



Manager/Supervisor Handbook - Intimate Partner Violence

EFAP Program



1-866-565-4903
TTY: 1-888-384-1152
Numéro sans frais - en français : 1-866-565-4903
International (Call collect): 604-689-1717

Homeweb.ca



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Introduction

Purpose

Many of us, from time to time, encounter personal problems which affect our sense of well being and our ability to function both at work and at home. Often, if help is available early on, these situations can be resolved before they become serious.

The Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) is designed to offer confidential, short-term counselling to help employees and their immediate family members overcome personal problems. A wide range of helpful information, online self-help courses, and other wellness services are also available and can be accessed through homeweb.ca.

Any permanent employee who is eligible to receive regular group benefits can use this program. Eligible spouses and dependents of eligible employees may also use the services of the EFAP. Occasionally, exceptions to the eligibility rules will be considered.

The Employee and Family Assistance Program is a 24 hours a day, seven days a week service, which provides assistance to employees and their families. The program offers complete confidentiality, access to a local clinician, and assistance for a wide range of personal problems. Any employee or eligible dependent is able to receive the required professional counselling at no cost.

Important Contacts

To access the EFAP for services, or to obtain any information you require, contact the Homewood Health Client Services Centre, Canada and USA inclusive.

1-866-565-4903 (English)

1-866-565-4903 (Numéro sans frais - en français)

1-888-384-1152 (TTY)

604-689-1717 (International, Call Collect)

www.Homeweb.ca



To a large extent the success of the EFAP depends on you and your knowledge and support of the program.

About Counselling Services

Types of Consultation

While most counselling is provided face to face, employees also have the option to receive counselling telephonically, or online through video, email or chat formats. The counselling approach is short-term, solution-focused.

In all instances, confidentiality is guaranteed. No identifying information is transferred to anyone without prior written consent. The only exceptions are scenarios where children are at risk, risk to self or others and subpoena.

Core counselling expertise includes but is not limited to:

- marital and family problems
- work-related stress
- **relationship difficulties**
- **separation/divorce/custody**
- financial and legal difficulties
- alcohol and drug dependency
- gambling and other addictions
- eating disorders
- difficulties with children
- psychological disorders
- anger management
- sexual harassment and abuse
- bereavement
- aging parents
- child/elder care resources
- retirement planning

Voluntary and Confidential

The EFAP is intended to be a predominantly voluntary program. As such any employee or eligible dependent experiencing a problem simply contacts the EFAP directly and receives assistance. Accessing the program in this way makes their participation totally voluntary.

In some instances an individual will access the program because a family member, friend, co-worker, or even a supervisor or manager will recommend support through the EFAP program. This type of entry into the EFAP is considered an **Assisted Referral**. Assisted Referrals are completely voluntary even though the recommendation originates from another

person. Experience shows that 99.5% of employees who use EFAPs do so in either of these two ways. In both instances use of the program has been completely voluntary.

A critical component to the success of any EFAP is confidentiality. The Homewood Health EFAP guarantees that any person who has become involved in the program voluntarily can expect their involvement to be held in absolute confidentiality and anonymity. No information will be shared with anyone unless voluntary written consent has been given by the individual.

Costs of the Service

There are no costs to employees and their immediate families when they receive this service.

Occasionally, one of the EFAP clinicians may refer the individual to an outside service or agency if an extended counselling program is required or if some specialized treatment is warranted. In these instances, the EFAP clinician will stay in touch with the individual until the problem is resolved and the outside service is no longer required.

An attempt is made to refer to outside services where provincial health plans and government services will cover the cost.



IMPORTANT! The employee's right to privacy must be respected by all of us: Homewood Health, and you, the supervisor.

Key Person Advice Line



The *Key Person Advice Line* gives you, the manager, supervisor, owner or union representative the opportunity to contact a Homewood Health senior level clinician for prompt and timely consultation should a situation arise in the workplace that could benefit from professional input.

Situations that typically benefit from consultation or coaching include, but are not restricted to:

- Workplace conflict;
- Employee problems;
- Unusual employee behaviour;
- Providing assistance to employees; and
- Strategies for assisted referrals.

Features

- Consultations provided by senior level clinicians with extensive experience in workplace issues.
- Toll-free 1-800 number.
- 24/7 access from anywhere in the world.
- Fully bilingual.
- Confidentiality is guaranteed.

Questions? More information? For coaching or consultation use our Client Services Centre numbers, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

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International (Call Collect): 604-689-1717**

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Vitality

An EFAP Newsletter for Human Resource and Occupational Health Professionals, Program Administrators, Supervisors, and Key Personnel



Surviving Abuse and Acts of Violence: An Ongoing Recovery Guide

Regardless of where abuse and violence occurs, outside or within the workplace, its destructive nature will impact your employees and presents human resources with unique challenges. From domestic violence, sexual harassment and physical assaults to intimidation, verbal abuse and microaggressions, acts of abuse and violence take several forms, but as an employer, it all boils down to one question: How can you best prevent, detect, intervene and protect?

Workplace violence is not defined by physical assault alone. It's comprised of several actions and/or behaviours which present far-reaching challenges and encompasses extensive and complex problems for both employer and employees. According to the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS), it can be defined as "any act in which a person is abused, threatened, intimidated or assaulted in his or her employment." It is generally meant to include threatening behaviour, verbal or written threats, verbal abuse and physical attacks.

Some Canadian jurisdictions include harassment as a form of violence, while others define harassment separately. Still, according to the CCOHS, harassment can be defined as "any behaviour that demeans, embarrasses, humiliates, annoys, alarms or verbally abuses a person and that is known or would be expected to be unwelcome. These behaviours include words, gestures, intimidation, bullying, or other inappropriate activities."

Abuse and violence are prevalent.

Harassment was the most common type of aggression faced by the respondents of an online survey conducted by Employment and Social Development Canada in 2017¹, with 60% reporting having experienced it. Thirty percent of respondents said that they had experienced sexual harassment, 21% that they had experienced violence and 3% that they had experienced sexual violence.



A 2014 Angus Reid Institute national survey² also found that over a quarter (28%) of Canadians have been on the receiving end of unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, or sexually-charged talk while on the job. Nearly half (47%) of women aged 35-54 reported having been harassed. People with disabilities and members of a visible minority are also more likely to experience harassment than other groups.

A 2001 U.S. study³ estimated that 2.3 million men and 1.1 million women had been victimized by a co-worker at some point. That being said, the majority of incidents of workplace violence are committed by individuals who are strangers to the victim. Men are less likely than women to know the perpetrator, with 52.9% of men considering their assailants strangers compared to only 41% of females. Regarding outside perpetrators, certain professions are more likely to experience workplace violence. According to the United States Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration, "Among those with higher-risk are First Responder workers, healthcare professionals, public service / customer service workers, more often those who exchange money with the public, and those who work alone or in small groups."

Violence hits your bottom line

We cannot ignore domestic violence. You might ask, what does domestic violence have to do with the workplace. In 2017, one of the most in-depth research papers undertaken in Canada brought to light several key findings on the effects of domestic violence in the workplace. Working with 22 of Ontario's Partner Assault Response programs, researchers at the University of Toronto's Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) partnered with the Centre for Research & Education on Violence against Women & Children (CREVAWC) and conducted a survey of 500 perpetrators of domestic violence. The survey sought findings on both the workplace of the perpetrator and the victim. It was found that domestic violence is linked to substantial negative effects on the productivity and safety of workers with close to half of respondents reporting violence issues negatively impacting their job performance.

More specifically, 33% of respondents reported being in contact with their partner or ex-partner during work hours to engage in emotionally abusive behaviours or to monitor their victims' actions or whereabouts. A quarter of the

abusing offenders used their workplace time to drop by the home or workplace of their victims. Most respondents said they were unaware or unsure of any resources and support available to them in the workplace regarding domestic violence issues and what help was available. Nearly 10% of respondents reported they caused, or almost caused, a work accident as a result of being distracted by these issues. About 25% told that violence issues led to absenteeism and taking paid time off work to deal with domestic violence issues.

A 2009 report⁴ from the federal Justice Department estimated the total economic impact of spousal violence on employers in Canada that year was about \$117 million. A survey by Western University in Ontario, Canada and the Canadian Labour Congress published in 2014, said about 34% of respondents reported having experienced intimate partner violence in their lifetime and 35.4% reported having at least one co-worker who they believed was a victim of domestic violence.

In the rest of this article, we'll be looking at:

- How to detect
- How to intervene
- How to prevent through sound internal policies

To help shed some light on those issues, we've asked the expert advice of Andrea Dermody, Trauma Specialist at Homewood Health.

As an employer, how can I detect if an employee suffers from abuse and violence?

Where cases involving acts of violence perpetrated by outside offenders in the context of one's occupation can most often be obvious (armed robbery, physical aggression towards a first responder, etc.), forms of internal workplace abuse and violence may be non-obvious and can be difficult to detect because they are subtle and can be laden within workplace culture.

"They can come in the shape of harassment or microaggressions which can be quite insidious", says Ms. Dermody.

Microaggressions are subtle, derogatory messages sent verbally or not, consciously or not, that are communicated at a member of a marginalized group. Compounded over time on a daily regime, those microaggressions can produce harmful effects. Andrea shared that, while she did not experience macroaggression, she experienced violence in the form of verbal and emotional harassment in a previous workplace.

It was carried out by another employee engaging in verbal abuse. Their actions and words were subtle at times, for example, in the form of passive aggressive comments on the way I looked and my personality, engaging in eye rolling and silent treatment. However, their actions could also be quite obvious at others times, for example, questioning my competency to speak on certain topics related to my role at events within the organization as well as responding to my interactions to them by raising their voice, puffing up their body and swearing at me during our conversations. I felt quite helpless in this situation. I noticed that my feelings toward my workplace were impacted, my feelings of anxiety were extremely high and I lost 15 pounds, which, for me, was a strong indicator that my sympathetic nervous system (threat response – fight, flight, and freeze response) had become quite activated. Unfortunately, at that time, I did not have the confidence to address it directly with the person.

It's not uncommon for employees to find it difficult to address the violence that they are experiencing from their aggressor. Dermody identifies that "[individuals who experience violence at work can feel stuck or unsure of how to manage their experience because of lack of knowledge as well as fear of their employment being in jeopardy, which is why it is so important for employers to promote awareness and knowledge regarding how violence in the workplace is managed and the consequences that result from those unacceptable actions or behaviours]". In the case of criminal assaults, workplace violence (47%) is less likely to be reported than non-workplace violence (52%)⁵.

So the question remains: How can employers detect occurrences if victims do not come forward?

According to the Canadian Mental Health Association (2014), 50% of workplace harassment victims suffer mental health problems. Fear and discomfort about interacting daily with the aggressor will cause a great deal of anxiety and the longer the situation persists, the more chances it could lead

to psychosomatic symptoms, depression and induce trauma to the point of potentially developing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder(PTSD).

Ms. Dermody recommends looking for changes in behaviour, such as an employee becoming withdrawn or socially isolated. Performance can also be an indicator. There can be changes in one's level of engagement and increased absenteeism. If it arises between colleagues, employee communications and general team climate can be affected.

"It's important to note that these behaviours can also be observed in individuals experiencing a high amount of stress in their lives. This is also why it is important to encourage and foster good relationships between employees and their employers. Having an employer taking a sincere and empathetic interest in the well-being of their employees is key to success of the organization as a whole".

As an employer, how can I take action?

"If employers can create a knowledge base or space for their employees to come to them, there can be an emphasis placed on problem-solving the situation. When violence exists, it can be further perpetuated by an unawareness of resources for support."

One key action is to actively promote knowledge that your workplace offers support to those affected by violence, regardless of if it is taking place at work or at home. Having workers or employers with some trauma-informed background or training is also helpful for supporting workers to seek help, feel understood and get connected to services and supports through their workplace or in their community.

"It does not mean that a person is an expert on violence or abuse, rather, it's that they have knowledge of how to support an individual from a whole person perspective, that is, to make sure that when a person encounters violence their physical, social and psychological concerns are recognized and taken into consideration."

Talking about abuse is not an easy topic, which is why bringing in an expert to address employees and/or hosting an internal human resources session with training for your staff on being trauma-informed is important.

“Another important quality to emphasize is the use of empathy during interactions with a person who is impacted by violence, which can go a long way in helping a person coming forward to feel safe, understood and stabilized.”

On makeitourbusiness.ca, you’ll find guidelines on how to communicate with an employee at risk. In a nutshell, it advises the following:

- Be supportive and reassure that coming forward was the right decision and will not affect their status or their work within the organization;
- Listen carefully and respect their suggestions, needs and choices;
- Express understanding that personal issues can influence or sometimes affect work performance;
- Tell the person it’s not their fault and that, for you and the organization, abuse is taken seriously, it is not normal and it is definitely not accepted.
- Validate their feelings, whether they feel hurt, anger, fear, and shame or trapped in a situation embroiled in conflicting emotions.
- Focus on safety and assess the situation. Is the situation a crisis? Does it represent a threat to this person or other employees?

It’s important to note, given the discussion points above, the conversations you have must remain confidential unless there is an underlying risk of harm to the employee and/or immediate members of their family.

Do I have to take action?

If a person is not willing to talk about what they are going through, you can still offer your ongoing support to them for when they feel they are ready to get help. Initiate open discussions on safety concerns and support them to engage in safety planning, if needed. As mentioned above, such conversations are private and further action must be at the direction of the employee unless there is an underlying risk of harm to the employee and/or their immediate family members. You have to establish clear communication about when they think they may need to get authorities involved or when you may need to as an employer. Even if a worker does not want any steps taken, as the employer you may still be required to take some action to protect the targeted worker and other workers, depending on the circumstances.

“Consent and confidentiality need to be considered but safety is a priority. Policy and procedure are needed for this very reason and employers have to be familiar with their duty to report. It is also important to consult with experts in one’s community such as the Police and Children’s Aid Society to address safety concerns and questions related to duty to report”, advises Andrea Dermody.

Which means that, if there is an immediate risk or threat to employees, or a case of workplace domestic violence, you must report it to the appropriate authorities, such as the police and workplace experts. So you must make it clear to your employee that it is possible you have a legal obligation to act to protect them and other employees from violence.

“Additionally, by speaking to the employee impacted by violence and asking them what they think needs to be done to protect that person and also what steps needs to be taken to protect their coworkers, you will help instill that person with a sense of power and choice in a situation where their power and choices may have been taken from them by the aggressor.”

Andrea Dermody adds that when discussing problem solving as related to violence in the workplace between staff members, it is indeed important that the worker who is impacted by violence is supported, but that the perpetrator of the violence shouldn’t be overlooked.

“He or she should be provided with options for getting support as well. In order for violence to stop or be prevented in the workplace (or anywhere), there needs to be both preventative and reactive responses in place for all parties effected.”

“P” for Prevention as in Policy

As the CCOHS advocates: “The most important component of any workplace violence prevention program is management commitment. Management commitment is best communicated in a written policy.”

With regard to policy, Ms. Dermody would recommend that employers consider working with an anti-violence group in their community or province to get further guidance and expertise.

A written policy will inform employees about “what behaviour (e.g., violence, intimidation, bullying, harassment, etc.) management considers inappropriate and unacceptable in the workplace; what to do when incidents covered by the policy occur” and will also provide contacts for reporting any incidents. Most importantly, a policy gives employees an avenue to seek assistance or support when needed.

References:

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2. Canadian Business, 2014. What Canadians say about workplace sexual harassment. Source: <https://www.macleans.ca/work/what-canadians-say-about-workplace-sexual-harassment/>
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4. An Estimation of the Economic Impact of Spousal Violence in Canada, 2009. Justice Canada. Source: https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/fv-vf/rr12_7/p6.html
5. Workplace Violence, 1993-2009. National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS). Erika Harrell, Ph.D., Bureau of Justice Statistics. March 29, 2011. Source: <https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=2377>



 Send us your questions, comments, and suggestions — vitality@homewoodhealth.com

For more information, please contact our Client Services Representatives available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in English or French. All calls are completely confidential.

Contact Us

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Indicators of Personal Problems

Becoming aware of how problems may manifest in the workplace

Indicators of personal problems can be identified by distinct changes in behaviour or performance, typically over a period of time, and increasing in frequency. It's not your job to diagnose your employees, but as a people leader, it's important not to ignore signs of a personal problem given your role in supporting performance in the workplace. It is very important that you do not attempt to diagnosis as this often takes you beyond what you as a supervisor/manager can appropriately and safely do. Instead, focus on work performance. It is felt that with this information you are better positioned to understand the meaning of behaviours that you may notice in the workplace.

Indicators of Stress

Physical

- change in normal biological habits
- decreased activity levels
- difficulty breathing deeply
- faster pulse
- headaches
- muscle tenseness
- pattern of minor illness
- poor diet or inconsistent eating patterns
- problematic or irregular sleep
- stomach and intestinal difficulties
- unusual sweating
- weight gain or loss

Environmental

- consistently not getting your work done within normal work hours
- fatigue at work which disappears when you leave work
- negative feedback from colleagues, friends, family

Behavioural/Psychological

- boredom
- emotional sensitivity (feeling on the verge of crying)
- feeling depressed
- inability to concentrate at will
- increased drinking, smoking, etc.
- increased irritability
- nervous tics
- preoccupied thoughts
- uncontrolled mood swings which last for three weeks or more

Appendix

- A. **Performance Indicators for the Troubled Worker**
- B. Intimate Violence Overview

Performance Indicators For The Troubled Worker

Please check all that apply.

ABSENTEEISM

- Absenteeism may be legitimate and still be a problem
- Unauthorized leave
- Excessive sick leave
- Frequent Monday and/or Friday absences
- Excessive lateness, particularly if on Monday or returning from lunch
- Leaving work early when inappropriate
- Peculiar and increasingly improbable excuses for absences
- Higher absenteeism rate than other workers for various health reasons

RISK POTENTIAL

- Accidents on the job
- Frequent near misses
- Undue deliberation when carrying out activities
- Inattentiveness to safety procedures
- Lack of caution when carrying out activities
- Covers up accidents/near misses rather than accepting responsibility
- Careless handling and maintenance of equipment
- Frequent injuries or lost time from accidents on or off the job

MENTAL/EMOTIONAL CONCERNS

- Difficulty in recalling instructions, details, etc.
- Increasing difficulty in handling complex work assignments
- Unexplained memory lapses
- Outbursts, crying
- Outbursts, anger
- Mood swings
- Difficulty in concentration
- Making poor decisions (especially impulsive ones)
- Fearful, anxious, suspicious
- Difficulty adjusting to changes

Performance Indicators for the Troubled Worker (continued) (Please check all that apply)

WORKPLACE Demeanor

- Coming to/returning to work in an obviously abnormal condition
- "Sloppy" appearance
- Inappropriate clothing

GENERAL LOWERED JOB EFFICIENCY

- Missed deadlines
- Mistakes due to inattention or poor judgement
- Wasting materials
- Alternate periods of high and low efficiency
- Complaints from users of products or services
- Improbable excuses for poor job performance
- Greater effort required for work
- Task/projects take more time to complete
- Deteriorating quality of work
- Easily fatigued
- Decreasing reliability

WORK RELATIONSHIPS

- Overreaction to real or imagined criticism
- Blaming co-workers for mistakes
- Abrasiveness with supervisors or co-workers
- Borrowing money from co-workers
- Insisting that co-workers are out to get him/her
- Unreasonable resentments
- Avoidance of superiors, co-workers
- Complaints from colleagues



Life Line

Issue :

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE



The breakdown of any relationship into one where violence and abuse become the norm can terrify the victim and damage the family members.

This month, we're talking about something that's often kept silent: intimate partner violence. We'll look at what intimate partner violence is, the alarming statistics, examine the implications of COVID-19, and identify some warning signs. We will also focus on tools to help someone you believe is experiencing domestic violence and taking action to leave an abusive relationship.

Intimate partner violence can occur in any relationship where there is an imbalance of power. Most often, abusers use a combination of physical force, emotional intimidation, and psychological terror to either threaten or abuse the victim. The victim lives in constant fear for themselves or others that the abuser has targeted. As a result, victims often live with chronic stress and stay silent as they try to protect themselves and/or others. They may hope that the abusive situation can be explained away as a reaction to someone having a bad day. They often try and convince themselves that it won't be repeated because it's not bad all the time or that people around them will notice something.

There's a tremendous amount of social stigma around intimate partner violence. Victims may think that it will be easier to stay in a toxic relationship and project an image that everything is wonderful. They believe that if they revealed anything to the contrary, it could be catastrophic. They may become stuck in a cycle and endure repeated abuse for an extended period, perhaps years. Victims often fear judgment from society, friends, and family for living in an abusive relationship. Exposing the abuse would mean that they need to share details about situations that may be embarrassing and painful to reveal. If children are involved, the victim may fear airing this information because they are worried that they will be considered a "bad parent" for letting it continue. As a result, intimate partner violence is grossly under-reported. Ultimately, its fear and a lack of confidence that keep victims quiet. One researcher found that victims have tended to "return to the relationship seven times before they leave for good."¹



Quick facts

- 79% of police reports show that women the most frequent victims of intimate partner violence. That's 4x the rate for men.²
- Women are "twice as likely to report being sexually assaulted, beaten, choked or threatened with a gun or knife" and have "higher rates of injury compared to male victims (40% of female victims to 24% of male victims)."³
- Women are more affected by long-term PTSD than men.⁴
- In same-sex relationships, women who identified as lesbian or bisexual reported significantly higher rates of violence by an intimate partner.⁵
- It's estimated that 1/3 of victims are male. Men often experience verbal and emotional abuse rather than physical violence.⁶ Still, they are reluctant to report because of embarrassment, stigma, fear of not being believed, religious beliefs, lack of resources, denial and revenge.⁷
- Women between the ages of 15-24 present the highest rates of violence while dating.⁸

"She sent text-message after text-message demanding to know where I was and why I wasn't responding instantly."

~ a 27-year-old man who lived with his abuser for four years

*Names have been removed to protect identities.

Violence against Indigenous women

For years, reports have shown that Indigenous women have been experiencing disproportionate incidents of violence. Though we could locate some statistics to illustrate the situation, it's anticipated that these numbers are significantly under-reported.

In Canada, data collected by Statistics Canada in 2018 showed that "59% of First Nations women, 64% of Metis women and 44% of Inuit women suffered from psychological, physical or sexual intimate partner violence. Overall, the data represented 61% of Indigenous women."⁹

In the U.S., the Department of Justice found that "American Indian and Alaska Natives are two and a half times more likely to experience violent crimes" when compared to the national average for all ethnicities."¹⁰

In both countries, grassroots efforts to identify the plight of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women continue in their attempts to bring awareness to the complexities of the situation.

There are many contributing factors, such as but not limited to:

- The isolation of Indigenous communities; food, water, and housing insecurity; and the lack of access to comprehensive healthcare and victim services organizations
- Victimization that has been perpetuated and cycled. It relates to the colonization process that intentionally destroyed Indigenous communities, families, and culture. It has introduced layers of intergenerational trauma that has manifested today in the destructive legacies of substance abuse, suicide, addiction, incarceration, serious illness, and unemployment.

What are the main types of intimate partner violence?

Intimate partner violence can be grouped into three main types: physical, emotional, and psychological.

Victims of physical abuse may be hit, slapped, kicked, pushed, punched, and spat upon. They could face sexual violence or be assaulted with a weapon.

With emotional abuse, victims can face verbal assaults of abusive language or yelling. They can also experience violent acts or threats against their property, pets, or even children. Often, the abuser tries to isolate the victim so that they no longer interact with family or friends.

Psychological abuse can include neglect, preventing a victim to leave home and earning an income, and withholding money to create economic or financial hardships purposefully. The abuser may also levee severe criticism of the victim's abilities to manage money, maintain relationships, and critically damage their self-esteem and self-worth.

Victims often feel vulnerable because of the social inequalities they face, such as food, labour, or housing insecurities and their strained ability to access healthcare. One study by Western University's Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children found immigrants and BIPOC are "more exposed and less protected."¹¹

"He was careful to never hit my face, only areas that would be covered by clothing. It never occurred to me that what had started as teasing would escalate to harassment and then violence like this. It can happen to you."

~ a 34-year-old woman who endured escalating abuse in her marriage *Names have been removed to protect identities.

How does intimate partner violence affect a victim's health?

Intimate partner violence certainly takes its toll on a victim's health. Physical violence can result in sprains, broken bones, wounds, scars, and severe hearing and vision problems. There can be injuries to voices, teeth, and hair loss. Victims can also be affected with chronic pain and headaches, or even experience Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS). Sexual health can also be affected where victims experience STDs, ongoing pain, infections, unplanned pregnancies, or infertility.

Equally alarming is the prevalence of psychological issues affecting victims of domestic abuse. Someone might present initially with low self-esteem, but over time the abuse escalates psychological responses. Victims may begin to harm themselves, experience acute anxiety and develop extreme reactions to their situation such as uncontrollable fear, crying, or anger. They may also experience insomnia or have nightmares. All these events could even result in memory loss. Serious conditions such as depression, thoughts of suicide, PTSD, eating disorders or even conditions such as obsessive-compulsive disorder may manifest in victims over time.

How has COVID-19 made intimate partner violence a bigger problem?

Worldwide, COVID-19 has created a situation where people are living in constant stress and having trouble coping. Lockdowns have kept people in close quarters, and the United Nations has sounded the alarm regarding the need to "combat the worldwide surge in domestic violence," referring to it as a "shadow pandemic."¹²

Social and physical distancing measures instituted by Public Health and Governmental responses have reduced access to victim supports and services but increased exposure to abusers. It also seems that abusers are taking advantage of the COVID-19 situation and using it as part of their measures undertaken to control or frighten their victims.

They may:

- Share misinformation (closed shelters, or false reports of outbreaks).
- Restrict movement inside or outside the home or withhold cleaning products or PPE.
- Lie about the scarcity of items the victim needs saying that basics such as medication or essential items are unavailable (i.e., birth control or hearing aid batteries).

- Isolate and manipulate someone by restricting Internet access.
- Threaten a victim's health by inviting people over or threatening to infect them deliberately.
- Imply that someone with COVID-19 could face repercussions such as losing custody of children or face deportation.
- Remove or harm pets and animal companions, saying that they are a risk of transmitting COVID-19.

"A small sign with the word HELP printed in capital letters appeared in the corner of the neighbour's second-floor window. It had never been there before. You never see them outside, so we called the police to report it."

~ a 50-year-old woman who noticed a silent plea for help from a neighbour *Names have been removed to protect identities.

What are some warning signs of intimate partner violence?

Apart from the more obvious physical harm that victims may present, it may be possible to identify trouble from behaviour patterns that abusers tend to display. Controlling, monitoring, manipulating, and creating isolation, plus imposing financial restrictions, deserve careful observation because they may be warning signs. Similarly, you should never ignore incidents of harassment and verbal ridicule, intimidation or threats, or any signs of verbal abuse and gaslighting. Abusers may try to gain control over a victim through technological means and use apps to track communication, online activities, mobile phone usage (including text messaging).

Children exposed to intimate partner violence can exhibit misinformation or express beliefs that can act as a red flag to dangerous situations at home. They may normalize violence as part of a loving relationship and develop the idea that you can be the aggressor or the victim in a relationship, that they are unequal, and that it's not necessary to treat others respectfully.¹³ Keep in mind that children can also be neglected or victims of physical abuse themselves.

If you notice that someone has:

- Frequent absences or illnesses at work or they are constantly late
- Abrupt changes in clothing/dress (trying to hide bruises or physical violence)

Intimate Partner Violence

- Behavioural changes (depression, fear, suicidal thoughts, lack of interest in daily activities, changes in sleep habits, last-minute cancellations, excessively private and distant)
- To obtain permission before going anywhere, has little money or no access to transportation, and refers to their partner as “jealous” or “possessive,”¹⁴

...then, there may be cause for alarm that they could be experiencing domestic abuse.

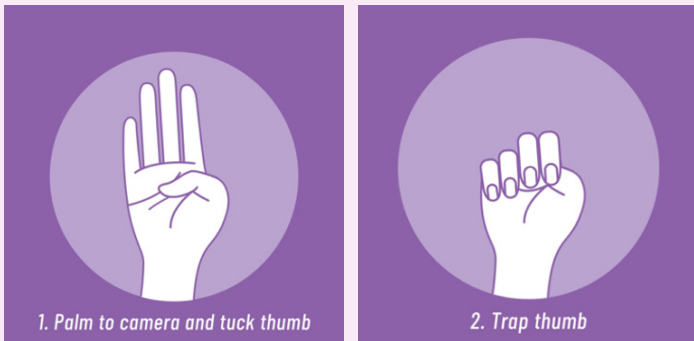
How to help someone experiencing intimate partner violence

Don't be surprised if they deny it. There are several things you can do to try and help.

- Keep in contact with them, despite any attempts by the abuser to isolate them.
- Encourage the victim to call 911 if it is an emergency. If you know they are in immediate danger, call yourself.
- Be observant of signs or signals (constant calling or texting to know where the victim is, who they are with, what they are doing)
- Come up with a code word.
- Help them store emergency cash, clothing, documents, phone numbers, etc. safely, outside of their home.

A hand signal for help

Learn the “Violence at home hand signal for help” developed by the Canadian Women’s Foundation in response to increasing rates of domestic violence during COVID-19. It indicates that someone wants you to “reach out to them safely” and is now “being shared by partner organizations around the world.”¹⁵



Things to remember if you are preparing to leave a relationship with intimate partner violence

Remember that you are not to blame. You did not cause the abuse. You and any children involved deserve to be safe, happy and treated respectfully. It's not likely that your abuser will change. They may make promises to stop, but eventually, the abuse will return. If you stay or believe you need to help them sort things out, you may enable the abuser to continue rather than fix it. Leaving the relationship must be based on who the abuser is now rather than who they could be. You should go if it's at all possible. Don't retaliate or try to get revenge. It could be disastrous.

- Be technologically smart and protect your privacy
 - Make calls from a public phone or a friend's or neighbours. You may want to consider getting a second prepaid mobile phone.
 - Numbers called from a home phone, or mobile phone can be accessed on monthly bills, so your abuser could track you down.
 - When using a shared computer or tablet, change usernames and passwords frequently and be aware of spyware that could be installed. If the abuser has access to these devices, be cautious about deleting your web browsing history. Abusers can be worried you are trying to hide information.
 - Beware of GPS tracking devices that can be attached to a car, placed on a phone or tucked into a purse. You should also be aware that your abuser could have hidden cameras or baby monitors to watch your activities. There are also smartphone apps that will allow an abuser to track movements, record conversations, or monitor device usage. If you discover any of these, don't turn them off as it could alert your abuser that you know about them.
- Collect evidence and report incidents
 - Keep an incident journal and evidence of tracking or tampering with your mobile phone.
 - Memorize emergency contacts.
 - Move any important documents to a safe place (possibly outside of your home).
 - Connect with the police to report abuse. This can help kickstart support services, including restraining orders or peace bonds.

Intimate Partner Violence

- Seek advice and assistance from an intimate partner violence program, shelter, or crisis hotline.
- When you get out, keep your new location a secret and change your routine.
- Take steps to build new, healthy relationships and move forward from the trauma.



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