

Respect In The Workplace



Employee Workbook

About this workbook*

Work is about more than just earning a wage—work can help strengthen your sense of identity and fuel positive feelings that you are putting your skills and abilities to good use.

You may have experienced or witnessed inappropriate workplace conduct (e.g., harassment, bullying, discrimination) or instances where domestic violence has spilled over into the workplace. You may have also had heated arguments with a co-worker or been upset by a disciplinary action or unwelcome work assignment from a manager or supervisor.

This course helps you learn when these situations cross the line from being simply negative or unwelcome events to qualifying as an instance of harassment, discrimination, bullying, and/or violence. And the course will help you understand what your employer, and you, should be doing to stop wrongful conduct and cultivate a more respectful workplace environment.

What is a “respectful” workplace?

In order to contribute to personal well-being, your workplace needs to be somewhere that you feel welcome, competent, safe, and productive. This is what is meant by a “respectful” workplace. And this is why a respectful workplace is good for both you and your employer.

In a respectful workplace:

- You feel valued and rewarded.
- Diversity is welcomed.
- The well-being of employees, clients, customers, and suppliers is safeguarded.
- It is safe to discuss what is not working and focus on solutions.
- Inappropriate or disrespectful behaviour is dealt with according to clearly established policies and in a timely manner.

**This workbook and e-course are not intended to offer legal interpretation on issues of discrimination, harassment, bullying, or violence. Rather, the intent is to educate and empower you to conduct yourself in ways that contribute to a respectful workplace.*



All employees have a role to play in cultivating a respectful workplace.

Your responsibility is twofold: Report incidents you experience or witness and ensure you behave respectfully towards others.

Did you know?

Work settings vary in their risks

When it comes to workplace violence and harassment, some work settings present higher risks of inappropriate conduct than others. These include:

- working with the public (retail workers, working where alcohol is served);
- working in high crime areas;
- transporting people and/or goods;
- working alone or in small numbers;
- handling money, valuables, or prescription drugs;
- contact with clients (e.g., real estate);
- mobile workplaces (e.g., insurance advisor); and,
- carrying out inspection or enforcement duties (e.g., parking enforcement, home inspection).

Multiple factors increase the risk. For example, if you work alone, late at night, with the public, and handle money you are at even higher risk.

If you work in one of these settings, take extra care to educate yourself about your rights, your employer's responsibilities, and the procedures and protocols in place to ensure you have a safe and productive work environment.

Legal requirements to create a respectful workplace

Employers have a legal responsibility to take reasonable steps to protect employees from harm that may occur in the workplace. The governing laws vary by province and territory, but the requirement is basically the same across Canada— employers have to:

- Recognize signs of violence and harassment;
- Assess potential risks to employees and other bystanders (e.g., clients, customers);
- Establish procedures to control these risks;
- Educate employees, managers, supervisors and key personnel on these issues;
- Respond appropriately and confidentially to issues (e.g., incidents, complaints) that are identified; And,
- Take reasonable action to resolve issues.

Want personalized coaching or counselling?

Are you the target of disrespectful workplace conduct (harassment, bullying, discrimination, workplace violence)? Need advice, support, or direction? We can help.



Terms and definitions

Your employer may define workplace violence, harassment, discrimination, and bullying, differently than the definitions adopted in this e-course. They may also have specific policies and procedures for dealing with incidents that are reported. Check these details with your employer and keep yourself informed.

About workplace violence

For the purpose of this course, workplace violence is defined as:

1. The exercise of physical force...
2. An attempt to exercise physical force...
3. A statement or a behaviour that is reasonable for a worker to interpret as a threat to exercise physical force...

...against the worker, in a workplace, that could cause physical injury to the worker.

Examples include physical attacks and threatening behaviour (written or spoken).

Sources of workplace violence

Workplace violence can arise from many sources, including:

- A person inside the workplace (e.g., a co-worker or manager).
- A person related to the function of the workplace (e.g., a client, customer, or supplier).
- A person with an indirect relationship to the workplace (e.g., a spouse or a former employee).
- A person who is unrelated to the workplace (e.g., a thief).

Violence outside the workplace

Workplace violence can occur outside of the workplace and still be considered “workplace violence” according to law. For example:

- At business-related events (e.g., conference, trade show or other event related to your work).
- At a client’s home.
- At your own home (e.g., you receive a threatening phone call at home that is related to your work).

About domestic violence

Domestic violence is a pattern of behaviour used by one person in an intimate relationship in an attempt to gain power and control over his or her partner. Domestic violence or harassment becomes a workplace issue when it occurs or spills over into the workplace. Some examples are:

- sexual assault
- physical attacks
- threats
- intimidation
- verbal abuse

About workplace harassment

Workplace harassment is generally defined as any behaviour that demeans, embarrasses, humiliates, annoys or abuses a person, is offensive to the target, and is known or reasonably expected to be unwelcome. The most critical aspect of harassment, regardless of whether it's personal harassment, sexual harassment or abuse of power and authority or breaking the law is the impact on the person being victimized and not the intent of the aggressor.

Examples include constant interruptions, isolating a person, discrediting a person, ridiculing or destroying someone's work, undermining professional or personal reputation, and making someone feel useless by giving them only meaningless/trivial tasks to do.

About workplace bullying

Bullying is a type of workplace harassment. The following are characteristics of bullying:

- Bullying is a type of workplace harassment that is not based on the prohibited discriminatory grounds listed in Human Rights legislation (e.g., religion, sexual orientation).
- Bullying is the result of cumulative, intentional, and enduring conduct where the effect of each incident builds upon the last to produce physical and/or psychological distress on the target.
- Bullying is an exploitation of a perpetrator's position of power over a target. These power differences can arise between peers, and in some cases even subordinates (e.g., if subordinates act as a group and bully a supervisor).

Examples include giving someone the 'silent treatment', excessive monitoring of work, name-calling, spreading malicious rumours, setting impossible deadlines.

Bullying is as much about what people don't do (e.g., excluding targets from events, withholding information) as what they do.

About discrimination

Discrimination means treating people differently, negatively, or adversely based on prohibited grounds of discrimination as defined by the Canadian Human Rights Commission. Employers and employees have an obligation to keep the workplace free of discrimination related to the prohibited grounds. These prohibited grounds of discrimination, as defined by the Canadian Human Rights Commission, may vary depending on province or territory but typically include the following:

- age
- race
- national or ethnic origin
- colour
- religion
- gender
- family status
- marital status
- pardoned convictions
- mental or physical disability including previous or present drug or alcohol dependence
- sexual orientation

Examples include unfair treatment or decisions about hiring, firing, promoting, compensation, job training, advancement opportunities, working conditions, and task assignments.

Remember

All jurisdictions in Canada have specific workplace violence prevention legislation or an applicable *General Duty Clause* that requires employers to take all reasonable precautions to protect employees against hazards on the job, including workplace violence. If you are concerned about violence, harassment, bullying, and/or discrimination, talk to your employer, safety committee or union.

What can you do to cultivate a respectful workplace?

Take a few moments to think about your answers to the following questions. Consider sharing your answers with co-workers as part of a team-building exercise, all in the effort of building a respectful workplace.

1. What would you like your workplace to look like with regard to becoming a more respectful workplace in 6 months time (i.e. safer, more productive, a place where it is safe to discuss problems and focus on solutions)?
2. What are some of the potential barriers to achieving this vision?
3. How can these barriers be overcome?
4. What changes are necessary that you have the ability to impact or influence?
5. What is one thing you can individually work on to contribute to a more respectful workplace?
6. What are some of the things you can do as a team to help ensure your workplace is safe and productive (e.g., training, codes of conduct, team-building activities)?

What can you do to deal more effectively with challenging situations in your workplace?

1. How do you react when someone in your workplace is acting negative towards you (e.g., over-bearing, dominating a conversation)?
 - Do you find yourself reacting in a disrespectful way (e.g., name-calling, shouting)?
 - If so, how can you change your behaviour so that you react assertively, but not disrespectfully?

2. Do others criticize your communication style (e.g., do they suggest you are pushy or overbearing with them or with customers or clients)? If so, do you think there is any truth to their criticism?

3. What is one step you can take today to communicate more assertively or positively with others?

4. If you have offended someone, what action should you now take (e.g., apologize)?

5. Observe co-workers dealing with conflict. Watch their reactions as they interact with each other in negative and confrontational ways, versus those who interact with each other in positive and assertive, solution-focused ways.
 - What are the some of the differences that you see?

 - Is there anything that you can learn from what you have observed that you can apply to yourself?

Taking Action To Report

1. How often have you been the target of disrespectful behaviour? (e.g., hostile glaring, malicious gossip, eye rolling)?
 - Did you report this behaviour?
 - If so, do you feel that your concerns were taken seriously by management?
 - If you did not report, why did you not report?
2. What instances of disrespectful behaviour have you witnessed in the workplace?
 - What did you do?
 - What was the outcome?
 - Did you know your workplace policy at the time?
 - Is there a gap in your knowledge that you need to fill (e.g., understanding policy or procedures)? If so, what steps can you take to fill that gap?
3. Have you, yourself, experienced harassment, discrimination, bullying, or violence in the workplace?
 - What did you do?
 - What was the outcome?
 - What will you do differently in the future to better respond to the situation (e.g., more detailed reporting) or to prevent the situation from occurring (e.g., be more assertive in requesting that the perpetrator stop their behaviour)?
4. Do you have any questions pertaining to this subject that you need to have answered by your employer? If so, how can you find out the answers?

Incident Reporting

If you witness an incident of harassment, discrimination, bullying, or violence, or if you are the target of this conduct, make note of the details. Your workplace should be able to guide you in incident reporting. Some of the items to note include:

- Date, time, and location of the incident.
- Who was involved.
- A detailed description including any verbal and physical actions. Only describe what you witnessed or experienced.
- Were there other witnesses/bystanders? Who were they?
- What, if any, action was taken concerning the incident?

Take stalking seriously.

Stalking has been identified as one of the primary risk factors for severe violent acts against female partners in intimate relationships. Immediately inform police and your employer if you are being stalked or if a restraining order is breached.



Signs that domestic violence may be occurring

Domestic violence becomes a workplace hazard when it occurs or spills over into the workplace. Have you seen any of these behaviours or done some of these things yourself? If so, you need to speak out to your manager or supervisor, your health and safety representative, or an employee assistance counsellor.

An alleged perpetrator of abuse:

- constantly puts their partner down;
- constantly checks up on the partner;
- prevents the partner from speaking with family and friends;
- acts as if he or she “owns” the partner;
- lies and exaggerates to look innocent or to lay blame on the target of the abuse.

A possible target or victim of the abuse:

- is apologetic and makes excuses for their partner;
- is nervous when their partner is nearby;
- is sick often and misses work;
- tries to cover bruises;
- tries to avoid family or friends;
- seems sad, lonely, withdrawn, or afraid;
- uses drugs or alcohol to cope.

The Criminal Code

Some acts of workplace violence fall under Canada’s Criminal Code. The Criminal Code deals with matters such as violent acts, threats, and behaviours (e.g., stalking, sexual or physical assault, arson).

The police should immediately be contacted when an act of violence has occurred in the workplace or when someone in the workplace is threatened with violence.

About Domestic Violence*

How to help a co-worker

Here are some suggestions on how to support a victim:

- Talk to her** about what you see and assure her you are concerned. Tell her you believe her and it is not her fault.
- If she is reluctant to tell you about the abuse right away you can gently say “I’ve noticed you seem upset and I’m concerned about you and your safety. Please know that when you are ready I’m someone you can come to for support.”
- Listen in a non-judgmental way to what she says showing concern and support and not suggest an action she could take.
- Encourage her not to confront her partner.
- If you are a concerned colleague, the EAP and/or community resources can help guide you and give you practical advice on ways to help and to protect yourself if you become involved.
- Call the police if you think the victim’s safety is in jeopardy.

How to support an abuser

Speaking to the abuser may feel difficult. You may be afraid his violence will turn to you or your coworkers. Be sure not to ignore the abuser’s behaviour because doing nothing could make it worse. Police and counsellors are trained to respond to violence.

- Choose the right time and place to have a discussion.
- Approach him when he is calm.
- Be direct and clear about what you have seen.
- Tell him his behaviour is his responsibility. Avoid making judgmental comments about him as a person. Don’t validate his attempt to blame others for his behaviour.
- Inform him his behaviour needs to stop and he can seek help from the EAP.
- Tell him you are concerned about the safety of his partner and children.
- Never argue with him about his abusive actions, nor intervene physically. Confrontational, argumentative approaches may make the situation worse.
- Let your supervisor know if you suspect one of your colleagues is being abusive.
- Call the police if you think the victim’s safety is in jeopardy.

How to ask your employer for help

Employee safety is a priority for your employer. They can minimize the risk of violence by working with you. They should maintain your confidentiality on a need-to-know basis but may be able to take some steps to protect you and your co-workers.

- Ask your employer for help creating a safety plan that considers your needs at work.
- Keep your employer informed of all threats and abusive actions.
- Ask if your calls can be screened or if you can change phone numbers.
- Ask for priority parking.
- Ask to be relocated and new location not disclosed.

*Adapted from materials developed by Occupational Health and Safety Council of Ontario.

**Most of the research and incidents of domestic violence involve male perpetrators and female targets/victims.

Bystanders/Witnesses

If you have observed a behaviour or attitude that may hurt others, there is a natural tendency to look away and hope the situation gets resolved. It is hard to intervene and easier to be a passive bystander. But ignoring the situation is not a behaviour to be proud of and your lack of action may directly or indirectly support the negative behaviour and contribute to an uncomfortable and disrespectful workplace climate.

As a bystander, you have a choice:

- Condone the wrong and harmful behaviour (e.g., ignore what is happening)
- Become involved and take action to stop the behaviour. A single appropriate intervention is all that it may take to change acts of harmful behaviour that could otherwise destroy an individual and drag down an entire work group.

In this latter case, your options include:

- tell the aggressor to stop if it is safe to do so.
- make sure the person being victimized is safe
- document what you have seen or heard or read
- report the incident
- keep the information confidential (except for reporting the incident to appropriate personnel)
- familiarize yourself with your workplace policies and procedures
- seek help for yourself if you feel you need it

If you have third hand knowledge about harmful behaviour (e.g., someone confides in you about an incident), you can take the following steps:

- make sure the target is safe and encourage them to report the incident according to policies and procedures
- if the person is an aggressor, encourage them to apologize to the victim and seek help
- do not share confidential information with colleagues

Reporting: A Sample Letter To An Employer

Date

Employer's name

Name of business

Address of business or location

Dear Madam/Sir:

After having checked my rights, I wish to inform you that I am experiencing a psychological harassment situation in my workplace.

Based on what I was able to read in our policy and procedures manuals and on provincial and federal web-sites relating to worker health and safety, measures can be taken to resolve this problem. I would like to discuss this matter with you so that we can discuss potential solutions.

I look forward to hearing from you as soon as possible. Thank you for your understanding in this matter.

Yours truly,

Resources

The following is a list of resources that you can search for more detailed information about harassment, discrimination, bullying, and violence in the workplace. Some of the resources are intended for employees, some for employers, and some for the general public.

This is a good place to begin a search. For information that applies to your specific workplace, talk to your employer (e.g., Human Resources, Health and Safety, your union).

Coalition Against Workplace Violence
(www.stopworkplaceviolence.ca/index.html)

Canadian Human Rights Commission (www.chrc-ccdpc.gc.ca)

Canadian Centre For Occupational Health and Safety
(www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/violence_warning_signs.html)

Provincial Resources

Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission
(www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca/)

British Columbia Human Rights Coalition
(www.bchrcoalition.org/)

Manitoba Human Rights Commission (www.gov.mb.ca/hrc/)

Newfoundland Human Rights Commission
(www.justice.gov.nl.ca/hrc/)

Northwest Territories Human Rights Commission
(www.nwthumanrights.ca/english/general.html)

Ontario Human Rights Commission (www.ohrc.on.ca/)

Prince Edward Island Human Rights Commission
(www.gov.pe.ca/humanrights/)

Québec-Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse (www.cdpcj.qc.ca/en/home.asp?noeud1=0&noeud2=0&cle=0)

Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission
(www.shrc.gov.sk.ca/)

Yukon Human Rights Commission (www.yhrc.yk.ca/)

