

A Workplace Toolkit

Model Family Violence Policy, Safety Plans and Messages



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Model Family Violence Policy

Whereas family violence affects the lives and impacts on the safety of hundreds of Niagara Region's employees each day,

Whereas, family violence enters the workplace impacting on the safety of both victims and co-workers, and results in lost productivity, increased health care costs, increased absenteeism and increased employee turnover,

It is the policy of _____ that each of our employees has the right to work in an environment free of violence. Moreover, every employee has the right to seek assistance [through the Employee Assistance Program] with issues in relation to violence, even when it is happening outside of the workplace. Violence, as defined in this policy, means a pattern of coercive tactics in which one person seeks to hurt or intimidate another through the use of physical force, verbal harassment or manipulation in order to establish and maintain power and control over the victim.

Therefore, we will use a variety of methods, including:

I. Employee Awareness

- We will disseminate a statement that states our opposition to all acts of violence, including family violence, to all our employees/ supervisors/ managers.
- We will post copies of the family violence policy, information posters and other media prominently in areas accessible to employees, customers and suppliers.
- We will provide information to all employees about services available, [through our EAP] to help employees deal with any issues related to workplace or family violence.

II. Workplace Safety

- We will seek to eliminate the potential for violence in and around the workplace by reviewing our workplace environment and minimizing, where possible, physical attributes which may expose our employees to violent acts.
- We will provide reasonable means to consult with and assist victimized employees in developing and implementing individualized workplace safety plans [consistent with existing collective bargaining agreements].
- We will enforce all known court orders, particularly orders telling the abuser to stay away from the work site.
- We will have an emergency security plan with procedures for contacting the police when employees observe anyone engaging in threatening behaviour.
- We will explore options for voluntary relocation of the victimized employee, escort for entry and exit of the building, and dealing with harassing telephone calls, email and faxes.

III. Supportive and Non-Discriminatory Policies

- We will take reasonable measures to develop policies, practices and measures that deal with employee absenteeism, productivity, safety, and requirements for support and counselling related to family violence.
- We will ensure that our policies and practices do not discriminate against employees experiencing family violence and we will be responsive to their needs as victims.
- We will not base staffing decisions on any assumption about or knowledge of an employee's exposure to family violence.

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IV. Training

- We will make training on family violence and its impacts on the workplace available on a regular basis for all managers, supervisors, human resources staff, and security staff.
- We will train staff on signs of family violence, impacts on the workplace, making appropriate referrals, confidentiality, individualized responses and safety plans.

V. Responsibility for Policy

- We will ensure that all managers and supervisors follow the policy and disseminate copies to all employees upon implementation and to all new employees.
- Employees with questions or complaints about family violence related workplace behaviours that fall under this policy, may discuss them with _____. Concerns will be addressed.

We believe that helping to prevent violence in the workplace and in the family is our company's business and will help foster a safer society.

Safety Plan

- If you have been assaulted more than once, you probably know the warning signs. Your partner may become silent, drink, accuse you of "sleeping around", bring up the past, or put you down.
- Trust your own feeling of fear - chances are your partner is building up to an assault.
- The best way to ensure your safety is to set up a safety plan:
 - plan how you and your children can get out of the house in an emergency
 - You can get help 24 hours a day.

**Women's Place
(St. Catharines and North Niagara)
905-684-8331**

**Women's Place
(Welland and South Niagara)
905-788-0113**

**Nova House, Niagara Falls
905-356-5800**

If You Have To Flee, Try To Take...

- Important papers - birth certificates, social insurance cards, any court documents
- Credit cards, bank account numbers, and ATM cards
- Some money
- An extra set of keys
- Medications and prescriptions
- Phone numbers and addresses for family, friends, doctors, lawyers, and community agencies.
- Clothing and comfort items for you and the children.

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Home and Workplace Safety Plans

Workplace Safety Plan

- Save any threatening emails or voicemail messages.
- Inform your employer, security supervisor or a person of your choice of your situation.
- Park close to the entrance of your building, and talk with security, the police, or a manager if you fear an assault at work.
- Have your calls screened, transfer harassing calls to security, or remove your name and number from automated phone directories.
- Identify an emergency contact person if the employer is unable to contact you.
- Make sure your employer is aware of court orders such as custody orders, peace bonds or restraining orders that forbid the harasser from being near or contacting you at your workplace.
- Ask security to escort you to and from your car or public transportation.

Home or Personal Safety Plan

- Consider an unlisted phone number
- If possible carry a cell phone for emergencies
- Remove items of a personal nature from your garbage or recyclables
- Make sure your windows and doors are locked, consider the use of deadbolts
- Use security alarms or other security features if possible
- If travelling in a car, change your travel route to and from work often
- Keep emergency numbers at your disposal
- Make sure others are informed of your situation and if possible, create a signal to let them know if you are in danger
- Have an escape route mapped out in case you need it
- If children are involved teach them the safety plan and make sure they know emergency numbers

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Messages about Family Violence

Start a public education campaign in your workplace. To help you, we have developed some family violence messages that you can use. Insert the names and phone numbers of contact people in your workplace or region. Send the messages out to employees, but be sure to do so in combination with the development of supportive policies and practices. Hold family violence sensitivity sessions and then start sending out messages. Use the messages on pay stubs, staff email, newsletters, or even on office bulletin boards.

No matter how small your contribution, reaching out to an employee experiencing abuse will help not only that person, but possibly other workers and the entire workplace. Supportive and validating acts and words do make a difference. We all benefit from promoting healthier, safer homes, workplaces, and communities.

General Family Violence Messages

- Family violence is the abuse of power in a personal or intimate relationship. It takes many different forms including physical, psychological, sexual, financial or spiritual.
- Psychological or emotional abuse can include threats to leave you, commit suicide, kill the pets, insults, constant criticisms, and damage to your belongings.
- Many people experiencing abuse blame themselves. If you live with family violence “it’s not your fault.” It’s about someone trying to control you.
- It’s not always easy to tell who is living with abuse. Family violence can affect a person at home and at work.
- Although anyone can be a victim of family violence, some people, such as persons with disabilities, women, and seniors are more vulnerable to abuse than others.

Family Violence and the Workplace Messages

When family violence enters the work place it can

- Affect Employee Productivity
- Lead To Absenteeism
- Impact On Employee Morale
- Put All Employees At Risk
- Create Substantial Costs
- Family violence can follow someone to work and affect everyone’s safety. Call _____ to share your concerns or to make arrangements that help you feel safer.
- Anyone can experience family violence. If you are being abused, there is help. We care about you. For support call _____

**24 Hour Crisis Lines
Women’s Place,
(St. Catharines and North Niagara)
905-684-8331**

**Women’s Place,
(Welland and South Niagara)
905-788-0113**

**Nova House, Niagara Falls
905-356-5800**

or talk to your personnel manager _____.

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Creating a Respectful Working Environment

- Sexual harassment is a specific kind of workplace harassment. It can happen to either women or men. Sexual harassment involves any unwanted conduct, comment, gesture, or contact, which is sexual in nature.
- Workplace harassment is not confined to a specific work environment. It can occur in any location connected with the work setting. This includes cafeterias, training sessions, business travel, workplace socials, parking lots, and even washrooms.
- All employees must take care to treat each other with respect. Employees who harass others are liable for their conduct. By law, employers are responsible for preventing and resolving workplace harassment.
- At (insert workplace here) we work as a team. We value the work you do and the person you are. If you or a co-worker are living with family violence and want more information speak to your union representative or personnel manager.

Services for People Experiencing Family Violence

- Victims of abuse often feel alone. There are people who understand and care. For information and support you can call: *(List the telephone numbers for supportive services in your area, such as the local transition home, or a help line.)*
- Women's shelters offer a safe environment for women experiencing family violence. They provide support and information. They can help women regain control over their lives.
- The second page of most telephone books list the 24 hour information numbers of the shelters.

Family Violence and the Law

- Remember, all forms of abuse are wrong. Stalking, hitting, slapping, threatening, and namecalling are not respectful. They are not expressions of love!
- Some people think that they can do anything they want inside their own home. That is not true. Assaulting another person is illegal... even at home.
- If you have ended a relationship and your former partner is repeatedly following you, calling you or sending you unwanted gifts, you may be experiencing "criminal harassment" sometimes known as stalking. Keep a record of acts and contact the police. Get assistance with a safety plan from a listed agency.
- A peacebond is a legal remedy you might consider if you have good reason to fear that your partner will continue to threaten you or harm you. The conditions of the peacebond can include staying away from your place of work, among other things. Talk to the police.
- Family court orders for custody and access of children can include orders to prevent your partner from harassing you while exercising his/ her access rights.

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Notes:

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