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Preventing Gender-Based Violence in Ontario's Public Sector

A SUPERVISOR'S PLAYBOOK



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Preventing Gender-Based Violence in Ontario's Public Sector: A Supervisor's Playbook



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INTRODUCTION

About This Playbook

This playbook is for **supervisors and managers in Ontario's public sector**. It offers practical, everyday guidance to help you notice risk, respond appropriately, and prevent escalation when **gender-based violence (GBV)** affects the workplace.

This playbook uses a trauma- and violence-informed care (TVIC) approach. Throughout, you will find guidance to support safety, choice, and trust without requiring workers to share personal details. The goal is to reduce harm in the moment and prevent escalation over time.

You do not need to be an expert in GBV, trauma, or the law. This resource is designed to support your day-to-day supervisory decisions, especially when situations feel uncomfortable, unclear, or easy to overlook. **Small, timely actions matter.**

You may be one of the first to notice changes in behaviour, performance, or team dynamics. Because of this, you play a key role in reducing harm and supporting workplace safety.

The NAP Approach

This playbook uses a simple supervision flow:

- **NOTICE** early signs of risk or patterns
- **ACT** safely and within your role
- **PREVENT** future harm through everyday supervision

How to use this playbook

You don't need to read this cover to cover. Use it as a reference and go to the section that fits your situation.

Acronyms

ESA: Employment Standards Act

GBV: Gender-Based Violence

HR: Human Resources

IPV: Intimate Partner Violence

IT: Information Technology

OHS: Occupational Health and Safety

OHSA: Occupational Health and Safety Act

TFHV: Technology-Facilitated Harm and Violence

TVIC: Trauma- and Violence-Informed Care

Glossary



Confidentiality: Sharing information only with people who need it for safety, policy, or legal reasons.

Disclosure: When a worker tells someone at work (for example, a supervisor or HR) that they have experienced or witnessed harm, harassment, or violence. A disclosure does not start a formal report, but it should lead to support and information about the next steps.

Domestic Violence: This can include physical, sexual, emotional, psychological financial, or digital abuse, or behaviours that make someone feel unsafe. Also used interchangeably with *Intimate Partner Violence*.

Gender-Based Violence: Violence, abuse, or harassment directed at someone because of their gender, gender identity, or sex. This includes sexual harassment and domestic violence.

Intersectionality: The idea that people have multiple identities (for example, gender, race, or age) that can overlap and affect how they experience harm, discrimination, or access to support.

Intimate Partner Violence: Harmful behaviour by a current or former partner. This can include physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, financial, or digital abuse. Also used interchangeably with *Domestic Violence*.

Reporting: Formally telling the employer about a concern through a workplace process or policy. Reporting follows set steps and may lead to an investigation or formal response.

Retaliation: Negative consequences a worker may face after raising a concern or taking part in a process.

Safe Reporting: Handling and sharing information in ways that protect safety, privacy, and trust.

Sexual Violence: Any sexual act or behaviour without consent, including assault, harassment, stalking, indecent exposure, voyeurism, or exploitation.

Technology-Facilitated Harm and Violence: Using technology (such as phones, apps, or online platforms) to harass, threaten, monitor, or harm someone. This can include sharing information or images without consent or using technology to control or intimidate.

Trauma- and Violence-Informed Care: An approach that recognizes that people may be affected by trauma and violence and promotes safety, choice, trust, and respect, without requiring people to share personal details.

SECTION 1: GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AT WORK



Objectives

NAP focus: This section supports **NOTICE** early signs of risk or pattern.

What this section helps you do

- Understand what gender-based violence can look like at work
- Recognize that gender-based violence may show up as patterns or single serious incidents
- Notice how power, authority, and dependency increase risk

Why gender-based violence is a workplace issue

Gender-based violence (GBV) is sometimes seen as a personal or private issue. When it affects a worker's safety, wellbeing, or ability to do their job—or affects anyone else at work—it becomes a workplace issue.

Even when behaviour happens outside of work, it can show up at work through:

- Safety concerns
- Health impacts
- Reduced focus or concentration
- Changes in attendance
- Changes in performance

As a supervisor, you are often one of the first people to notice these changes. Early awareness can support workplace health and safety responsibilities.



What we mean by gender-based violence at work

In a workplace context, GBV refers to behaviour that harms, intimidates, or controls a worker because of their gender, including gender identity, gender expression, sex, or sexual orientation.

At work, this behaviour may be physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, or financial. It can happen:

- In person
- By phone
- Through email, messaging, or social media

The behaviour may be carried out by a coworker, a supervisor, a client, a patient, or someone outside the workplace, such as a current or former partner. It becomes a workplace issue when it affects a worker at work.



Power, authority, and dependency in supervisory relationships

GBV in the workplace is closely linked to power differences, especially between supervisors and workers. As a supervisor, you influence schedules, evaluations, opportunities, and job security. Because of this, your actions carry more weight.

Why this matters

Workers may feel unable to object, raise concerns, or leave a situation—even when behaviour makes them uncomfortable. The same behaviour can feel different when it comes from someone with authority.

Misuse of power

Misuse of power can include:

- Personal or sexual comments from someone in authority
- Blurred boundaries framed as mentorship or friendliness
- Implying job benefits depend on personal attention

Trust and dependency

When trust is misused, workers may be led to question their own judgment. This can include minimizing behaviour, denying impact, or reframing boundary crossing as support. Because workers depend on you for references and advancement, this dynamic can increase harm.

How gender-based violence shows up at work

GBV can show up in many ways at work. Some behaviours are obvious. Others are subtle, minimized, or develop over time. All can affect safety, wellbeing, or ability to work.

Examples:

Gender-based harassment or discrimination

- Gendered comments or jokes dismissed as humour
- Behaviour that stereotypes, excludes, or undermines

Sexual harassment

- Unwelcome sexual comments, jokes, or gestures
- Unwanted touching
- Pressure linked to work opportunities

Domestic or intimate partner violence

- Repeated calls or messages during work hours
- Threats, stalking, or showing up at a worksite



Some behaviours are minimized because they seem familiar or “not serious”, even when they affect safety over time. Over time, they can create a hostile or unsafe work environment.

Escalation over time

GBV can start with small behaviours that escalate when ignored or normalized. Early behaviours may include:

- Off-hand gendered comments
- Subtle personal remarks
- Behaviour that creates discomfort but is brushed off

Over time, these behaviours may:

- Increase in frequency
- Become more controlling or personal
- Affect safety, confidence, or ability to work

Patterns and serious incidents

GBV at work can show up as patterns of behaviour or as a single serious incident.

Impact matters more than intent. Behaviour may not be intended to cause harm, but it can still affect safety, wellbeing, dignity, or ability to work.

Disclosure and formal reporting

A worker sharing a concern, even indirectly, is a disclosure. This is not always the same as making a formal report. Workers may be seeking support, information, or reassurance without asking to start a formal process.

Supervisor takeaway

Gender-based violence at work can involve power differences and a harmful impact. It may show up as patterns or as a single serious incident—both require attention.

SECTION 2: NOTICING RISK AT WORK



Objectives

NAP focus: This section supports **NOTICE** early signs of risk or pattern.

What this section helps you do

- Notice early signs that may affect safety or ability to work
- Recognize when concerns may involve more than performance or conduct
- Decide when to watch, check in, or involve supports without waiting for disclosure

What “Noticing Risk” means

Noticing risk means you are alert to changes, behaviours, or signals that suggest something may be affecting a worker’s safety or ability to work.

You do **not** need to:

- Determine what happened
- Assess intent or credibility
- Receive a disclosure

Some behaviours, such as bullying, intimidation, or stalking are not always gender-based. When they are gendered, targeted, or linked to power, control, or dependency, they can be part of GBV at work.



Common signs that may signal risk

Risk related to GBV often shows up through changes rather than a clear disclosure. These signals do not automatically mean GBV. They are indicators that something may need attention.

Concern may increase when signs:

- Repeat
- Cluster together
- Affect safety or ability to work

Changes in behaviour or wellbeing

- Withdrawal from coworkers
- Increased anxiety or distress
- Being unusually quiet in meetings
- Avoiding certain people, situations, or locations

Changes in work patterns

- Frequent lateness or absenteeism
- Missed deadlines or reduced focus
- A noticeable change in performance
- Increased distraction, including frequent phone checking

Changes in team dynamics

- Tension or discomfort around a particular person
- Favouritism with conditions attached
- Repeated boundary-crossing comments or behaviour



Patterns matter over time

Looking at behaviour in isolation can make risk easy to miss. Patterns become clearer when similar behaviour repeats or is directed at the same worker. At the same time, a single serious incident can be significant on its own.

Examples:

- One “off-colour” comment may seem minor. When it happens repeatedly and is directed at the same worker, it can signal a pattern.
- One unexpected personal message may not raise concern. Ongoing unsolicited messages can increase risk.

Patterns can help explain why “something feels off” and support earlier, work-focused check-ins.



Single serious incidents

Risk does not always show up as a pattern. A single serious or overt incident can be significant on its own, especially when it involves clear boundary crossing, misuse of power, or immediate safety concerns. One event can be enough to signal risk at work.



Examples:

- A supervisor makes a sexual comment about a worker's body during a one-on-one meeting
- A worker is threatened by their supervisor to be demoted after refusing a sexual advance

Try this now

When something feels off, start with a brief, work-focused check-in. Keep the focus on work and support, not on finding out what happened.

- Name what you're noticing
- Ask what support would help
- Do not ask for details

Say this

"I wanted to check in because I've noticed a few deadlines have been missed. Is there anything at work that's making things harder right now?"

When risk looks like a performance issue

Concerns related to GBV may first appear as performance or conduct issues. Without context, you may interpret this as disengagement or lack of effort. In some cases, these changes are linked to safety concerns or ongoing stress rather than ability or motivation.

Treating these changes only as performance issues can miss the underlying risk. Moving directly to discipline without checking in can increase stress and discourage help-seeking. A supportive check-in helps clarify what is going on and what next steps may be appropriate.

What supervisors can do

You do not need certainty to respond appropriately. When you notice a change, respond early and respectfully by focusing on the impact on work and support needs—without making assumptions about attitude or effort or trying to investigate. **Your role is to notice and respond—not to figure everything out.**

Start with a respectful check-in

Effective check-ins:

- Are private and one-on-one
- Focus on what you are noticing, not conclusions
- Avoid pressure to share personal details

Say this

“I’ve noticed you’ve been late to a few meetings recently. I wanted to check in and see if anything is affecting your work that you’d like support with.”



When noticing needs additional action

Additional steps may be needed when:

- Safety may be affected
- Behaviour is escalating
- A pattern is emerging
- A worker hints at harm or asks for help

At this point, you should follow workplace processes and involve appropriate supports, such as human resources (HR), occupational health and safety (OHS), or other designated resources.

Supervisor takeaway

Changes in behaviour or performance can signal risk, especially when they repeat or affect work. Supervisors do not need proof or a disclosure to check in or take the next steps.

SECTION 3: YOUR ROLE AS A SUPERVISOR



Objectives

NAP focus: This section supports **ACT** safely and within your role.

What this section helps you do

- Understand your role when concerns or disclosures arise
- Stay within your role while responding supportively
- Know when and how to seek advice or escalate concerns

Role clarity under pressure

When a concern or disclosure arises, your role is to respond and support—not to determine what happened.

At the same time, you may feel pressure to:

- Get all the details
- Determine what happened
- Decide what should happen next

Being clear on your role helps you know how to show up in the moment, even when the situation feels uncomfortable, emotional, or unclear.

When role boundaries are unclear, supervisors may either overstep or do nothing at all. Both can cause harm. Clear role boundaries help supervisors support safety and trust while avoiding responsibilities that belong elsewhere.

What the supervisor role includes when concerns arise

In practice, this means:

- Listening and acknowledging what is shared
- Taking safety and work impact seriously
- Being clear about limits to confidentiality
- Identifying immediate workplace needs
- Sharing information about available supports or options
- Connecting the concern to appropriate next steps or processes

This approach supports safety and helps build trust, even when information is limited.

Offering supports as part of responding

Offering support is part of a trauma- and violence-informed response. This involves making supports visible without pressuring a worker to use them.

You may:

- Share information about supports or options that are available
- Explain what those supports are for and how they can be accessed
- Ask what would feel helpful right now
- Respect a worker's pace and choices

You should avoid:

- Pushing formal reporting before a worker is ready, unless safety requires it
- Presenting supports as something the worker must accept
- Treating hesitation or refusal as the end of concern or responsibility
- Requiring workers to repeat their experience to multiple people when a clear handoff is possible

Offering support helps keep options open and reduces the risk of additional harm.

Say this

"Thank you for telling me."

"I want to support you and explain what happens next."

"There are support options available if you want to hear about them."

"You don't have to decide anything right now."

"There are limits to confidentiality, and I want to explain those before we continue."

What the supervisor role does not include

You do not investigate concerns related to GBV.

This includes:

- Gathering evidence
- Questioning people to determine what happened
- Assessing credibility or intent
- Deciding outcomes or discipline
- Providing counselling or legal advice

Investigation and decision-making are handled through designated workplace processes such as HR, labour relations, OHS, or assigned investigators.



Supporting vs. investigating vs. deciding

These roles are often confused, especially when situations feel serious or unclear. Understanding the difference helps you stay within your role when responding to concerns.

Pause and notice

Before you respond, pause and ask yourself:

What is needed right now to support safety or work needs?

Am I focusing on support and immediate needs, rather than trying to figure out what happened?

If you feel pressure to get details or make decisions, pause. This is a signal to reflect on your role or seek advice.

Supporting (your role)

Supporting involves responding to the worker and addressing immediate needs without trying to resolve the situation.

Supporting includes:

- Listening and acknowledging
- Taking safety seriously
- Checking for immediate needs
- Sharing options and supports
- Following reporting or escalation steps when required

Investigating (not your role)

Investigating involves gathering information to determine what happened. This role belongs to designated processes and trained roles.

Supervisors may be required to cooperate with an investigation when asked. This is different from conducting an investigation.

You should avoid investigating, even when you feel pressure to “get the full story”.

Deciding (not your role)

Deciding involves determining outcomes or consequences. This also belongs to designated roles and formal processes.

Why doing nothing can cause harm

When you are unsure what to do, it can feel safer to wait or take no action. This is common when information is limited or the situation feels unclear.

Doing nothing can:

- Signal that speaking up is unsafe
- Increase the risk of escalation
- Leave workers without support or guidance

You do not need certainty to respond. Acknowledging concerns and taking safety seriously can reduce harm and support earlier access to help.

Supervisor takeaway

Supervisors respond and support. Staying within your role protects workers, builds trust, and helps prevent harm.

TOOL: ROLE AND DECISION BOUNDARY GUIDE

What this tool is

A quick guide to help you decide whether to respond, seek advice, or escalate when a concern or disclosure arises.

Purpose

To help you stay within your role while responding safely and appropriately.

How to use it

Start with your situation.

Use “When” to find the closest match, then follow the actions listed. Move to “Seek advice” or “Escalate” if safety concerns arise or you are unsure what to do.

STAYS WITH YOU

When: No immediate safety concerns; focus is on support.

You can

- Listen and acknowledge
- Check immediate needs
- Make authorized work adjustments

Remember: Support — don’t investigate or decide.

SEEK ADVICE

When: You are unsure what to do next

You can

- Contact HR, OHS, or a designated lead
- Get guidance before acting
- Document the advice you receive

Remember: Seeking advice helps you stay within your role.

ESCALATE / HAND OFF

When: Safety concerns, reporting requirements, or authority limits apply.

You can

- Follow the reporting pathway
- Share only what is needed
- Hand off investigation and decision-making to designated roles

Remember: Escalation supports safety and process.

SECTION 4: RESPONDING TO DISCLOSURES



Objectives

NAP focus: This section supports **ACT** safely and within your role.

What this section helps you do

- Respond calmly and supportively when a worker shares a concern
- Use language that supports safety, dignity, and choice
- Avoid responses that may unintentionally cause harm
- Take appropriate next steps, including sharing supports and supporting time away from work when needed

TOOL: THE CALM APPROACH

Use the **CALM approach** as a simple, practical guide when a worker shares a concern related to GBV. You do not need to follow it perfectly or in order. Use what fits the conversation.

C – CREATE SAFETY

Start by creating as much safety and clarity as possible.

- Make the space private where you can
- Check for any immediate safety concerns at work
- Explain limits to confidentiality clearly and early

Say this

“Thank you for telling me. I’m glad you came to me.”

“Before we go further, I want to explain confidentiality and when I may need to involve others to address safety.”

If there is an immediate safety concern, follow workplace safety procedures.

A – ASK WHAT WOULD HELP

Avoid assuming what the worker needs. Let them guide the conversation.

- Ask open, supportive questions
- Let the worker decide what to share and how much
- Respect their pace

Say this

“How can I support you right now?”

“We can talk about options, or we can just focus on what you need today.”

You are not expected to fix the situation or decide next steps at this moment.

L — LISTEN AND VALIDATE

Listen without interrupting or pushing for details.

- Thank the worker for speaking up
- Acknowledge that it may be difficult to share

Avoid

- Asking for evidence, timelines, or names
- Asking “why” questions
- Questioning credibility or intent

Say this

“I hear you.”

“That sounds really difficult.”

“You don’t have to go into details.”

Listening without pressure helps build trust and reduces the risk of harm.

M — MAKE CONNECTIONS

Once safety and immediate needs are addressed, you can share information and options without pressure.

- Explain what you can and cannot do in your role
- Share available workplace or external supports
- Be transparent about possible next steps

Say this

“There are a few support options available if you want to hear about them.”

“You don’t have to decide anything right now.”

Making connections helps keep options open and supports future helpseeking.

After the conversation

What happens next matters as much as the initial response.

What supervisors should do

- Document only what is required by workplace processes
- Follow reporting or escalation steps when required
- Consult HR, OHS, or designated supports if unsure
- Continue regular, respectful supervision

What supervisors should avoid

- Sharing information more widely than necessary
- Taking informal action outside established processes
- Acting independently when unsure of the next step

Quick action plan

Pick one to practice the next time a concern is shared:

- Thank the worker and acknowledge what they shared
- Be clear about confidentiality early
- Offer options without pressure
- Avoid asking for details

If a worker is not ready to disclose

Not every concern comes with details. Some workers may test whether it feels safe to talk or stop partway through.

A lack of disclosure does not mean there is no risk or concern.

How supervisors can respond

- Thank the worker for speaking up
- Let them know support is available
- Avoid pressuring them to share more
- Continue to notice changes at work

Keep the door open. Do not treat the conversation as closed or resolved.

TOOL: DISCLOSURE RESPONSE SCRIPTS

What this tool is

A set of short scripts supervisors can use when responding to a disclosure related to GBV.

Purpose

To support calm and respectful responses when supervisors are unsure what to say.

How to use it

Use these scripts as starting points. Focus on tone, respect, and clarity rather than exact wording.

Acknowledge and Create Safety

"Thank you for telling me. I'm glad you came to me."

"I'm really sorry this happened to you."

"I want to support you the best way I can."

Listen Without Pressure

"You can share as much or as little as you want."

"We don't have to go into details right now."

"Take your time. I am listening."

Validate and Reduce Self-blame

"This isn't your fault."

"What you're feeling makes sense."

"You're allowed to feel the way you do."

Clarify Confidentiality Respectfully

"I want to be upfront about confidentiality. If there are safety or policy concerns, I may need to share limited information."

"If I need to share information, I'll explain what I'm sharing, why I'm sharing it, and who I'm sharing it with."

Offer Options Without Pressure

"We can talk about options if you want, or we can just focus on support today."

"You don't have to decide anything right now."

"What would feel most helpful at this moment?"

Close the Conversation with Clarity

"Before we wrap up, let's check what you need today and what the next step is."

"I'll follow up with you by [time/date]. Does that work for you?"

Supporting time away from work: Domestic or Sexual Violence Leave

When a worker needs time away from work due to domestic or sexual violence, your role is to provide access to the leave without barriers.

Domestic or Sexual Violence (DSV) Leave is a job-protected leave under the Employment Standards Act (ESA). A worker can take this leave if they, or their child under 18, are experiencing or have been threatened with domestic or sexual violence. For more information, www.ontario.ca/document/your-guide-employment-standards-act-0/domestic-or-sexual-violence-leave.

Worker eligibility and scope

Workers can access DSV Leave when they need time away from work for themselves or their child.

If a worker meets the basic ESA requirements and identifies the absence as DSV Leave, you put the leave in place. **Your role is not to investigate what happened.**

A worker is eligible if:

- They have worked for the employer for at least 13 consecutive weeks
- They or their child under 18 experienced or were threatened with domestic or sexual violence
- They are in a role covered by the ESA (full-time, part-time, permanent, or temporary)
- They are not the person who committed the violence

Timing does not limit eligibility

- The violence does not need to be recent
- The worker does not need to be living with the person who caused harm

Permitted uses of Domestic or Sexual Violence Leave

A worker may use the leave to:

- Get medical or mental health care
- Access victim services or community supports
- Attend counselling or therapy
- Relocate to a safer home
- Take legal steps, including police or court appointments

Amount of leave available

Workers have access to both days and weeks of DSV Leave each calendar year. These are separate banks and can be used flexibly.

Workers can take:

- Up to 10 days, and
- Up to 15 weeks each year

The leave can be used all at once or in smaller blocks.

How the leave is counted

DSV Leave must be tracked consistently.

Days (10-day bank):

- Can be taken one at a time or in parts
- A partial day may count as a full day

Weeks (15-week bank):

- Can be taken all at once or in blocks
- Any time in a week may count as a full week

Apply these rules consistently and ensure payroll is updated so that leave is tracked properly.

Paid and unpaid portions

DSV Leave includes both paid and unpaid time.

How pay works:

- The first 5 days each year are paid
- Additional days or weeks are unpaid
- Paid days are at the worker's regular rate

Supervisor responsibilities

Supervisors play an important role in making sure workers can access DSV Leave safely, without delay, and without unnecessary barriers.

Your role is to support access to leave and follow process. You do not investigate what happened.

Key Rule: Do not investigate. Provide access to leave and follow process.

What supervisors can do

1. Respond without requiring personal details

Workers only need to tell you they are taking DSV Leave.

- Do not ask for details about the situation
- The worker only needs to identify the absence as DSV Leave
- You may request evidence later if appropriate, but do not delay approval

Notice requirements:

- Days: verbal or written notice before the leave, or as soon as possible after
- Weeks: written notice before the leave, or as soon as possible after

2. Ask only what is needed for scheduling and safety

- Ask only what is needed for scheduling or safety
- Ask how to communicate about scheduling, if needed
- Ask if there is a safe way to contact the worker
- Do not ask what happened or who was involved

Say this

"You don't need to share details."

"Thank you for letting me know."

"For scheduling purposes, how much time away are you expecting?"

"Is there a safe way for me to contact you while you're away?"

3. Request evidence only when reasonable and safe

You may request evidence, but only when it is reasonable and does not create barriers or risk.

Consider:

- Whether evidence is available
- The cost or burden to the worker

Try this now

When a worker requests DSV Leave, take a moment to check your response:

Have I approved the leave without asking for details?

Have I asked only what is needed for scheduling and safety?

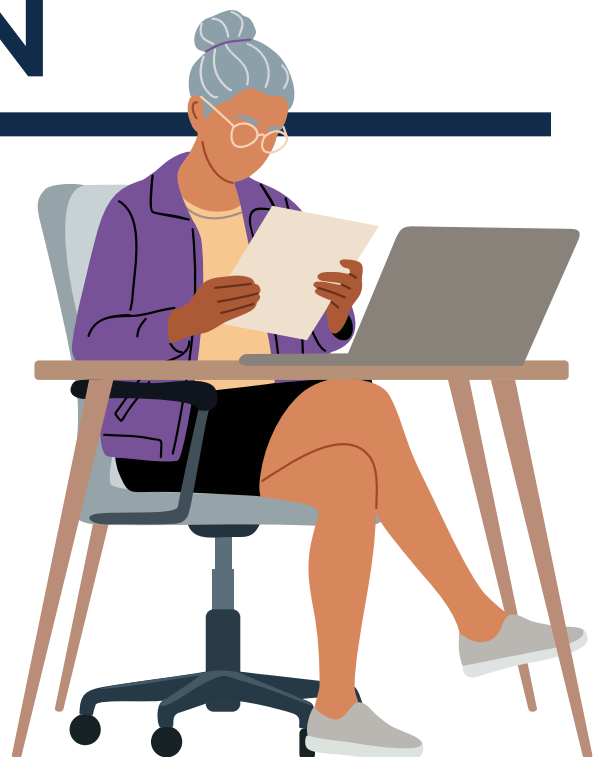
Have I avoided actions that could create barriers or delays?

Have I considered whether there is a safe way to follow up, if needed?

Supervisor takeaway

How supervisors respond affects safety, trust, and access to support. Calm, respectful responses—and taking appropriate next steps—matter more than having all the details.

SECTION 5: SAFE REPORTING: HANDLING DISCLOSURES, REPORTS, AND INFORMATION



Objectives

NAP focus: This section supports **ACT** safely and within your role.

What this section helps you do

- Understand safe reporting as a practice, not a single process
- Respond appropriately to disclosures and formal reports
- Share information carefully and explain next steps clearly
- Reduce the risk of retaliation or unnecessary exposure

Clarifying key terms: Disclosure and reporting

This section explains how this toolkit uses the terms “disclosure” and “reporting”.

Disclosure

A disclosure means any time a worker shares or hints at a concern, experience, or impact related to GBV. This may be:

- Partial or indirect
- Informal
- Shared without naming behaviour or people
- Shared to seek support, information, or reassurance

A disclosure does not mean the worker wants to make a formal report.

Reporting

Reporting means formally telling the employer about a concern through a workplace process or policy. This may include:

- Workplace violence or harassment reporting
- HR, labour relations, or OHS processes
- An investigation or formal review

Reporting may happen later, or not at all, depending on the situation and required processes.

What “Safe Reporting” means in practice

Safe reporting is not a separate policy or legal term.

It describes how information is handled, shared, and explained to support safety, dignity, and trust, especially when information unfolds over time.

In practice, safe reporting means:

- Responding without rushing to formal processes unless required
- Limiting information sharing to what is necessary
- Being transparent about what may happen next
- Reducing the risk of retaliation or unintended harm

Workers often raise concerns with supervisors before deciding whether to make a report. How supervisors respond at this stage shapes whether reporting feels safe or risky.

Why safe reporting and the supervisor role matter

When information is handled poorly, reporting processes can unintentionally cause harm. This may include:

- Escalating situations before a worker is ready
- Sharing information too widely
- Minimizing concerns or treating them as resolved too quickly
- Creating confusion about next steps

Safe reporting depends on clear communication and careful information sharing, not just on where information is sent.

What safe reporting involves for supervisors

You support safe reporting by:

- Explaining options and processes in plain language
- Being clear about limits to confidentiality
- Ensuring workers are not required to report to the person causing harm
- Sharing information only through appropriate channels
- Limiting how many times a worker has to recount their experience
- Taking concerns about retaliation seriously
- Seeking guidance when unsure

Safe reporting is shaped by how the process responds to the worker, not only by where information is sent.

Say this

“I want to explain what happens next so there are no surprises.”

“There are limits to confidentiality, and I’ll explain what information may need to be shared and why.”

“You don’t have to make any decisions right now.”

Internal reporting options

Many workplaces have more than one reporting option, which is especially important when power or authority is involved. If you are unsure which pathway to use, seek guidance before acting.

Depending on the workplace, options may include:

- A supervisor or manager
- HR or labour relations
- OHS
- A designated reporting contact or alternate pathway

Supervisors should not require a worker to report to the person causing harm. When unsure about the appropriate reporting pathway, seek guidance before acting.



Confidentiality and retaliation

What confidentiality means in practice

Confidentiality means sharing information only with those who need to address safety, policy, or legal obligations. It does not mean keeping information secret when escalation is required.

Good practice includes:

- Avoiding informal discussions
- Sharing only relevant information
- Explaining clearly what is being shared, with whom, and why



What retaliation can look like

Retaliation is any negative consequence linked to raising a concern or participating in a process. It can be overt or subtle.

Examples:

- Changes to hours, shifts, or duties
- Negative performance feedback linked to a concern
- Exclusion from meetings or communication
- Increased scrutiny or isolation
- Pressure to “drop it” or “move on”

Even actions framed as operational can feel retaliatory when they disadvantage a worker after a disclosure or report.

Under Ontario’s Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA), retaliation for reporting workplace violence or harassment in good faith is prohibited.



Documentation: What to record and what not to

Documentation supports continuity and safety when done carefully and consistently.

What to document:

- Date, time, and context of the conversation
- What was shared using neutral and factual language
- Any immediate safety concerns
- Steps taken (for example, referrals, reporting, consultation)

What not to document:

- Opinions or assumptions
- Judgments about credibility or intent
- Unnecessary or graphic detail
- Speculation about outcomes

Where to store records:

- Records should be kept only in designated, secure workplace systems
- This helps protect confidentiality, limit access, and support appropriate follow-up

Quick action plan

Pick one action to use the next time a reporting process comes up.

- Explain what will happen next and why
- Be clear about what information will be shared and with whom
- Check for concerns about confidentiality or retaliation
- Get guidance before acting when unsure

Supervisor takeaway

Safe reporting depends on clear communication, careful information sharing, and attention to retaliation risks.

SECTION 6: WHEN DIGITAL HARM IS INVOLVED IN GENDER- BASED VIOLENCE



Objectives

NAP focus: This section supports **ACT** safely and within your role.

What this section helps you do

- Recognize when technology may be part of the harm affecting work
- Focus on workplace impact and safety rather than technical details
- Reduce workplace risk and involve appropriate supports when needed

How digital harm shows up in the workplace

Technology-facilitated harm and violence (TFHV) happens when technology is used to harass, threaten, monitor, control, stalk, or intimidate someone. Harm may start inside or outside the workplace and spill over across boundaries.

Technology can be a pathway to harm

Harmful behaviour → *Technology as the channel* → Workplace impact and safety.

You may notice these signals as changes in behaviour, performance, focus, or safety at work.

Examples:

- **Constant or unwanted contact:** Repeated calls, messages, or notifications during work hours that disrupt focus or cause distress.
- **Monitoring or surveillance:** Attempts to access a worker's accounts or activity through shared devices or synced accounts.
- **Location tracking:** Use of apps, settings, or shared accounts to track where someone is during the workday.
- **Impersonation:** Someone posing as the worker by sending messages or contacting others in their name.
- **Sharing private information:** Posting or sending personal details without consent, sometimes called "doxing."
- **Manipulated images, audio, or video:** Altered or fabricated content used to harass, embarrass, or threaten.

Technology can be one way harm is carried out. Supervisor responses focus on workplace impact, safety, and connecting the right supports, not on examining digital content, devices, or accounts.

Supervisor focus when digital harm is involved

When technology is part of the harm, the supervisor's role remains the same—focus on workplace impact, safety, and appropriate hand-off.

Focus on workplace impact and safety

You can:

- Check whether anything at work feels unsafe right now
- Pause before making changes that could increase risk
- Consider practical steps to reduce workplace exposure (for example, adjusting shared calendars, removing contact from distribution lists, limiting visibility in internal directories, or changing meeting formats where appropriate)

- Be transparent about when others need to be involved

Avoid technical investigation

You should avoid:

- Analyzing devices, accounts, or messages
- Verifying or proving digital content
- Attempting to fix technical issues on your own

Technical analysis and evidence handling belong to designated roles and processes.

Documentation and digital content

Digital content can disappear quickly. Documentation supports continuity and safety, even if a worker is not ready to report.

You may:

- Let the worker know documentation is an option
- Suggest noting dates, times, and impacts on work
- Suggest saving screenshots or copies only if it is safe to do so

You should not:

- Request copies of personal content unless required by process
- Store digital material outside designated systems

Involving the right supports

Digital harm often involves risks outside a supervisor's expertise.

Depending on the situation, this may include:

- IT (information technology), when harmful content appears on workplace systems
- HR or labour relations, for reporting or process guidance
- OHS, when safety planning or risk assessment is needed

If you are unsure, seek guidance before taking action.

Respecting pace and choice

Workers may not be ready to act or make changes right away. Sudden changes to devices, accounts, or work arrangements may increase risk.

Good practice includes:

- Respecting the worker's pace
- Sharing options without pressure
- Revisiting the conversation as needed

Try this now

When technology is part of the harm, focus on workplace impact and safety.

In the moment:

- Check whether anything at work feels unsafe right now
- Slow the pace before making changes that could increase risk
- Reduce workplace exposure where possible
- Involve IT, HR, or OHS when needed, and explain why

You should avoid:

- Asking for proof before offering support
- Trying to fix technical issues alone
- Making changes without guidance
- Sharing information more widely than necessary

Supervisor takeaway

When technology affects a worker's safety or ability to work, supervisors focus on reducing workplace risk and connecting the appropriate supports.

SECTION 7: PREVENTING GENDER- BASED VIOLENCE THROUGH EVERYDAY SUPERVISION



Objectives

NAP focus: This section supports **PREVENT** future harm through everyday supervision.

What this section helps you do

- Use everyday supervision practices to reduce risk over time
- Apply trauma- and violence-informed care approaches in routine interactions
- Adjust how support is offered to reduce identity-based barriers
- Reinforce respectful behaviour and shape a safer workplace culture

Why everyday supervision matters for prevention

Preventing GBV starts with how you supervise day-to-day—not only when a disclosure or report occurs.

Supervisors influence workplace culture through routine actions such as how concerns are handled, how boundaries are reinforced, and how authority is used. These everyday choices shape whether risk is addressed early or allowed to continue.

GBV may continue over time or appear suddenly—both require attention.

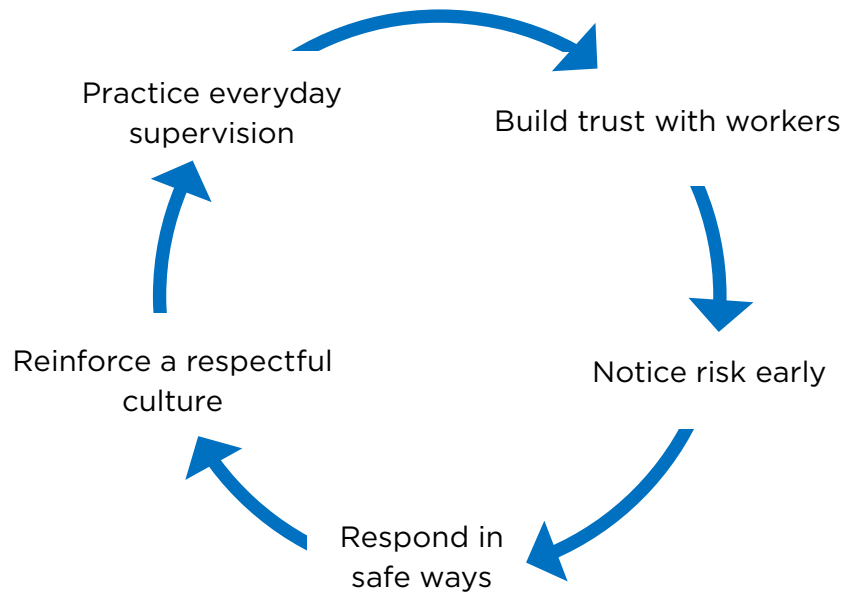
When incidents are viewed only in isolation, patterns and early warning can be missed. Paying attention and responding early helps reduce risk and prevent escalation.

How supervisors respond affects whether workers:

- Notice harm early
- Feel safe raising concerns
- Trust that something will change if they speak up



How everyday supervision prevents gender-based violence



Small, consistent supervisory behaviours build trust with workers, support early risk detection, and lead to safer responses before harm escalates. Over time, these everyday actions help shape a safer workplace culture where workers feel able to speak up.

Two ways supervisors help prevent gender-based violence

Supervisors help prevent GBV through everyday supervision in two connected ways:

- Using trauma- and violence-informed care (TVIC) supervision practices
- Applying an intersectional lens to supervision

These approaches work together and reinforce one another.

Pause and notice

Workplace culture is shaped by what becomes accepted over time.

Notice when:

- Disrespectful comments are brushed off as jokes
- Boundary crossing is minimized or ignored
- Certain workers are interrupted, dismissed, or excluded

What is tolerated tends to continue.

1. Trauma- and violence-informed care supervision

TVIC recognizes that many people have experienced trauma or violence, and that this can affect how they respond to stress, authority, and support at work. These impacts are often invisible and not always disclosed.

In supervision, a TVIC approach focuses on awareness and response rather than on diagnosing, investigating, or uncovering personal histories. It is about how you interpret behaviour and respond in everyday interactions, especially when situations feel tense, emotional, or unclear.

You do not need to be an expert in trauma or GBV to reduce risk. What matters most is how you show up in everyday supervision.

TVIC supervision focuses on:

- Safety
- Choice
- Respect
- Trust

It does this without requiring workers to share personal details or experiences.

Trust is built before disclosure

Many workers do not share concerns right away. Disclosure often becomes possible only after trust is built over time through everyday supervision.

In practice

In everyday supervision, a TVIC approach includes:

- Pausing before interpreting behaviour as attitude or performance
- Keeping conversations focused on work impact rather than personal explanations
- Offering support without pressing for details or disclosure
- Responding calmly and consistently, especially when situations feel tense or unclear, to avoid unintentionally retraumatizing workers



Try This Now

In a routine check-in, include a brief, work-focused question: *“Before we wrap up, how are things going at work? Is there anything that would help right now?”*

2. Applying an intersectional lens in supervision

Intersectionality explains how overlapping identities—such as gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, or immigration status—can shape how workers experience harm and access support.

Because of these overlapping identities, the same supervisory approach may not feel equally safe, accessible, or realistic for everyone, even when intentions are neutral.

You do not need to know or ask about a worker’s identities to apply an intersectional lens. The focus is on how support is offered, not on labelling or assessing workers.

In practice

Applying an intersectional lens means adjusting *how* support is offered to reduce identity-based barriers.

Examples:

- **Offer alternatives** to in-person meetings when privacy, being alone with a supervisor, or physical or sensory barriers could make the interaction feel unsafe or harder to engage in.
- **Use neutral calendar labels or meeting descriptions** when visibility could increase risk or scrutiny for workers who already face bias or monitoring.
- **Share information in more than one format** (for example, verbal and written) when language or disability affects access to support.

These adjustments do not require disclosure. They reflect awareness that workplace practices are not experienced equally by all workers.

Pause and notice

Before interpreting a worker's silence, hesitation, or disengagement, ask yourself: *Could identity-based barriers be affecting how safe or accessible this interaction feels?*

TOOL: P.A.C.E. LOOP FOR EVERYDAY SUPERVISION

The P.A.C.E. loop is a practical approach supervisors can use during everyday supervision moments—such as check-ins, team meetings, or expectation-setting conversations.

It is not a script—you do not need to use it in full or in order. Supervisors can enter the loop at any point and use the parts that fit the moment. The goal is to support safer, more respectful supervision and reduce escalation over time.

Pause: Reset the tone and refocus on the work.

Say this: *“Let’s pause for a moment and refocus on your work.”*

Ask: Check in on work impact, not personal details.

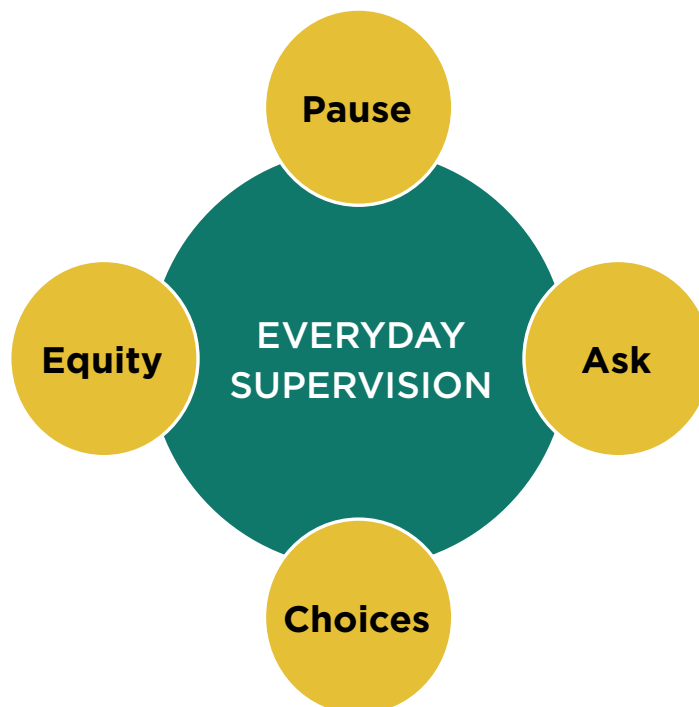
Say this: *“How are things going with your work right now? Anything getting in the way?”*

Choices: Offer options instead of directives.

Say this: *“There are a couple of ways we could handle this. We can talk them through now, or we can pause and come back to it.”*

Equity (Barriers): Notice and reduce barriers that make work harder or less safe.

Say this: *“Is there anything getting in the way of your work or making things more difficult that I can help with?”*



Modelling respectful behaviour and shifting culture

Workplace culture is shaped by what you model, reinforce, and address in everyday interactions.

Through small, consistent actions, such as interrupting disrespect early, using authority fairly, and making support visible, supervisors signal what behaviour is expected and supported at work.

When supervisors consistently apply TVIC practices and remain mindful of identity-based barriers, they help reduce harm, build trust, and support earlier help-seeking before situations escalate.

Supervisor takeaway

Every day supervision shapes workplace culture. Consistent use of trauma- and violence-informed care approaches and attention to barriers help prevent harm before it escalates.

SECTION 8: LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF



Objectives

NAP focus: This section supports **NOTICE**, **ACT**, and **PREVENT**.

What this section helps you do

- Recognize how responding to harm or risk can affect you
- Stay within your role while supporting others
- Use support and debriefing to protect your capacity
- Respond clearly and sustainably over time

Why looking after yourself matters

You are often one of the first points of contact when concerns arise. Over time, listening to difficult experiences, managing uncertainty, and responding to safety concerns can take a toll.

You may experience:

- Emotional strain after difficult conversations
- Stress related to safety concerns or escalation decisions
- A sense of responsibility to protect others
- Difficulty switching off after work

These reactions are normal. Looking after yourself supports clearer judgment, steadier responses, and safer supervision over time.

Noticing your own signals

More specific signs that a situation may be affecting you include:

- Feeling on edge or hyper-alert about safety
- Difficulty concentrating after disclosures
- Emotional exhaustion or numbness
- Avoiding conversations that feel like past situations

Noticing these signals early helps you seek support or adjust before strain builds.

Staying within your role

Staying within your role is an important part of looking after yourself.

When you take on responsibilities that are not part of your role—such as investigating, counselling, or deciding outcomes—it can increase stress and make it harder to respond well over time. Clear role boundaries help prevent overload and reduce burnout.

Staying in role supports both your wellbeing and safer responses for workers.

Using support and debriefing

You are not meant to manage the impacts of GBV alone.

Debriefing after difficult conversations or situations can help:

- Process what you have heard
- Reduce emotional carryover into other work

- Clarify next steps and role boundaries
- Prevent stress from building over time

Debriefing should focus on support and guidance, not on sharing unnecessary details. Appropriate supports may include your manager, HR, OHS, or another designated resource, depending on your workplace.

Quick action plan

Choose one this week:

- Ask for guidance instead of handling a concern alone
- Schedule a brief debrief after a difficult conversation
- Set a clear boundary around availability
- Use an existing support or wellness resource

Supervisor Takeaway

Looking after yourself is part of effective supervision. Using support and staying within your role helps you do that sustainably.

RESOURCES



External Supports and Resources

Use this section to find support for safety, wellbeing, and information related to gender-based violence.

Immediate Support and Crisis Lines

Use when urgent emotional support, safety planning, or crisis help is needed.

Assaulted Women's Helpline

Confidential, 24/7 support, safety planning, and referrals (available in many languages).

Phone: 1 866 863 0511

TTY: 1 866 863 7868

GTA: 416 863 0511

Text: SAFE to 7233

Website: www.awhl.org/

Fem'aide

24/7 crisis and support line for Francophone women experiencing violence.

Phone: 1 877 336 2433

Text: 1 [877 336 2433](tel:18773362433)

Online Chat: [Fem'aide](#)

Website: <https://femaide.ca/>

Support for Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse

Multilingual, 24/7 crisis and referral support for male survivors.

Phone: 1 866 887 0015

Seniors Safety Line

Confidential support for seniors experiencing abuse, neglect, or harm from family members, caregivers, or others they rely on.

Phone: 1 866 299 1011

TTY: 1 866 299 0008

Website: <https://seniorssafetyline.ca/>

Kids Help Phone

24/7 phone and online counselling for young people.

Phone: 1 800 668 6868

Text: Text 686868

Website: <https://kidshelpphone.ca/>

Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Services

Use when specialized support, counselling, shelter, or medical care is needed.

Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres

Network of 30+ English-language sexual assault centres in Ontario.

Website: <http://www.sexualassaultsupport.ca/>

Sheltersafe.ca

Online resource for women and their children seeking safety from violence and abuse.

Website: Sheltersafe.ca

Ontario Network of Sexual Assault / Domestic Violence Treatment Centres

An Ontario network supporting hospital-based centres that provide medical care and support after sexual and domestic violence.

Phone (24/7): 1 855 628 7238

Website: <https://www.sadvreatmentcentres.ca/>

Health, Mental Health and Counselling Supports

Use when counselling, wellbeing, or noncrisis mental health support is needed.

ConnexOntario

24/7 free, confidential information on mental health, addiction, and support services.

Phone: 1 866 531 2600

Text: CONNEX to 247247

Online Chat: [ConnexOntario](https://connexontario.ca/)

Website: <https://connexontario.ca/>

Distress Centres Ontario

An Ontario network of community-based organizations that provide emotional support and crisis services through local distress and crisis lines.

Email (admin, not a crisis line): info@dcontario.org

Website: <https://www.dcontario.org/>

iHEAL (mobile app)

A confidential app that supports women who have experienced abuse from a current or past partner.

Website: <https://ihealapp.ca/>

Culturally Specific and Language-Based Supports

Use when culture, language, or identity may affect access to support.

Talk4Healing (Beendigen)

24/7 culturally specific support service for Indigenous women and children experiencing violence.

Phone: 1 855 554 HEAL

Text: 1 855 554 HEAL

Online Chat: [Talk4Healing](#)

Website: www.beendigen.com/programs/talk4healing/

Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres

Culturally-based support and advocate centres for Indigenous People in urban communities.

Phone: 1 800 772 9291

Toronto: 416 956 7575

Email: ofifc@ofifc.org

Website: <https://ofifc.org/>

Hope for Wellness

A 24/7 support and crisis line for Indigenous people, providing culturally appropriate emotional support.

Phone: 1 855 242 3310

Online Chat: [Hope for Wellness](#)

Website: <https://www.hopeforwellness.ca/>

Language Interpreter Services

Interpreters for more than 70 languages for victims of domestic violence, sexual violence, and human trafficking victims.

Website: [Language Interpreters](#)

Settlement.org

Information and local services for newcomers to Ontario.

Website: Settlement.org

Legal and Advocacy Supports

Use when questions about legal rights, protection, or advocacy arise.

Legal Aid Ontario

Legal help for low-income individuals.

Phone: 1 800 668 8258

Online Chat: [Legal Aid Ontario](#)

Website: [Legal Aid Ontario](#)

Finding the Right Support

Use when you're unsure which service fits best.

211 Ontario

Confidential service that connects people to social and community supports.

Phone: 211

Text: 211

Online Chat: [211 Ontario](#)

Website: [211 Ontario](#)

Supports for Victims of Violence

Provincial information and services for victims of crime.

Website: [Supports for Victims of Violence](#)

Victim Support Directory

A directory that helps people find victim support services across Ontario.

Phone (24/7): 1 888 579 2888

Online Chat: [Victim Support Directory](#)

Website: [Victim Support Directory](#)

Additional Resources and Learning

Reports, tools, and learning resources that provide more information about gender-based violence, prevention, and workplace response.

Respect at Work

Evidence-based resource hub with research, policy guidance, and practical tools to support prevention and response to workplace harassment and violence.

Website: [Respect at Work](#)

Make It Our Business

Provides tools and training to help workplaces prevent and respond to domestic violence and support employees affected at work.

Website: [Make It Our Business](#)

Tech Safety Canada

Provides practical tools and information to help address technology-facilitated gender-based violence.

Website: [Tech Safety Canada](#)

Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (Video)

Animated video showing how technology can both support and harm women and girls with disabilities, highlighting risks and the need for safer digital spaces.

Video: [Watch video](#)

Addressing Domestic Violence in the Workplace (PSHSA)

A practical handbook on workplace impacts of domestic violence and how to respond.

Website: [PSHSA Handbook](#)

Gender Based Violence Supervisor's Playbook VWVPMAEN0526

Public Services Health and Safety Association (PSHSA)

4950 Yonge Street, 18th floor, Suite 1800

Toronto, Ontario Canada, M2N 6K1

Telephone: 416-250-2131

Toll Free: 1-877-250-7444

Website: www.pshsa.ca



PSHSA.ca

Public Services Health
& Safety Association