



Make It Our Business

Guidelines for Setting up an Interprofessional Team

Guidelines for setting up a team to address workplace domestic violence

As of June 15, 2010, all employers in Ontario are responsible for protecting workers when domestic violence follows them into the workplace. Ontario's Occupational Health and Safety Act states, in section 32.0.4:

"If an employer becomes aware, or ought reasonably to be aware, that domestic violence that would likely expose a worker to physical injury may occur in the workplace, the employer shall take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances for the protection of the worker."

How can a team help?

The dynamics of violence are very different in an intimate relationship than they are in other settings. Domestic violence puts the targeted worker at risk, but it may also pose a threat to co-workers. Specialized knowledge and expertise about domestic violence can help to assess that risk and to intervene appropriately.

Your workplace will be able to act more effectively to prevent and respond to workplace domestic violence if you have a coordinated approach. This should involve specialists in security, human resources, and diversity and equity and training. Setting up a multidisciplinary team with focused training and expertise in domestic violence can be part of your workplace violence program.

Setting up a team in smaller workplaces

Setting up a team that can respond to workplace domestic violence may not be feasible for small or even some medium-sized workplaces. You may not have specialized roles or divisions. In this case, look to resources in the community. Learn more in Finding Community Resources to Address Workplace Domestic Violence.

Getting Started

A Workplace Domestic Violence Team needs solid support from the leadership of the organization. This includes the CEO or CAO, senior management, labour organizations, and the Joint Health & Safety Committee.

To be successful, the team will need support and resources. They will need access to information and decision makers as they develop their mandate and carry out their duties. They will need a budget to support their work and they will need both visibility and a defined status within the organization.

The next step is to look around your workplace and identify the people with the right interest and expertise. This is an opportunity for leadership and training. Members of the team will need time for training and meeting. To sustain the team, plan for re-training when turnover occurs.

Once established, the team will need to clarify its purpose, mandate, roles, and responsibilities. Determine how this team fits into the existing structure of your organization. What are the reporting relationships and lines of authority for the team?

The team will have to customize prevention and response to fit the realities of your workplace. There are many factors to take into consideration. These include the structure and culture of your workplace, the hazards and risks that have already been identified, the diversity of your employees, the job functions, and the work sites.

Relationship to Joint Health & Safety Committee

It is important to determine how a workplace domestic violence team will relate to the Joint Health & Safety Committee if you have one in your workplace and to make the relationships clear for employees.

Joint health and safety committees and health and safety representatives have the same powers and responsibilities for workplace violence hazards as they do for other occupational health and safety hazards under the Occupational Health and Safety Act. For example, their role during a work refusal [Section 43] is the same for workplace violence as it is for any other workplace hazard.

These committees and health and safety representatives should be able to recognize risks of workplace violence in the course of carrying out their regular functions such as inspecting workplaces.

An employer may wish to consult with his or her workplace's joint health and safety committee or health and safety representative when developing workplace violence and workplace harassment policies and programs.

Employers must advise the joint health and safety committee or health and safety representative of the results of an assessment of workplace violence risks [Section 32.0.3(3)(a)] or the results of a reassessment [section 32.0.3(5)]. For more information, see Section 2.3 - Assessing the Risks of Workplace Violence.

Employers must also inform the committee or health and safety representative if a person is killed, critically injured, disabled from performing their usual work, or requires medical attention due to workplace violence [sections 51(1) and 52(1)]. For more information, see Section 2.9 - Notices.

Generally speaking, all committee members should be available to receive employee concerns, complaints and recommendations; to discuss problems and recommend solutions; and to provide input into existing and proposed health and safety programs. This will require clear communication and solid collaboration with the domestic violence team.

Scope

Will the team specialize and deal only with workplace domestic violence? Or, will the team deal with all forms of workplace violence, including domestic violence? Or, will the team focus on health and safety in the workplace, with some attention to workplace violence and workplace domestic violence?

If the team has a larger mandate to address workplace violence in general or workplace health and safety, does it make sense for all members to have specialized knowledge and expertise about domestic violence, or can you rely on the particular expertise of some members of the team?

Some workplaces may decide to create and train specialized response teams, such as a Threat Assessment Team or a Crisis Response Team. These teams could stand alone, focussing on response to critical incidents, or be set up as sub-committees of the larger team, focussing on prevention as well as response.

Be certain to coordinate the program, policy and response efforts in the workplace regardless of the focus of the team..

Guidelines for assembling the team

Make it multidisciplinary: We recommend a multidisciplinary or interprofessional approach to gather the needed expertise and experience. Some people may fill more than one role.

Manage the size: In large organizations, the team might have 6 to 10 members. Groups larger than that may become unwieldy. Smaller workplaces might have a team of 2 or 3 members, and bring in specialized expertise as needed.

Involve both management and labour: In a unionized workplace it makes sense to include union representation and input *at the earliest stage* of development, planning and coordination. If your workplace is not unionized, or if you have groups of employees or sectors of your workforce who are not represented by a union or employee association, involve representatives or appointees of those employees.

Integrate with health and safety: Either link this team with the workplace Joint Health & Safety Committee, or create this team as a sub-group of the JHSC. This will help to make roles, responsibilities and reporting structures clear for everyone in the workplace.

Expertise needed: The composition of the team will depend on several factors including: the team's purpose and mandate, the size and structure of your workplace, the culture of your workplace and the commitment and resources management is giving to workplace violence. Start by considering the expertise needed on your team. Here are some examples:

From the workplace:

- Senior management linkages
- The “designated management representatives” named in your policies to be contacted for follow-up or to report an incident of threats or violence
- Workplace Coordinator [[hyperlink to Workplace Coordinator section in Suggested Guidelines for Security](#)]
- Joint Health & Safety Committee
- Human Resources

- Employee or Labour Relations
- Security
- Training
- Communications
- Union or employee representation
- Management and front-line supervisory representation
- Administrative and clerical support

External or special expertise:

- EAP (Employee Assistance Program)
- Legal counsel
- Diversity, equity, and human rights specialists
- Occupational nurse or medical department
- WSIB, benefit, attendance management, and return to work specialists
- Threat assessment and risk management professionals
- Community affairs, public relations, and government relations
- Privacy specialists
- Information systems specialist
- Local Women's Shelter or a Violence Against Women/Domestic Violence agency
- Police and local law enforcement
- Security company

Note: If you are using a Joint Health & Safety Committee model for your team, it is usually not recommended that ex-officio members be included. Instead, the team/committee may invite individuals with specialized knowledge or expertise to participate in an advisory or observer role.

Quick reference checklist for establishing a team

- ✓ Define the purpose of the team
- ✓ Determine roles and responsibilities of team members
- ✓ Determine membership and select members
- ✓ Establish the mandate of the team (their role and responsibilities in relation to other personnel, especially those who perform related tasks, such as security, HR, EAP).
- ✓ Decide which team members will be the “key contacts” or “designated management representatives” in the workplace policy.
- ✓ Establish your terms of reference (reporting to whom, by when/how frequently, timeframe for the work of the team, a project plan, budget and resources, meeting schedule, agenda, minutes).
- ✓ Identify the information and instruction needs of team members. Create a training plan for the team.
- ✓ Provide initial information and training to understand the dynamics and effects of domestic violence, workplace domestic violence, and workplace violence.
- ✓ Develop plans and protocols for responding to situations of workplace domestic violence
- ✓ Start developing community linkages and effective referral systems.
- ✓ Research the experience of workplace domestic violence programs in other workplaces.
- ✓ Carry out an initial workplace audit concerning workplace violence. (see the Safe Workplace Checklist)



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