

## 5. Supportive Workplace Policies, Practices and Programs

The purpose of this fact sheet is to explain the value of policies, practices and programs that are supportive to workers experiencing the impacts of family violence in the workplace. It also provides examples of supportive policies and practices.

### The Value of Family Violence Sensitive Policies

The most valuable asset of any organization is its people. Policies and practices that create a positive workplace incorporate the concepts of wellness, safety, social responsibility and community involvement. A positive workplace can be created through the development of policies, practices and programs that foster and support these concepts.

Wellness and safety policies and programs that include information on family violence not only support employees who are experiencing family violence, but they also enable other employees to develop an increased understanding of their co-workers who are in this situation. Understanding increases for managers and supervisors as they learn more about how they can

help employees deal with the impact of family violence and improve safety in the workplace as a whole.



### Supportive Policies and Practices

Consider implementing family violence sensitive policies and practices throughout your workplace. Some programs require more planning than others; many are long-term, while others provide immediate short-term support. For example, share safety plan tips with your employees. (See Model Policy, Safety Plans and Messages.)

Here are some policies or programs you might consider.

#### Family Violence Policy

Every business and workplace, to the fullest extent possible without violating existing collective bargaining agreements, rules or statutory requirements, should implement a policy to deal with family violence when it spills over into the workplace. There are many such policies available on the web. To assist employers, we have adapted, and included in this Toolkit, a "Model Family Violence Policy" that incorporates the key elements of a good policy. Try adapting it to your workplace. (See Model Policy, Safety Plans and Messages.)

#### Employee Assistance Programs

Studies show that family violence prevention programs in the workplace that become part of an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) are an excellent way to support employees and co-workers who are impacted by family violence that is entering the workplace. Your EAP may offer additional support for those living with family violence and may include counseling, legal, medical, and financial services. Sometimes existing EAPs do not specifically state that they offer assistance to employees who are living with family violence at home, or workers who are affected by it at the work site. It is important to spell out "family violence" in the policy, train your human resources and management staff, and ensure that employees know that their EAP can help them with this problem. (see: <http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/hsprograms/eap.html>) (French language site available)

# A Workplace Toolkit

## **Assaulted Staff Action Program**

Some workplaces have developed a response program called Assaulted Staff Action Program (ASAP). It is viewed as an effective response to family violence after it occurs in the workplace. ASAPs treat the individual in the workplace where the violent action occurred. ASAPs rely on both trained volunteer staff as well as paid professionals. They are particularly useful in situations where a physical or sexual assault has occurred.

## **Threat Assessment Teams**

Employers can establish a Threat Assessment Team. TATs work with staff and business supervisors to identify and assist staff who are experiencing family violence. Designated trained staff contact individuals who are in daily contact with the person who is experiencing family violence and attempt to address the problem.

## **Safe Walk Program**

Employers can establish a safe walk program. Small groups are put together to help walk individuals home or simply to their cars after work. A safe walk program can help to reduce fear in the workplace as well as build personal relationships among co-workers. (see: [www.mtroyal.ab.ca/mrssa/pdf/avenir2002\\_march.pdf](http://www.mtroyal.ab.ca/mrssa/pdf/avenir2002_march.pdf) for an example of a safe walk program)

## **Privacy Policies**

Privacy issues are more apparent with increased technology use. The employer can implement policies that mutually benefit all. Keeping confidential information from getting out helps keep the environment safe as well as the business. Certainly complete privacy is not obtainable with the internet and e-mail, but monitoring policies can help to avoid workplace violence and discrimination within the workplace.

## **Supportive Benefit and Leave Policies**

Flexible and supportive benefit and leave policies may go a long way toward assisting a victim of family violence. For example, allowing a paid or unpaid leave to someone leaving an abusive relationship, such as a woman who must spend some time at a shelter, can help that individual to become a more productive person and employee.

## **Sexual Harassment Policy**

Sexual harassment within the workplace can be costly in terms of morale, productivity and turnover. Policies should help instill respect, and promote positive response to incidents of sexual harassment, while increasing awareness and educating employees about prevention. Moreover, employers can reduce their liability for acts of harassment through the implementation of these policies. (see: [www.chrc-ccdp.ca/publications](http://www.chrc-ccdp.ca/publications)) (French language site available)

## **Workplace Bullying Policy**

Bullying policies can help everyone in the workplace understand the unique characteristics of bullying. Bullying falls into a category of psychological abuse and can be classified apart from harassment and discrimination because the focus and the causes are different. Workplace bullying policies show a broader understanding and help to ensure a healthy and productive work environment. (see: <http://www.safety-council.org/info/OSH/bullies.html>) (French Language site link)

## **Child Care Policies**

Employers can establish a number of childcare policies. For example, a daycare facility can be created on-site or near the work place or emergency daycare can be made available in the absence of a full time facility. Having a place for the children to go can reduce the stress on employees and give them a sense of security. (see: <http://labour.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/worklife/familycare-en.cfm>) (French language site available)

