

# Breaking Workplace Silence



## Staff Awareness Guide

A Companion Document to  
the Restigouche Employer Package

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Domestic Violence and the Workplace  
January 2021

This project has been funded in part by Women and Gender Equality Canada.



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# 1. Introduction

## About this Guide

The Staff Awareness Guide suggests how to raise awareness of domestic violence in the workplace among your personnel. It is an additional tool accompanying *the Restigouche Employer Package*, which is an important resource for businesses to better understand and manage the impacts of domestic violence in the workplace.

*The Restigouche Employer Package* can be downloaded at:

[www.Breaking-Workplace-Silence.ca](http://www.Breaking-Workplace-Silence.ca)



Domestic violence can happen to anyone, anywhere. It is important for staff to know what to do if a co-worker is experiencing domestic violence.

The positive effects of increasing staff awareness include having more staff capable of recognizing the warning signs, minimizing the negative impacts on the business, and ensuring the employee gets the help and support she needs. By raising staff awareness, you are creating a safer workplace.

**Did you know?** A woman experiencing domestic violence, who can maintain her job, is far more likely to successfully transition from her situation of violence and be a valuable and productive employee in her workplace.

## Why the Focus on Women?

The Breaking Workplace Silence project was initiated to increase private-sector leadership and investment in women experiencing violence, in particular domestic violence, with the broader objective of increasing women's economic security -- a critical piece in improving women's overall well-being. Statistics show that women are significantly more often the victims of domestic violence, compared to men. The project's main objective is to increase women's access to sustainable employment by raising the awareness of employers regarding the issues and barriers that women face when trying to transition from situations of violence to stable economic security.

## Project Partners

This Guide is a result of close collaboration with a range of Restigouche employers and other partners with expertise in domestic violence and human resources management. For a list of the project partners, please visit [www.Breaking-Workplace-Silence.ca](http://www.Breaking-Workplace-Silence.ca)

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## 2. Menu of Options

This Guide lists and describes many different activities for raising awareness of domestic violence in the workplace; it is up to the employer to determine what is an appropriate level of engagement within their organization. Any action, no matter the size, is a positive step forward.

An employer can choose to implement any or all of the following activities presented below:

**Designate a Resource Person**

Designate/assign one or more of your staff to act as the point of contact for employees who are experiencing domestic violence. **See more details in Section 3: *Designated Resource Person*.**

**Share Information**

Share information with your employees regarding domestic violence in the workplace. **See more details in Section 4: *Share Information*.**

**Set up a Committee**

Set up a committee tasked with raising awareness of domestic violence issues in the workplace. **See more details in Section 5: *Set up a Committee*.**

**Community Involvement**

Participate in community efforts to help end domestic violence. **See more details in Section 6: *Community Involvement*.**

**Share your Policy/Procedure/Code of Practice**

Inform your employees of the code of practice (policies and procedures) for dealing with domestic violence within your workplace.

*\*Note that you may have a legal responsibility to establish a code of practice (policies and procedures) covering domestic violence in your workplace. See [the Restigouche Employer Package](#) for more information.*



## 3. Designated Resource Person

A Designated Resource Person can be someone within your organization who is designated or assigned to act as the point of contact for an employee who needs to talk about domestic violence. The Designated Resource Person can be one or more people and may be members of the supervisory or management team, occupational health and safety committee, workplace wellness committee, or even the business owner.

### Acting as a Bridge

A key aspect of the Designated Resource Person role is to act as a bridge connecting the employee to the support and resources that are both internal and external to your organization.

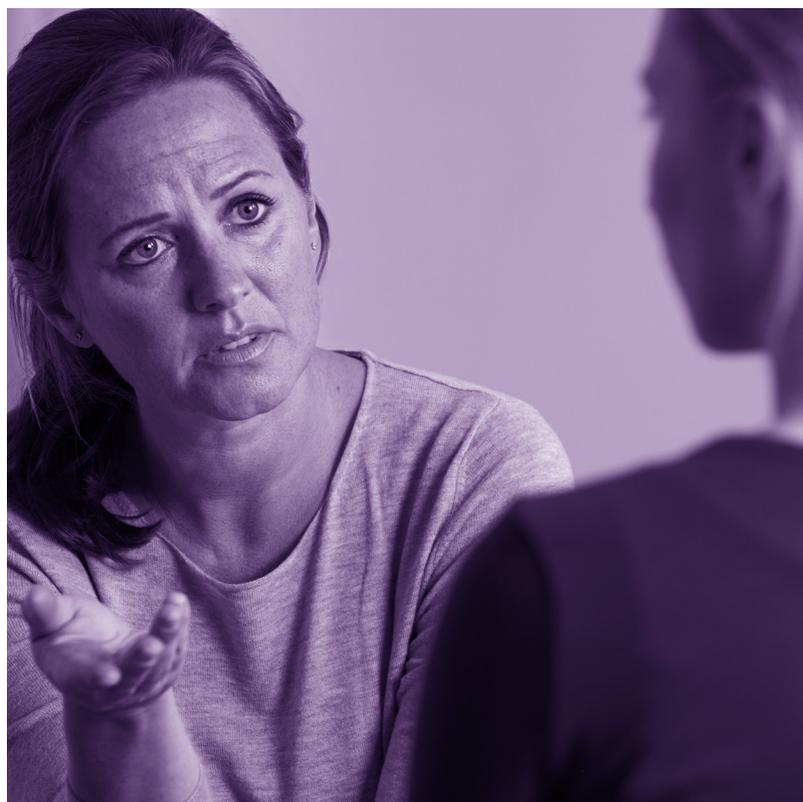
#### *Bridge to internal resources and support*

The Designated Resource Person should support the employee by informing her direct supervisor of her situation so that she can access her employer's supports and resources (e.g., the Employee Assistance Program, flexible hours, screened calls, etc.).

Examples of how to support and accommodate an employee who is experiencing domestic violence are found in *the Restigouche Employee Package*.

#### *Bridge to external resources and support*

The Designated Resource Person should guide the employee towards community resources, including emergency shelters and outreach services. The Designated Resource Person could even arrange, upon request and with discretion, for a family-violence professional to come meet the employee in the workplace.



### Privacy and Confidentiality

When the Designated Resource Person is talking with an employee who is experiencing domestic violence, it is important to inform them that some of the information they share may need to be disclosed with management for the purpose of providing her with accommodations and supports. It would be helpful to mention that their employer is not only aware that domestic violence can affect someone in the workplace, but that they are also willing to support an employee who is experiencing domestic violence.

If the employee is unwilling to share some of this information with management, then the Designated Resource Person must respect the employee's decision. However, if the Designated Resource Person is informed that the employee may encounter a specific individual who may become violent in the workplace,

then they must inform the staff of this risk, person's identity, the nature and extent of the risk, and the necessary controls.

There is no duty to inform all employees of this risk, only those who are likely to encounter the individual in the course of their work. There is a need to balance the requirement to keep workers safe and the employees' right to confidentiality, which may involve competing legal obligations that must be addressed on a case-by-case basis (please see *the Restigouche Employer Package* for more information).

## Limitations and Boundaries

It can be tempting for the person in the Designated Resource Person role to act beyond the scope of this role, especially when the intention is to help the employee even further. However, doing so can have serious implications for both employees; thus, it is important to closely examine and understand the mandate of this role, along with its limited scope of responsibilities.

The person in the Designated Resource Person role should always understand that they are being asked to take on this support role in the workplace, and not outside of work, and should respect the employers' instructions on the agreed-upon scope and description of this role. The responsibilities listed below should give a better sense of what the Designated Resource Person should and should not get involved with.

Responsibilities should include:

- Being available to listen to the employee in the workplace.
- Learn how to communicate effectively with an employee who is experiencing domestic violence, and:
  - o Adopt a neutral, objective, and non-judgmental approach designed to win trust; Show empathy and understanding; Show a genuine interest in the safety of employees experiencing domestic violence and have excellent communication skills; Respond appropriately and respectfully towards employees seeking to discuss their abusive situation.
  - o Remember that it takes a lot of courage for an employee to talk about their domestic violence situation, and how important it is for them to feel heard, believed, and treated with empathy.
  - o Read Section 2 of *the Restigouche Employer Package* for more tips.
- Adhere to policies on privacy and confidentiality by taking steps to avoid gossiping and to respect the privacy of an employee who comes forward to speak about their domestic violence experience.
- Share information on professional support services for employees.
- Liaise with management, as required.



At the request of management, other activities of the Designated Resource Person may involve:

- Promote awareness among staff of the impacts domestic violence can have in the workplace.
- Provide information on domestic violence and/or arrange staff training.
- Help set up a committee regarding domestic violence in the workplace.
- Take part in the organization's community involvement to help end domestic violence.
- Learn more about Domestic Violence in the Workplace (see Section 7: Training and Resources).

Responsibilities should not include:

- Acting as the Designated Resource Person outside the workplace.
- Trying to become an "expert" in domestic violence to diagnose or treat trauma.
- Attempting to gather details about the employee's personal life.
- Trying to solve the domestic situation.
- Judging or rejecting the employee if she chooses to stay with her abuser.
- Becoming too emotionally or personally invested.

## Benefits

Having a Designated Resource Person in your organization can help:

- Foster an environment of trust and motivate your employees to end their isolation and talk about their situation as they can feel less intimidated, afraid, or embarrassed to approach someone who they know is informed about domestic violence in the workplace.
- Improve communication between employees and their employer on this matter. Employees can then view their employer as being proactive in their health and safety. Being a domestic violence-informed employer can boost the organization's standing in the eyes of its employees.

An employer who knows how to communicate with and support an employee who is experiencing domestic violence will create the conditions for a trusting professional working relationship. In addition, this may allow her to maintain her financial security (by continuing to work) and remain a productive and healthy employee.



Testimonials from women in Restigouche who experienced domestic violence:

*"I would have loved to have someone to talk to about my situation."*

*"It's important to designate/assign contact persons and to display/share that information in the workplace so people know who to approach to talk about things they can talk to. It's reassuring to know that one or more people who are sensitive to the situation are available there to listen. For employees experiencing domestic violence, it's like having an ally in the workplace."*

## 4. Share Information

Here are some suggestions on how to share information related to domestic violence and how to raise staff awareness:

- Share your policy/procedure/code of practice that defines violence and steps to address domestic violence in the workplace.
- Inform your staff of the name of the Designated Resource Person, if your organization has one, and how to contact them.
- Place a poster in your lobby or staff lounge indicating that your organization is informed on the effects domestic violence can have in the workplace, and who they can talk to. A sample poster is in Annex B of *the Restigouche Employer Package*.
- Assemble an orientation folder for new employees that contains the above-mentioned poster and a list of regional resources for women experiencing domestic violence. This list is provided in Annex A of *the Restigouche Employer Package*.
- Place a poster/sticker in the employee washroom with Notre-Dame House emergency contact information.
- Make *the Restigouche Employer Package* accessible to all employees.

Additional suggestions:

- Arrange for staff training on domestic violence (see **Section 7: Training and Resources**).
- Deliver a presentation on domestic violence in the workplace during a staff meeting.
- Create a folder that is readily accessible to employees who want to learn more about domestic violence in the workplace. Include materials such as those listed in **Section 7: Training and Resources**.

### **IMPORTANT: Employers Must Inform Staff if there is a Risk of Violence**

If you are informed that your employees could encounter a specific individual who may become violent in the workplace, you must inform the staff of this risk. You must inform them of the person's identity, the nature and extent of the risk, and the necessary controls. Learn more in *Section 4 "Six Steps to Meeting Your Legal Responsibilities"* of *the Restigouche Employer Package*.



## 5. Set up a Committee

Creating a committee is a great way to raise staff awareness. Ask your workplace Health and Safety Committee or strike a new committee to kick-start this initiative.

One of the first things that a committee can do is establish a workplace violence policy that includes domestic violence (including sexual, between intimate partners, etc.) in the definition of workplace violence, and steps to address violence in the workplace. Each year, the committee can help assess the risk of violence in your workplace. Also, the committee can be responsible for training employees on your organization's workplace violence policy and procedures for managing violence in the workplace, which includes how to:

- Recognize the potential for violence in the workplace.
- Implement the policies, procedures, and arrangements that need to be made to address the risk.
- Respond to domestic violence situations in the workplace.
- Obtain assistance.
- Report, investigate, and document any incidents of violence in the workplace.

Remember that you may have a legal responsibility around these above-mentioned activities. Please see [\*the Restigouche Employer Package\*](#) for more information.



Other activities of the committee may include:

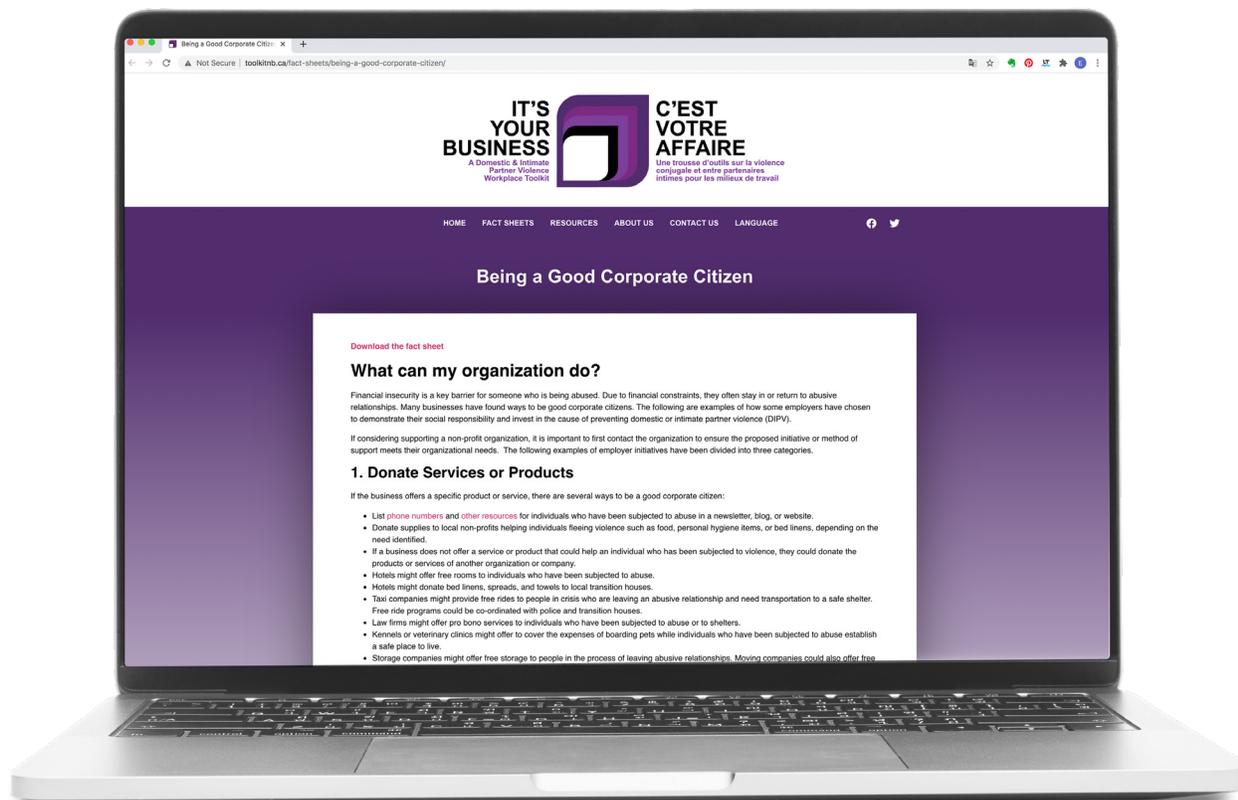
- Establish and monitor procedures for the safety of employees and the security of the organization, including:
  - o Ensuring that parking lots and hallways are well lit;
  - o Install corner mirrors or emergency contact alarms in parking areas; and
  - o Offer to walk a vulnerable employee to her vehicle.
- Provide ideas and suggestions for creating safety plans, complying with all court orders, including ones requiring the abuser to stay away from the employee's workplace.
- Have an emergency safety plan in place, which includes procedures on how to contact the police if employees believe that someone is exhibiting threatening behaviour associated with domestic violence towards another employee.
- Arrange for training on how to recognize the signs of domestic violence in the workplace and how to communicate effectively with an employee who may be experiencing domestic violence.

## 6. Community Involvement

Employers can demonstrate their social responsibility in different ways. If your organization wishes to invest in the prevention of domestic violence, find suggestions below about how you can get involved in your community:

- Donate services or products to local organizations providing domestic violence services.
- Sponsor community programs on domestic violence.
- Be a good Samaritan and participate in fundraising campaigns that address domestic violence.
- Launch or participate in a public awareness campaign focused on domestic violence.
- Ask community service providers to host breakfast/lunch-and-learns on domestic violence issues and share available local resources.

For more information on getting involved in the community, please see the Fact Sheet on Being a Good Corporate Citizen, from *It's Your Business: A Domestic & Intimate Partner Violence (DIPV) Workplace Toolkit*: <http://www.toolkitnb.ca/fact-sheets/being-a-good-corporate-citizen/>



## 7. Training and Resources

Employees are not expected to develop expertise in domestic violence as ending the cycle of violence can be very complex. However, it is important to understand the basics, which are covered in *the Restigouche Employer Package* and in many other materials referenced below.

There are many resources available to staff and to the Designated Resource Person to increase their knowledge and understanding of domestic violence in the workplace. Here are some suggestions:



### Materials

Restigouche Employer Package	Breaking Workplace Silence Project <a href="http://www.Breaking-Workplace-Silence.ca">www.Breaking-Workplace-Silence.ca</a>
It's Your Business: A Domestic & Intimate Partner Violence (DIPV) Workplace Toolkit	The Domestic/Intimate Partner Violence and the Workplace Committee of New Brunswick <a href="http://www.toolkitnb.ca/home/">http://www.toolkitnb.ca/home/</a>

### Videos

Talking About Domestic Violence	<a href="http://www.toolkitnb.ca/resources/videos/">http://www.toolkitnb.ca/resources/videos/</a>
Supervisors can make a difference	<a href="https://www.workplacesrespond.org/resource-library/supervisors-can-make-difference/">https://www.workplacesrespond.org/resource-library/supervisors-can-make-difference/</a>
Develop a Personal Safety Plan	<a href="http://www.toolkitnb.ca/resources/videos/">http://www.toolkitnb.ca/resources/videos/</a>

## Courses in New Brunswick

Full day or Half day Training	The Domestic/Intimate Partner Violence and the Workplace Committee of New Brunswick <a href="http://www.toolkitnb.ca/contact-us/">http://www.toolkitnb.ca/contact-us/</a>
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## Online Courses

Domestic Violence in the Workplace: What everyone needs to know (E-course 1h)	Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children, Western University <a href="http://www.dvatwork.ca">www.dvatwork.ca</a>
Responder Module (E-course 3h)	Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children, Western University <a href="http://www.dvatwork.ca">www.dvatwork.ca</a>
Domestic violence in the workplace (E-course 1hr \$50)	Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety <a href="https://www.ccohs.ca/products/posters/bullying-harassment/">https://www.ccohs.ca/products/posters/bullying-harassment/</a>

## Other Helpful Resources and References

Love Shouldn't Hurt Campaign	Government of New Brunswick <a href="https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/public-safety/community_safety/content/intimate_partner_violence.html">https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/public-safety/community_safety/content/intimate_partner_violence.html</a>
What Employers Can Do	Government of Manitoba <a href="https://gov.mb.ca/msw/fvpp/toolkit/cando.html">https://gov.mb.ca/msw/fvpp/toolkit/cando.html</a>
Addressing Domestic Violence in the Workplace: A Handbook for Employers	WorkSafeBC <a href="https://www.worksafebc.com/en/resources/health-safety/books-guides/addressing-domestic-violence-in-the-workplace-a-handbook-for-employers?lang=en">https://www.worksafebc.com/en/resources/health-safety/books-guides/addressing-domestic-violence-in-the-workplace-a-handbook-for-employers?lang=en</a>
Règles pour les personnes-ressources en milieu de travail <i>*available in French only</i>	Association paritaire pour la santé et la sécurité du travail secteur « affaires municipales » <a href="https://www.apsam.com/formation/nos-formateurs/regles-pour-les-personnes-ressources-en-milieu-de-travail">https://www.apsam.com/formation/nos-formateurs/regles-pour-les-personnes-ressources-en-milieu-de-travail</a>