

Warning signs of domestic violence

When a worker is experiencing domestic violence, warning signs will often show up in the workplace. All warning signs are an opportunity to intervene by having a supportive conversation to build trust and to open the door for the person you are concerned about to tell you more about what is happening.

It's important to remember that warning signs are just that, red flags that something might be wrong. The warning signs could be a result of problems or circumstances other than domestic violence. So, while we want to pay attention to those around us, we don't want to jump to conclusions.

Warning signs of physical abuse

A worker:

- has or has had bruises, abrasions or broken bones
- hides or tries to hide bruises or injuries
- provides explanations for injuries that seem questionable
- sometimes wears clothing inappropriate for the season (long sleeves in hot weather)
- sometimes wears heavy make-up that could be hiding injuries

Behavioural warning signs

A worker:

- often works late, even when it's not required
- changes their behaviour (i.e. becomes anxious, withdrawn, afraid)
- begins using drugs or alcohol to cope

Work related warning signs

A worker:

- has a lot of absences (i.e. increasing sick days, unpaid leaves, unexplained absences)
- is often late
- has trouble concentrating
- works slowly
- has difficulty making decisions
- requests accommodations (to reschedule work shifts, to change work location)
- generally struggles more with their work duties

Warning signs of concerning (ex)partner behaviour

A worker:

- receives frequent phone calls and/or text messages
- receives frequent visits from a partner or ex-partner
- has a partner or ex-partner who contacts co-workers or supervisors to ask questions about them
- is victimized by vandalism
- is followed or harassed in person or electronically
- has limited autonomy with no opportunity to interact with coworkers outside of work

Signs of increasing risk for serious injury or death

Through research and case reviews when someone has been killed or almost killed because of domestic violence, we have learned about signs that tell us the level of risk is increasing. Usually there will be a pattern of risk factors, but it's important to pay attention to any sign of increasing danger.

The [Addressing Domestic Violence in the Workplace Through Collaboration](#) website has a Risk Screening Tool that you can use to guide you through questions about the level of risk and that provides suggestions for follow-up.

The risk of serious injury or death is greater when:

The couple has history of domestic violence.

Violence has included choking or any other action that could potentially lead to serious injury or death (e.g., blows to the head, pushing towards a serious fall- down stairs).

There has been a recent escalation in violence.

The (ex)partner isolates or controls most daily activities of the worker experiencing domestic violence (because of constant jealousy or for other reasons).

The (ex) partner has monitored whereabouts and/or stalked the worker experiencing domestic violence.

Pay particular attention to threats and perception of threat to cause serious harm or to kill:

The worker experiencing domestic violence thinks or worries that their (ex)partner might try to kill them, their children, their pet(s) or others close to them.

The (ex)partner of the worker experiencing domestic violence has threatened to kill them or their children.

These factors that can increase risk when you have confirmed that a worker has experienced domestic violence:

The (ex)partner knows or suspects the worker experiencing violence is thinking about leaving, or the worker experiencing domestic violence is in the process of leaving their (ex)partner, or has recently left their partner.

The (ex)partner recently has been using alcohol or drugs excessively.

The (ex)partner is unemployed.

The (ex)partner has ready access to a gun.

The (ex)partner is depressed or was recently depressed.

The (ex)partner has attempted suicide or talked about suicide or attempting suicide.

These behaviours help to determine the potential for the workplace to become involved in a violent altercation:

The (ex)partner regularly contacts the workplace to check up on the worker experiencing domestic violence.

The (ex)partner has threatened to come to the workplace or actually come to the workplace.

The worker experiencing domestic violence is worried or afraid for their personal safety while at work.

The (ex)partner has threatened to harm the worker experiencing domestic violence or their co-workers at work.

The (ex)partner has violated no-contact conditions and showing up at the workplace.

The workplace is the only, or one of the only, places that the (ex) partner can find the worker experiencing domestic violence.