safety — not only the safety of the abused employee but co-workers as well. If an employee *is* a violent partner, that employee may be using the workplace as a base for harassing the abused partner.

**Good business practice.** Employers understand that the personal well-being of employees is important to an organization's success. Addressing an issue that affects productivity and safety makes good business sense. Employers who have implemented family violence policies report an increase in staff morale.

Many employers are now implementing family violence policies in their workplaces.

### What are signs that family violence may be affecting an employee?

**A victim of family violence** may show some of the following signs:

- injuries like bruises, black eyes or broken bones, often explained by “falls,” “accidents” or “being clumsy”
- unseasonal clothing, such as long-sleeves or turtlenecks in summer, or wearing heavy makeup
- increased number of phone calls, emails or faxes (there may be strong reactions to these calls or reluctance to talk with the caller)
- disruptive visits to the workplace by a current or former partner
- increased absences or lateness
- change in job performance, such as poor concentration, more errors, slowness or inconsistent work quality
- anxiety, fear, emotional distress or depression

**A person who abuses family members** may:

- call, e-mail or visit a partner repeatedly during work hours
- blame others for problems, especially the person's partner
- show “defensive injuries” such as scratches from fending off an attack
- be abusive towards, or bully, others at work
- be extremely rigid and controlling



## How can a workplace respond?

### 1. Understand the problem

- Ensure managers and staff know the facts about family violence and how it can affect a business. They can then plan and implement family violence policies.
- Consider delegating a manager whom employees can approach about family violence. Employees affected by family violence will first go to people they trust, such as a co-worker or supervisor, who can then approach the manager who has necessary information.

### 2. Provide information to all employees

- Ensure all managers and staff understand how to recognize family violence, how to respond and where to get help.
- Conduct mandatory education sessions so family violence victims and abusers will attend.
- Make information, such as posters, pamphlets and brochures, available to staff.

### 3. Offer referrals to services

- If your organization has an Employee Assistance Program that could provide help or counselling, ensure employees know how to access this.
- Ensure staff members are aware of family violence services in the community, such as counselling, programs for abusers and shelters.

### 4. Practice prevention

- Develop proactive policies outlining how safety and other issues of violence are addressed in the workplace.
- Eliminate behaviours that put employees down.
- Treat employees with respect. Show no tolerance for staff abuse or bullying.
- Support community programs for family violence prevention.

## Get information

- **Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS)** has tip sheets about family violence and the workplace ([www.alis.alberta.ca/tips](http://www.alis.alberta.ca/tips)).
- **Retail Council of Canada** encourages employers to be aware of, and deal sensitively with, family violence that can affect their staff ([www.retailcouncil.org](http://www.retailcouncil.org)).
- **Workplace Bullying Institute** has research drawing links between bullying at work and violence at home ([www.workplacebullying.org](http://www.workplacebullying.org)).

“I remember the first co-worker who asked me if my fat lip was caused by my ex-husband. He may have felt that it didn’t do any good, or that he was wrong to ask. But by asking that question, he planted a seed in my mind that what was happening to me wasn’t right.”<sup>2</sup>

“What I felt was the emotional and mental abuse... She got angry enough a couple of times where there was physical [abuse]. She hit me once and gave me a black eye, but I never felt it as a threat. This fear of failure is maybe more important to a man than the threat of physical violence.”<sup>3</sup>

1. Alberta Children and Youth Services. (2005). *Alberta Roundtable on Family Violence and Bullying: Finding Solutions Together*. Edmonton, AB: Alberta Children and Youth Services. [www.child.alberta.ca/home/documents/familyviolence/rpt\\_opfvb\\_finding\\_solutions\\_high.pdf](http://www.child.alberta.ca/home/documents/familyviolence/rpt_opfvb_finding_solutions_high.pdf)

2. Adapted from Colorado Bar Association materials. *Recognize. Respond. Refer. What to Do When Abuse at Home Comes to Work*. Retrieved July 2007 from Liz Claiborne, Love is Not Abuse website: [www.loveisnotabuse.com/web/guest/recognize.respond.refer](http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/web/guest/recognize.respond.refer)

3. Alberta Children and Youth Services. (2005). *Family Violence: It's Your Business Community Resource Guide*, p. 54. Edmonton, AB: Alberta Children and Youth Services. [www.child.alberta.ca/home/documents/familyviolence/rpt\\_opfvb\\_community\\_resource\\_guide.pdf](http://www.child.alberta.ca/home/documents/familyviolence/rpt_opfvb_community_resource_guide.pdf)