

be resilient

A publication of the Employee Assistance Centre

Domestic Violence

As you read this article, it is likely that someone you know, work with, or even you yourself are experiencing some form of domestic violence.

Domestic violence, or intimate partner abuse, is present across cultures, religions, income levels, gender identities and sexual orientations. While domestic violence can and does impact all types of relationships, it is an action based in a culture of power and therefore is most often perpetrated against those who are vulnerable. The impact of domestic violence is felt by those who are abused, those who witness this abuse, and those who care about them.

What is domestic violence?

While domestic violence takes many forms, it is often characterized by the intent to control, intimidate and harm. The offender may be someone in a current or previous relationship.

Acts of violence include:

Threats:

- of physical harm to yourself, a child, pet or family member
- of the destruction of property
- of restricting access to money

Verbal assaults:

- name calling
- degrading attacks on your character, appearance, worth
- monitoring and criticism of your daily activities
- blaming you for the abusive behaviours

Control:

- of access to money, food, transportation, friends and family
- of daily activity, often requiring frequent phone calls or texts to check your whereabouts

Psychological:

- messages that you are “crazy”
- messages that others don’t like you or are a danger and only the offender can be trusted
- “gaslighting” – casting doubt on what is real and what is not

Physical:

- unwanted sexualization
- sexual assault
- blocking doorways and exits

Did you know?

According to Statistics Canada, there was a 12 per cent increase in police calls for domestic disturbances from March to June 2020. Federal consultations with front-line organizations suggest an increase in gender-based and domestic violence of around 20 to 30 per cent.

Manitoba Blue Cross’s EAP offers qualified counsellors specializing in domestic abuse.

- shoving
- physical restraint
- slapping, hitting, punching
- assault with weapons or objects

Stalking:

- repeated attempts to track your movements
- repeated unwelcome contact by phone, email or text
- repeated contact with friends or family to deliver or gather information about you

What happens when you are in an abusive relationship?

There is a cycle of violence that repeats in relationships that are unsafe.

Phase 1 is the tension building stage. This is where the offender begins displaying signs of stress and the vulnerable partner often tries to “get it right,” trying to figure out what will calm the offender.

Phase 2 is “the incident” with one or more acts of abuse.

Phase 3 is a period of reconciliation during which the offender tries to justify the abuse with blame and excuses. This phase can also include apologies and promises to change.

Phase 4 is a period of calm or “pretend normalcy” where both partners continue with an appearance of normal daily life together.

This cycle is continuous, often with “the incident” phase becoming increasingly violent over time. It is important to recognize that we all have periods of stress and distress in our lives, yet we do not all cope with them by becoming abusive. Stress alone does not cause abuse; therefore, it is not possible to manage someone’s violence by attempting to reduce their stress.

The cycle is only broken when one of two things happens: the offender accepts all responsibility for their abusive behaviours and seeks help to change, or the vulnerable partner finds an exit.

What domestic violence is not

All relationships have conflict. We cannot be in an intimate relationship without some difference of opinion or episodes of unintended hurt. In healthy relationships we deal with these by talking or arguing safely without an intent to control, intimidate or harm. So, while all relationships have conflict, all do not have abuse and conflict that results in any form of abuse, even one time, is unhealthy. Domestic violence cannot be healed as a relationship issue.

How domestic violence impacts the workplace

The prevalence of domestic violence ensures that those at risk are in all workplace environments, employed at all levels of income.

People experiencing domestic violence are affected in many ways that may be evident in their professional and work lives:

- There may be frequent intrusions as the offender exerts control by checking in through phone calls or texts
- Employees at risk may display high levels of anxiety, scanning the environment for signs of danger
- Attacks on character and self-worth set the stage for low self-esteem and compromised belief in one’s own competence

- Control over personal freedoms makes it difficult to form friendships or participate in casual conversations
- Concern for the welfare of children, pets or family members makes concentration difficult
- Attendance may be impacted by immediate risk or injury.

Coworkers, supervisors and colleagues may suspect abuse and feel powerless to help.

What to do if you or someone you know is at risk

The threat of escalating violence as partner abuse is confronted or revealed is real, so it is important to consider safety when approaching others or seeking help yourself.

If you suspect someone is at risk, talk with them privately and express your concern. Respect their privacy and communicate your willingness to talk again if they do not wish to talk now. Provide information without telling them what to do. Offer only support that you feel safe providing. If you are an employer, consider arranging training for your employees through the Manitoba Government Workplace Initiative to Support Employees on Family Violence (WISE).

If you are seeking help, talk with someone privately and confidentially. Remember that phone records and internet searches can be traced. Contact your EAP to talk with a counsellor or call the provincial domestic violence information/crisis line at 1.877.977.0007. They will discuss options, help develop a safety plan and provide you with all available residential, supportive and legal resources in Manitoba. If you are in immediate danger call 911.

Remember: if you are experiencing domestic violence, you are not alone, you are not at fault and help is available.

– **Judy Hill, M.Ed. Psych**
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For more information call the Employee Assistance Centre at 204.786.8880, TTY 204.775.0586, toll-free 1.800.590.5553 or visit mb.bluecross.ca.

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Consult a professional (counsellor, physician, etc.) before taking action with respect to any topics discussed.

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