



THE CANADIAN DENTAL
HYGIENISTS ASSOCIATION
L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE
DES HYGIÉNISTES DENTAIRES



Healthy &
Respectful
Workplace



TIPS TO ADDRESS ABUSE AND VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE

No one should feel uncomfortable or fearful at work. Yet too many oral health care professionals experience violence or abuse in the workplace. The Canadian Dental Hygienists Association's (CDHA) 2018 *Healthy and Respectful Workplace Survey* (cdha.ca/healthyworkplacesurvey) revealed that 22% of respondents had experienced workplace abuse or violence from clients; 12% had experienced such abuse from dentists.

What is workplace abuse and/or violence?

Workplace abuse or violence can be defined as “any act in which a person is abused, threatened, intimidated or assaulted in his or her employment”¹. It includes sexual harassment, sexual assault, and physically and verbally abusive or violent behaviour.

If you are being sexually harassed at work, please consult our *Tips to Address Sexual Harassment in the Workplace* (cdha.ca/sexualharassment).



Examples of abuse and violence include:



Physical abuse

(spitting, biting, hitting, pushing, kicking or throwing objects, including dental instruments)



Verbal abuse

(uttering threats or using slurs and other abusive language)



Intimidation

(destroying objects, shaking fists or slamming doors to make someone feel unsafe)



Domestic violence

(an abuser stalking someone at work or making them feel unsafe at work)

If you're experiencing workplace abuse or violence, visit Western University's Workplace Harassment and Violence web pages for [support resources](http://supportresources.learningtoendabuse.ca/docs/List-of-Support-Resources--BILINGUAL-.pdf) ([learningtoendabuse.ca/docs/List-of-Support-Resources--BILINGUAL-.pdf](http://supportresources.learningtoendabuse.ca/docs/List-of-Support-Resources--BILINGUAL-.pdf)) in your province.

If you are in distress or if your psychological well-being is affected, contact [Homewood Health](http://cdha.ca/Homewood) (cdha.ca/Homewood), CDHA's member and family assistance program, for support.

What should you do if you experience workplace abuse or violence from a client?

- Address the situation if you feel safe in doing so, state the facts clearly, and share your discomfort
- Report the incident to your office manager, human resources department or your employer
- Document the incident in detail, both as a report and in the client's chart
- Discontinue the dental hygienist–client relationship
- If the offender is a regulated health professional, report them to their regulatory body.
- If it has escalated to assault, report the incident to the police.

¹ Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety. Violence and Harassment in the Workplace [Internet]. OSH Answers Fact Sheets series, updated December 18, 2020. Available from: www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/violence.html



TIPS TO ADDRESS

ABUSE AND VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE

What should you do if you experience workplace abuse or violence from a co-worker or employer?

- Address the person if you feel it is safe to do so; ask a person you feel comfortable with (co-worker, spouse/partner or friend) to be with you during the conversation
- Document the incident in detail
- Consult your office's protocols for dealing with workplace abuse and violence (e.g., office personnel handbook or policy on harassment and abuse)
- Report the incident to your office manager, human resources department or employer
 - If the offender is a regulated health professional, report the incident to their regulatory body
- Consult CDHA's [Employment Legal Line \(cdha.ca/employmentlaw\)](https://cdha.ca/employmentlaw) for legal advice
- If necessary, report the incident to the police

What should your employer do if you're experiencing workplace violence or abuse?

Your employer has an obligation to maintain a safe work environment. In most provinces and territories, employers are required to have an anti-abuse and violence prevention policy that includes reporting protocols.² If you are experiencing violence or abuse from a client, your employer can:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communicate to the client that abuse or violence towards staff will not be tolerated• Support you in addressing or clarifying the situation with the client• Consult their regulatory body or human resources department to determine if dismissing the client is appropriate | <p>If you are experiencing violence or abuse from a co-worker, your employer can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Implement a remediation process with the offender• Require the offender to receive training on proper workplace behaviour• Terminate the employee |
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What should you do if you witness workplace abuse or violence towards a co-worker?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assess if the situation is safe for you to intervene. If so, interrupt the incident to give your co-worker a chance to exit the situation and inform the offender that their conduct is inappropriate. If not, consider contacting the police• Document the incident in detail | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Offer to serve as a witness for the person being abused• Acknowledge the incident with your co-worker, offer empathy, and help connect them with resources they need (e.g., Homewood Health) |
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How can you help create a workplace that is free from abuse and violence?

- Make sure all employees know the workplace policies on recognizing and reporting abuse and violence
- Attend training on workplace violence prevention
- Post information about preventing workplace abuse and violence in a place where it can be easily accessed by employees
- Get involved in your workplace's health and safety committee or workplace committee
- Emphasize positive and open communication in the workplace

²<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/workplace-health-safety/harassment-violence-prevention.html>