



Western

Centre for Research & Education on
Violence Against Women & Children

ADDRESSING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE THROUGH COLLABORATION

Plan for safety from domestic violence
in working from home agreements

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While working from home has long been the norm for some workers, many others have pivoted to telework as a result of the pandemic. This move towards working remotely is likely to continue for many workers long after the pandemic has ended. For this reason, working from home agreements or safety checklists for home offices are becoming even more necessary.

For a person subjected to domestic violence, working from home can increase their risk of serious injury or death. When working from home, they are likely trapped with an abusive partner full-time. For those who have an ex-partner who is abusive, working from home might make them easier to find and stalk them. This information is intended to help employers think about how to address safety concerns when an employee working from home is experiencing domestic violence.

While it is the responsibility of an employer to take reasonable precautions to ensure the safety of an employee, in situations of domestic violence, whether to leave an abusive relationship or not is always the decision of the victim-survivor. It is the role of the employer to offer support and to plan for safety, but not to pressure or influence an employee's decisions about their relationship.

Similar to situations when employees report to a physical workplace location, the key to effectively enhancing safety when someone is experiencing domestic violence is to create an environment in which employees can talk openly and in confidence to a manager, supervisor, human resources professional or other designated person in the organization about issues and to seek out help.

Every situation is unique and requires a customized response. The information offered here is not intended as a set of instructions. Some of potential measures may be possible and may assist to ensure safety and some may not be feasible or advisable in any given situation.

You can begin to build trust and openness around the taboo subject of domestic violence through organization wide training that raises awareness about how economic abuse, coercive control, emotional and psychological abuse are as life-limiting and potentially dangerous as physical harm. As the new federal regulations relating to workplace violence and harassment require, you can provide information about local domestic violence specialist services in your workplace and the community. It is best to provide this information through universal communications so that neither survivors, nor their abusive partners feel this information is only targeting them.

If an employee does disclose domestic violence, true support begins with a believing, validating response which asks: how can I help? The employer should be guided by the survivor as to the best support they can give. If an employee experiencing domestic violence tries to minimize the seriousness of the situation and/or the potential danger arising from it, the employer should persist in putting all possible measures in place to enhance safety. Respecting the autonomy of an employee and meeting legal and ethical requirements to prevent and respond to situations of domestic violence is a delicate and complex balance. Establishing a relationship of trust will help to plan for safety.

It is important to understand how warning signs of domestic violence can show up in the workplace and to be prepared to respond to those warning signs. It is important to access the level of risk when you become

aware that an employee is experiencing domestic violence. Remember that local domestic violence experts and services can assist you. If you are not sure how to contact experts, your local women's shelter is always a good place to start.

If your employee has recently left an abusive relationship, but their ex-partner continues to stalk, harass or monitor them, they will still need your support. Consider which of the measures listed below would be relevant.

The following measures are gathered from evidence-based best practices and measures that companies committed to addressing domestic violence at work have already put in place. They are:

- Do a risk assessment and create a safety plan with a qualified domestic violence expert, even if a worker is minimizing the situation
- Arrange daily contact with the survivor in a way that looks like it was set up for all employees working from home. This can help to alleviate suspicion should a perpetrator become aware of the check-ins.
- Agree on a word or phrase to signal that the survivor needs help. You might have one code that means "please have someone check in with me" and another that means "I need help from emergency responders."
- Provide a back-up phone that is pre-programmed with the phone number of emergency responders.
- Help the survivor install an app on their smart phone that acts as an emergency alarm. (If the abusive partner is monitoring the phone ensure it is disguised as a different app.)
- If it is an option for your workplace, designate the survivor as an essential worker and have them physically come into the office.
- Pay for a safe working space outside of the home, such as a hotel room.
- Provide paid leave for appointments to get support, to attend court and/or to leave the abusive relationships.
- Provide emergency accommodation.
- Provide emergency financial assistance.

If you have provided assistance to an employee experiencing domestic violence who was working from home, we invite you to share the actions you took with us. We will continue to update this document as we receive helpful suggestions. Contact us at crevawc@uwo.ca.