



Western

Centre for Research & Education on
Violence Against Women & Children

Centre de recherche et d'éducation sur la
violence contre les femmes et les enfants

RESPECT

at Work • au travail

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Canada

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harcèlement et de la violence en milieu de travail

Canada

Designing Trauma- and Violence-Informed Policies, Training, and Response Plans to Address Intimate Partner Violence at Work

Rika Sawatsky

December 9, 2025



Content Warning

Intimate Partner Violence

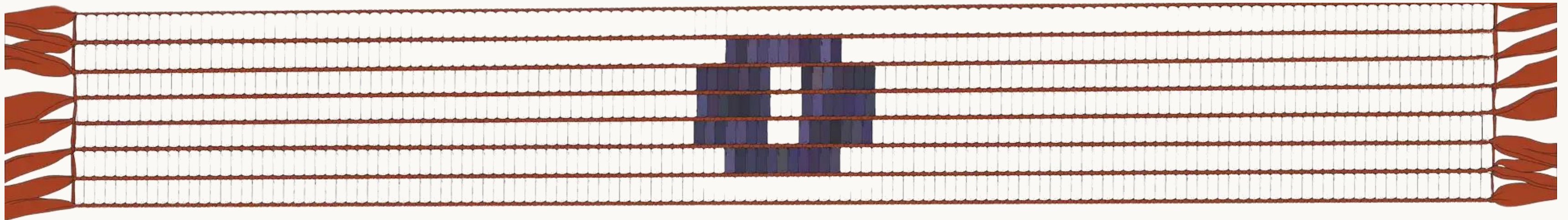
Substance Use Disorder

Stigmatizing Language in Case Study

Reconciliation

We are all Treaty people who share responsibility for taking action on reconciliation.

- Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada



Reconciliation

92.iii. Provide education for management and staff on the **history of Aboriginal peoples**, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal–Crown relations. This will require **skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism**.

- Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action

Agenda



What is TVI?

Case Study

Applying a TVI Lens to the Case Study

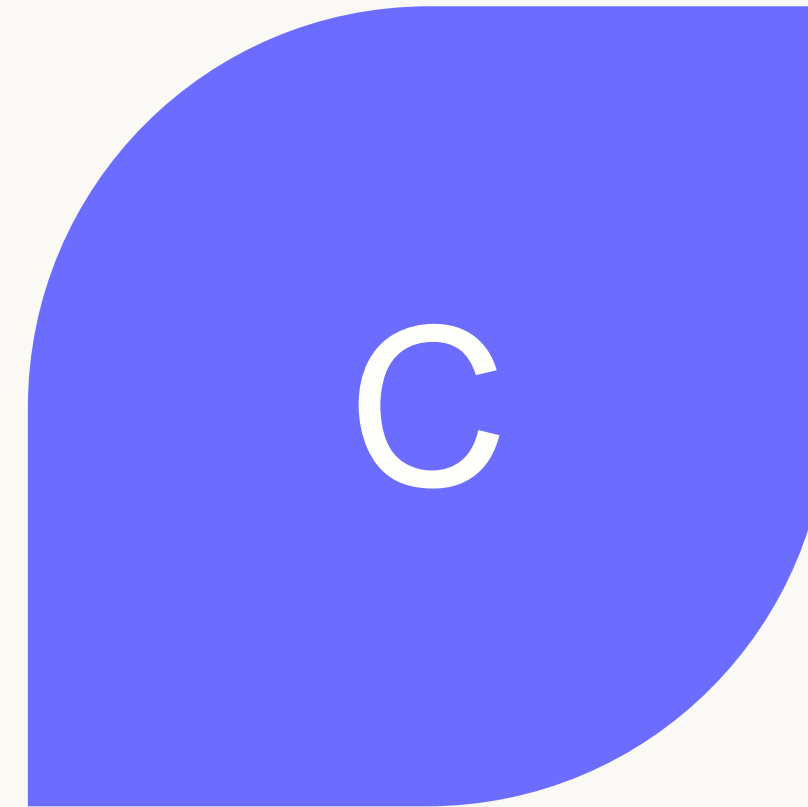
Takeaways

Q&A

What does it mean
to be trauma- and
violence-informed?

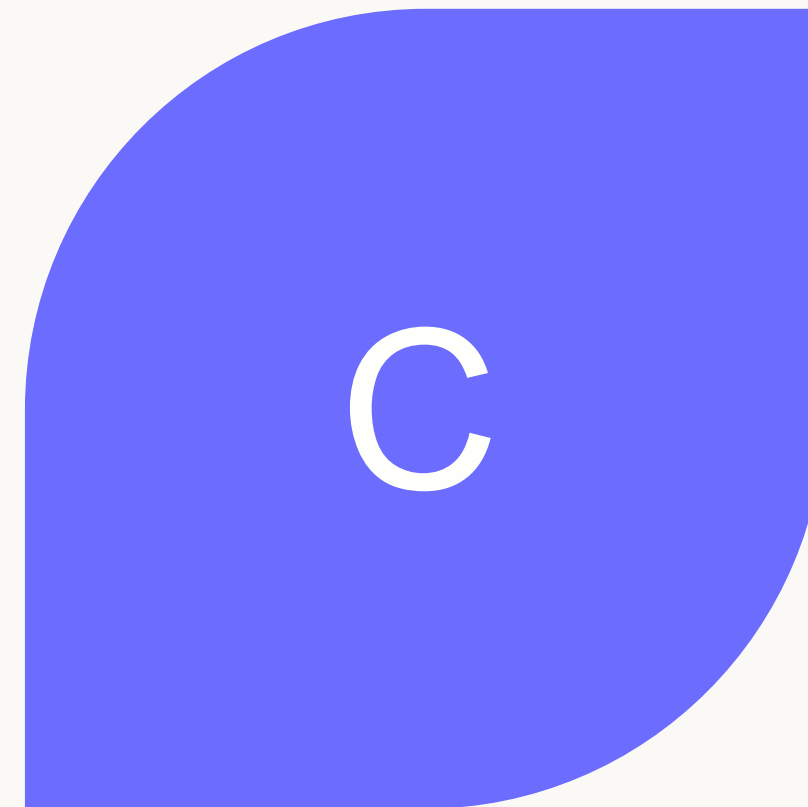
Understand T & V

Understand trauma and violence, especially structural violence, its prevalence and its impacts on peoples' lives and behaviours



Cultural Safety

Create emotionally, culturally and physically safe environments for management and employees



Strengths-Based

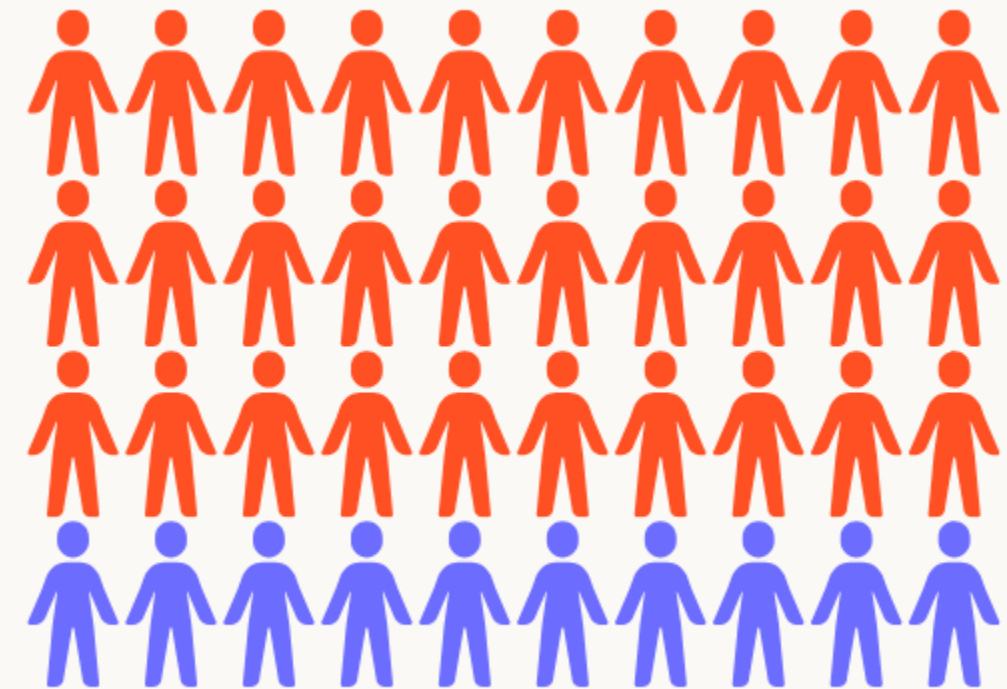
Provide strengths-based and capacity-building ways to support employees

Choice

Foster opportunities for choice, collaboration, and connection

- EQUIP Health Care

Universal Approach



75%
of Canadians
experience trauma

- EQUIP Health Care

You don't have
to be an expert

Why TVI?

DID DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, SEXUAL ASSAULT, DATING VIOLENCE, AND STALKING MAKE IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR A VICTIM/SURVIVOR TO WORK?

YES

79%
Domestic
Violence

25%
Dating
Violence

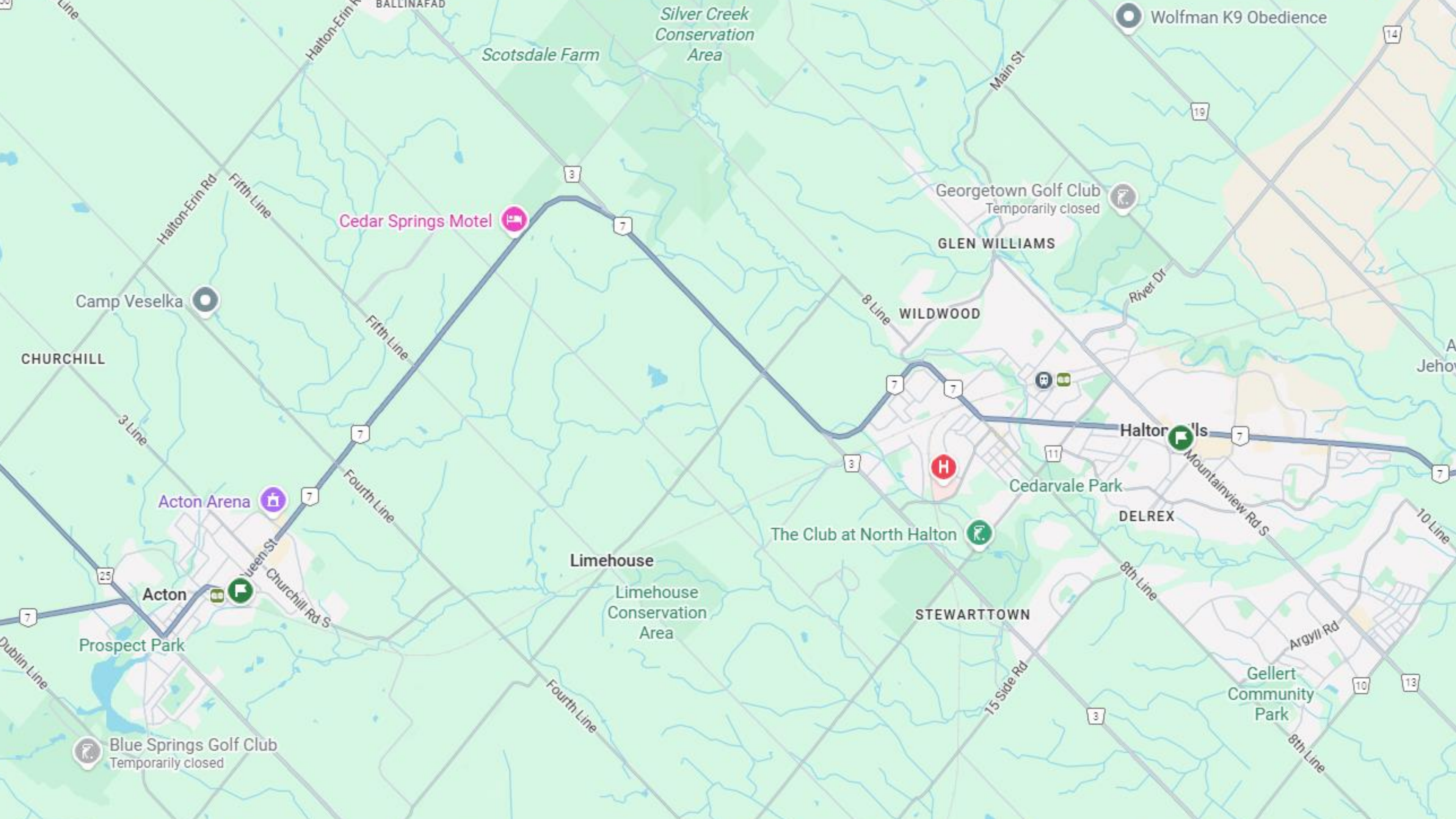
27%
Sexual Assault

35%
Stalking

Case Study

Liquor Store, 2006 - 2009







Meet Jane

56 years old

Abused by husband for 20 years

Uses alcohol as coping mechanism

Hired by liquor store in September 2004

Works evenings at Wal-mart

Husband doesn't help with bills

Grieving mother's passing

No car

5 pets



Disclosure of IPV

September 2006

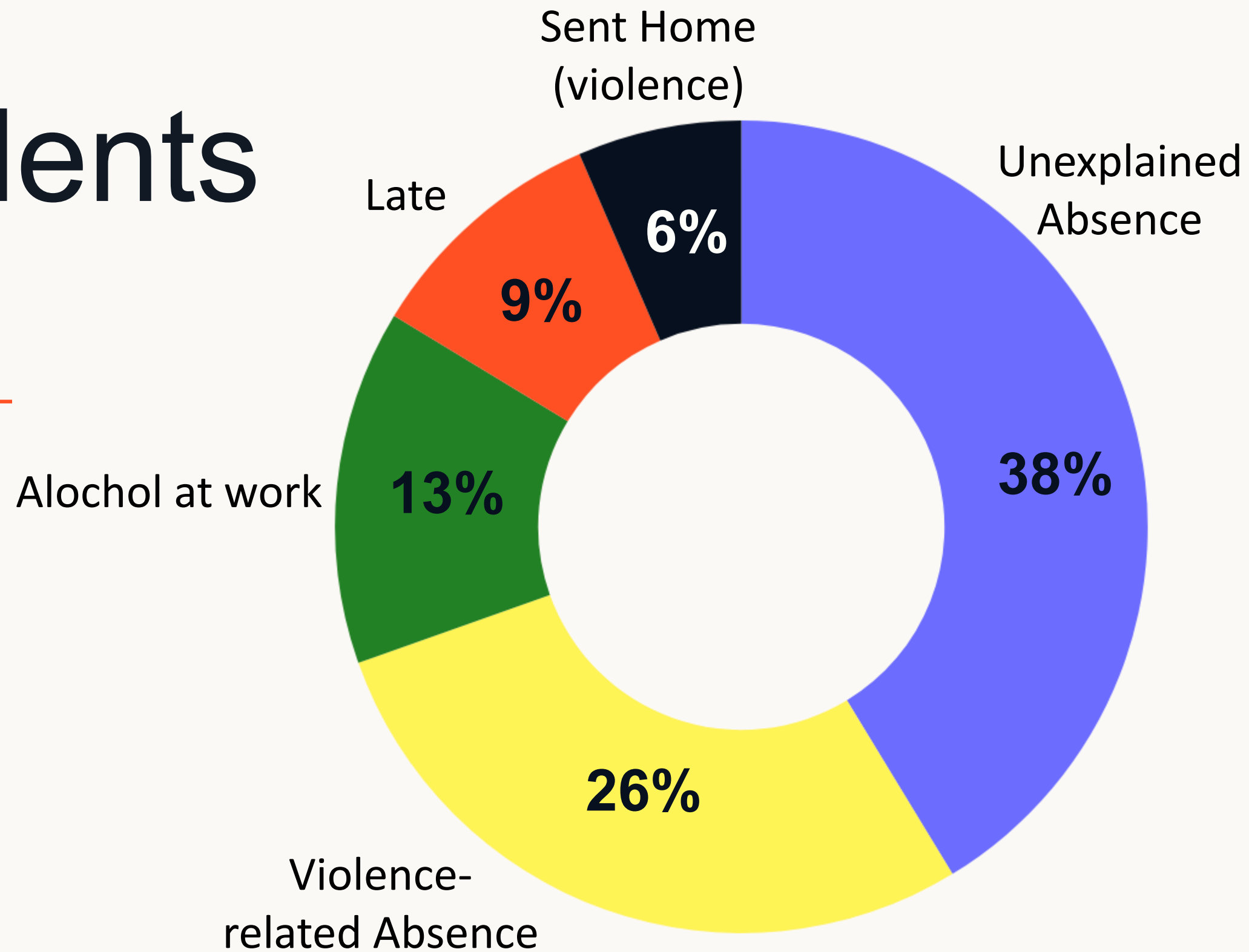
I've turned to alcohol for help when I've had a bad day, but I don't have an alcohol abuse problem.

Leave of Absence

October 2006 - April 2008

**I haven't drunk at work
nor had a drink in the past
year, and I'm ready to
leave my husband.**

Incidents



47 incidents in the year leading up to termination in September 2009

Pattern

Trigger

Absence or alcohol

Store's Response

If you **admit** having a problem and **ask** for help,
we'll accommodate you.

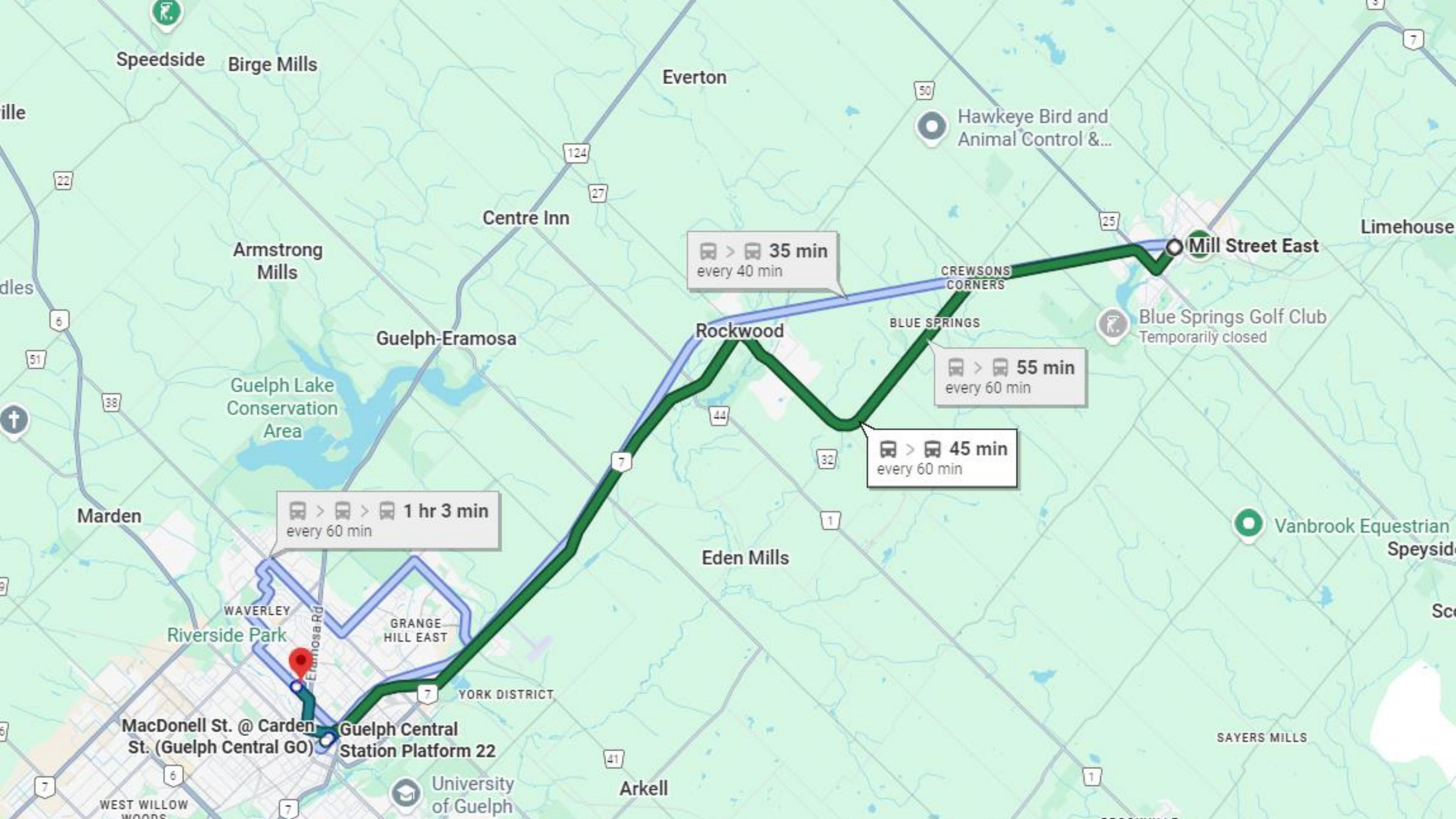
Jane's Reply

No → discipline

Example 1

Absence due to being hit/bruising

I haven't continued the group sessions in Guelph because I can't get there and I work nights at Walmart. And my mom died.



Example 2

Physical assault at work

We're prepared to transfer you to another store and to develop a response plan should your husband attend at the store.

Example 3

Sent home with black eye

**I'm still black and blue.
I'm not presentable. I'm
too weak to work. I'm not
eating.**

Progressive Discipline

- 1 verbal warning
- 4 written warnings
- 6 suspensions (17 days)

Last Chance

August 8, 2011

By August 31, 2011, provide:

1. confirmation of arrangements for enrolment in suitable alcohol addiction treatment program
2. duration, dates, and times of participation

I think I started to have an alcohol abuse problem. I'm prepared to participate in treatment.

Store's Recommendation

Homewood Health Centre,
Guelph

1-month inpatient program

Wait time: up to several weeks



Reaching Out

July 14, 2011

I can't wait anymore. I'm leaving.

Reaching Out

September 16, 2011

I need to speak to the District Manager. Can I at least leave a message with you?

Termination Grievance Arbitration

Reasons for missing August 31 deadline

I didn't ask about a non-residential option. I didn't ask for an extension. I don't know why I didn't show up to the meeting.

Employer's Position

No medical evidence

Substance use disorder
PTSD/concussion
Link to misconduct

Hasn't removed source of issues

Subsequent violent incidents prove she didn't leave her husband

Hasn't rehabilitated herself

Hasn't accessed EAP
Hasn't sought clinical support
Chose only church support group

For reasons which are **not entirely clear**, the grievor **consistently denied** that she had a problem. These denials effectively **limited the Employer's ability** to respond to the situation.

- Arbitrator

The grievor **never responded** to the Employer's offers by requesting a transfer or asking for any other accommodation.... The grievor **failed** to take the steps necessary to address the issue.

- Arbitrator

I'm very sorry and ashamed. My mind wasn't working back then. I was a different person.

- Jane

What do you think?

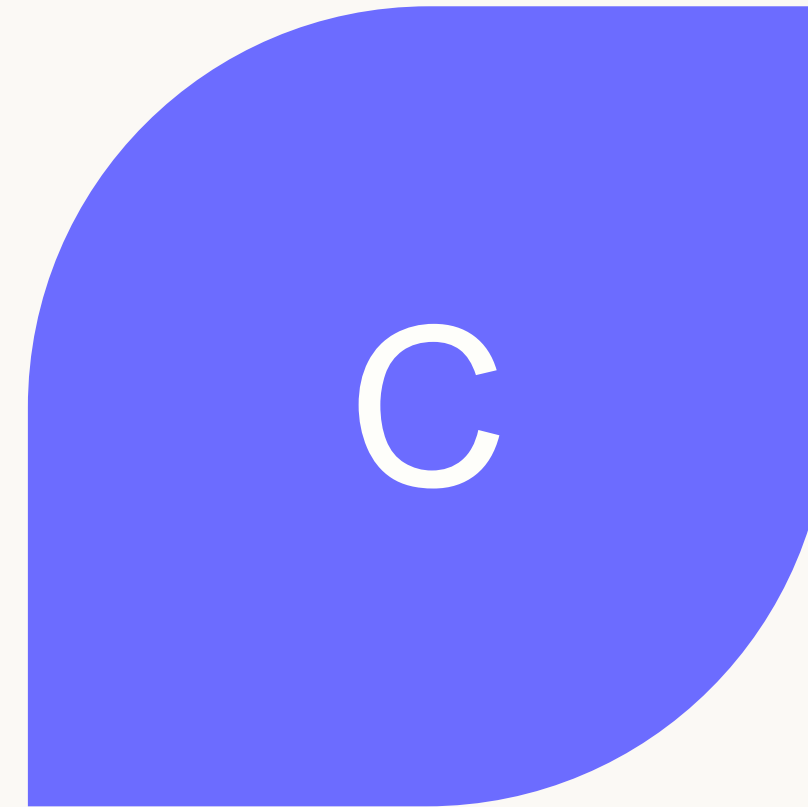


Was “cooperating” in the accommodation process realistic for Jane?

How might a TVI approach have changed the outcome?

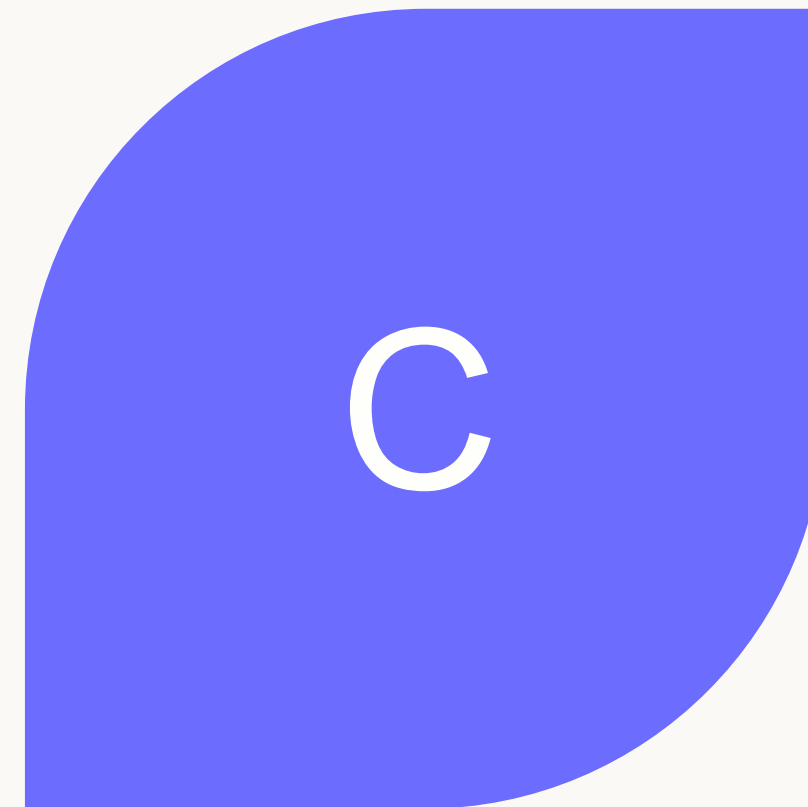
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Strengths-Based

Provide strengths-based and capacity-building ways to support employees

Choice

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- EQUIP Health Care

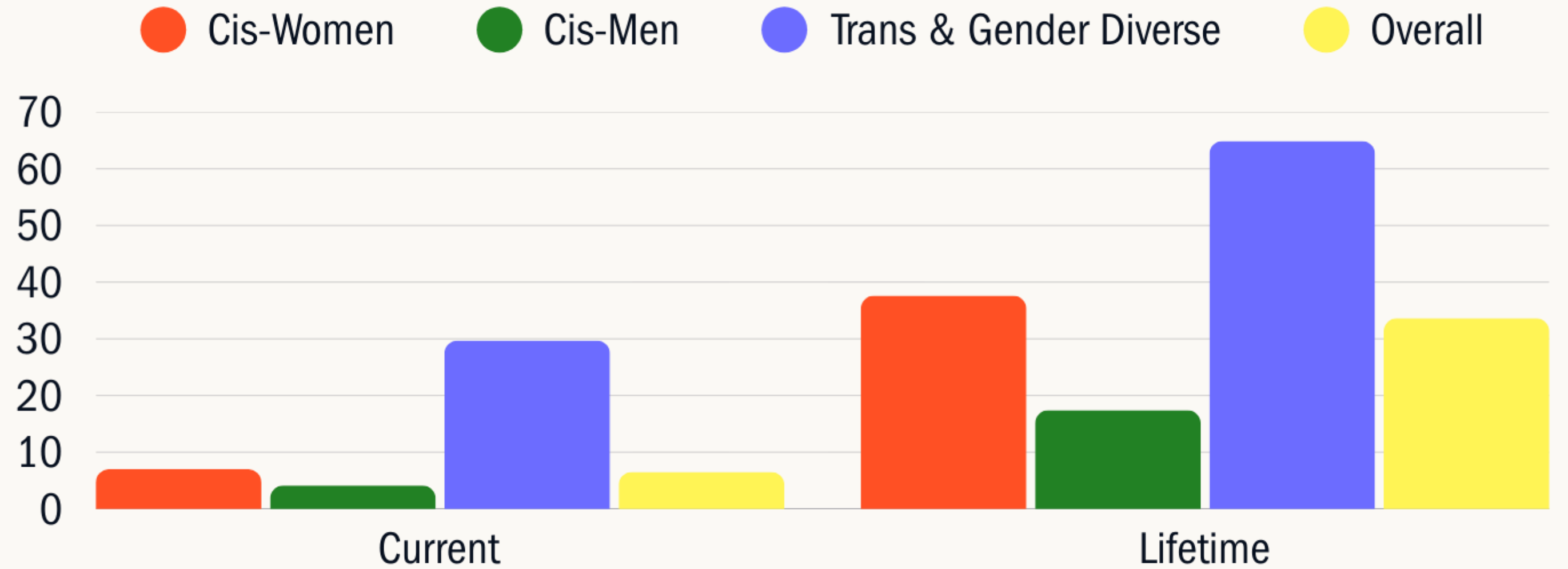
Understand T & V

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Do your policies show that you
get it?

IPV Prevalence



- CREVAWC, 2014

Defining IPV

Physical abuse

Psychological abuse, including coercive control

Damage to property, including pets

Forced confinement

Deprivation of basic necessities

Stalking/harassment

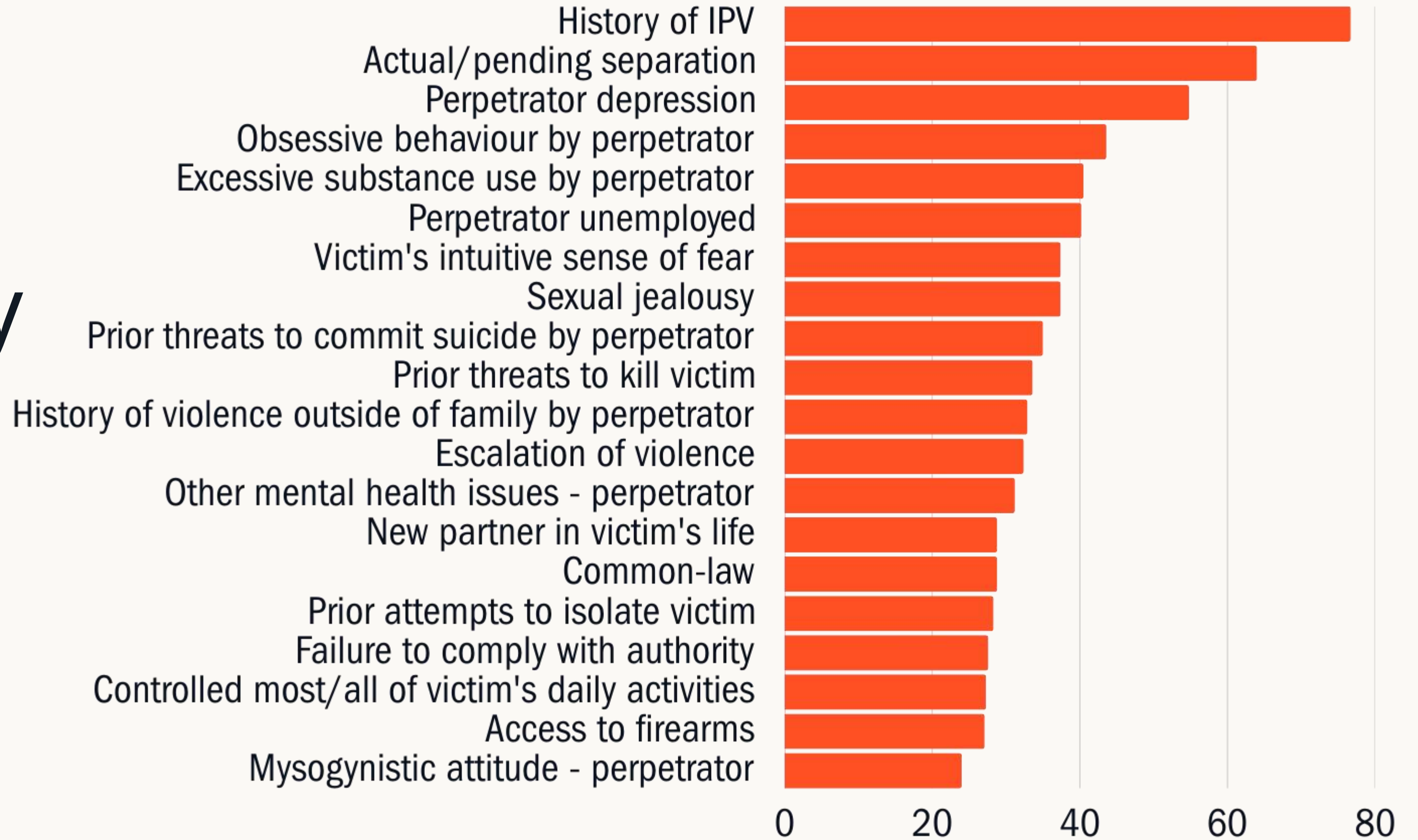
Financial abuse

Human trafficking

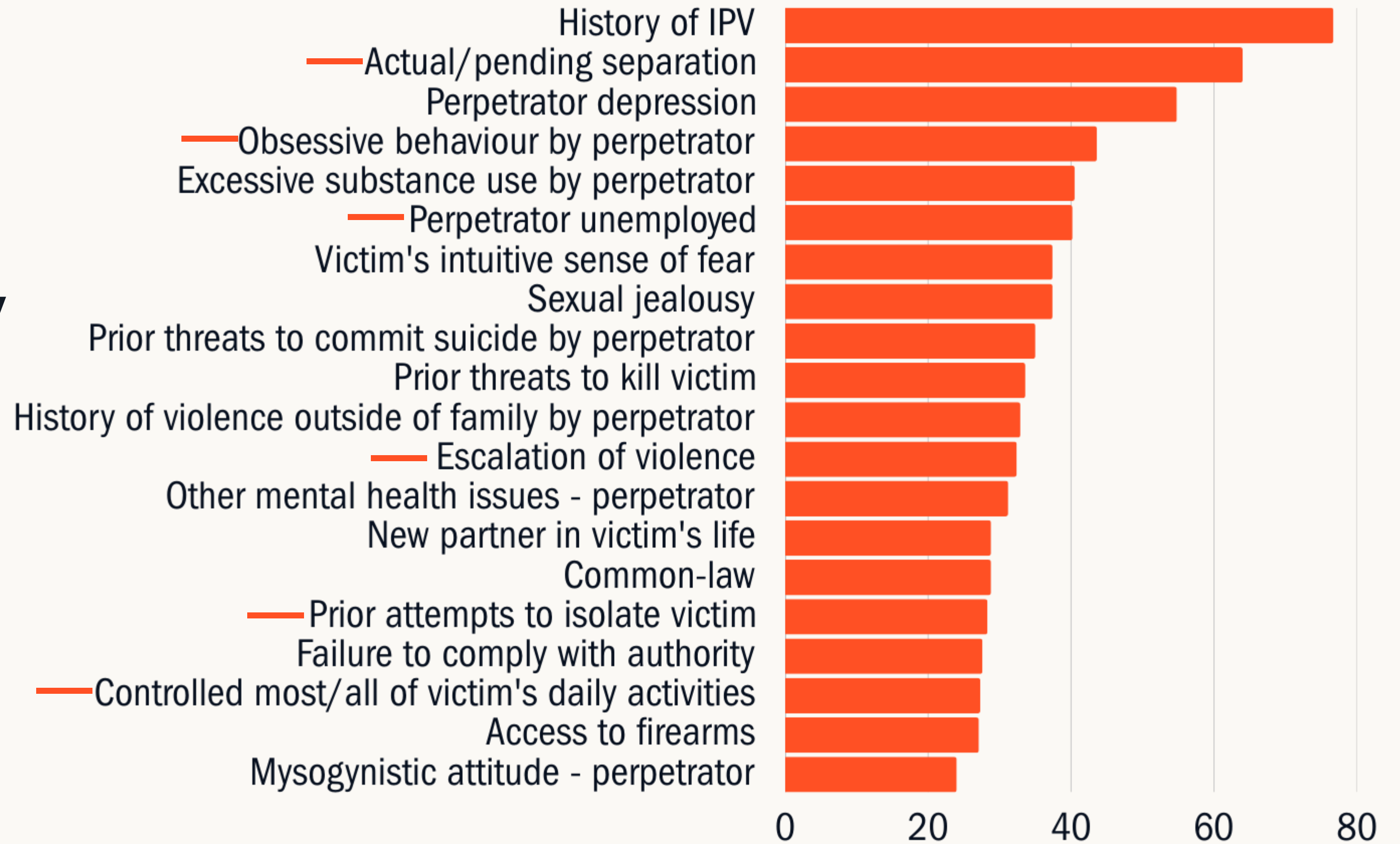
~~Cycle of violence~~

Violence is constant

Lethality

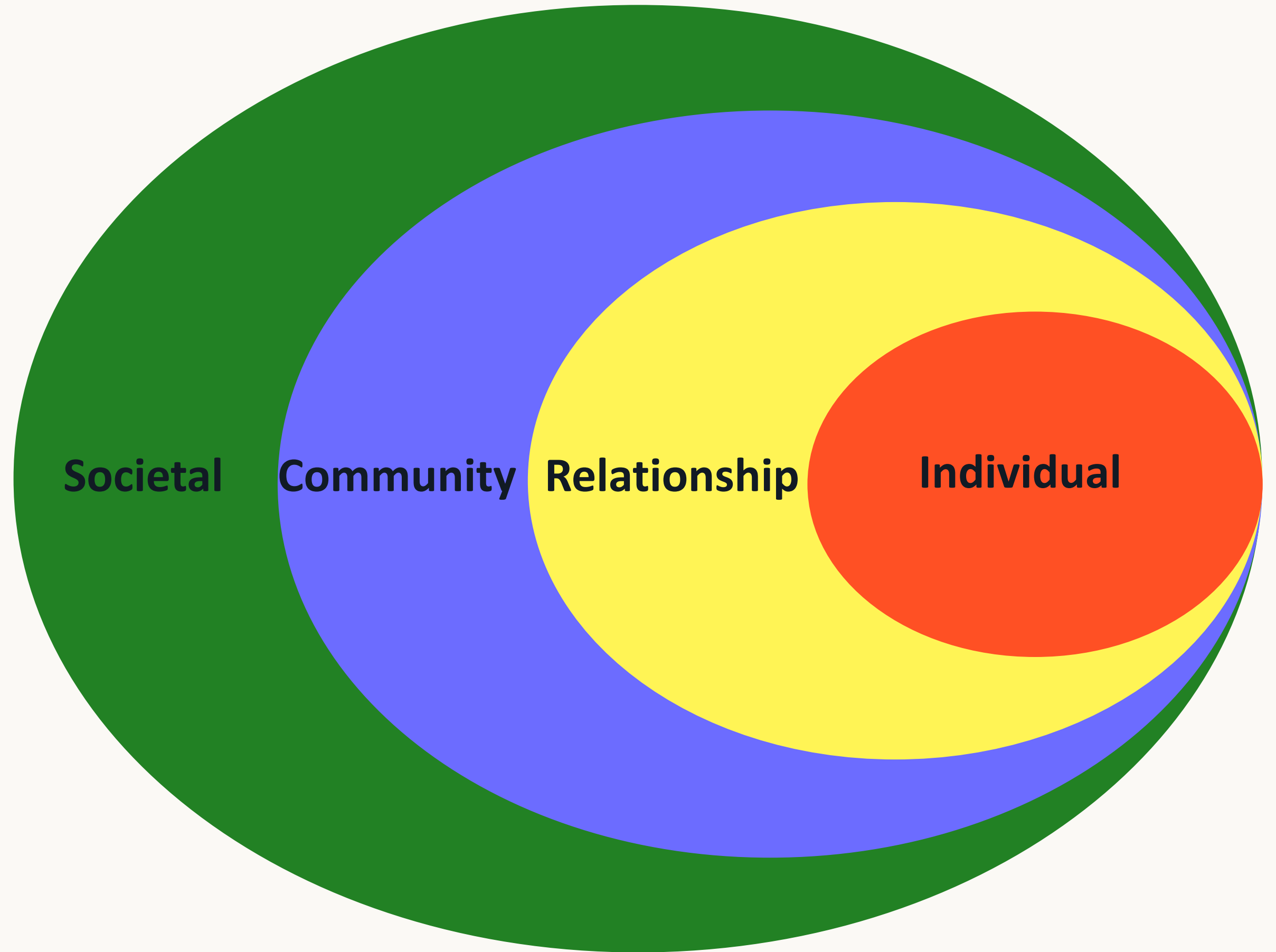


Lethality



Structural Violence

(Socio) ecological
framework



Structural Violence

Rural x Older Women

75%

higher IPV
rate than
rural



traditional
gender
roles

45%

higher sr.
IPV rate
than rural



lack of
access to
resources



self-blame
& secrecy



lack of
shelters



isolation



limited
employment

Leaving

It takes an average of

7

Health Impacts

Head injuries & concussion

Strangulation

Chronic Pain

Sleep Disorder

PTSD

Depression

Shame/Guilt

Substance Use Disorder

Health Impacts

My mind wasn't working back then. I was a different person.

Head injuries & concussion

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Substance Use Disorder



Safety

Create emotionally,
culturally and
physically safe
environments for
management and
employees

Is it safe to disclose IPV at your workplace?

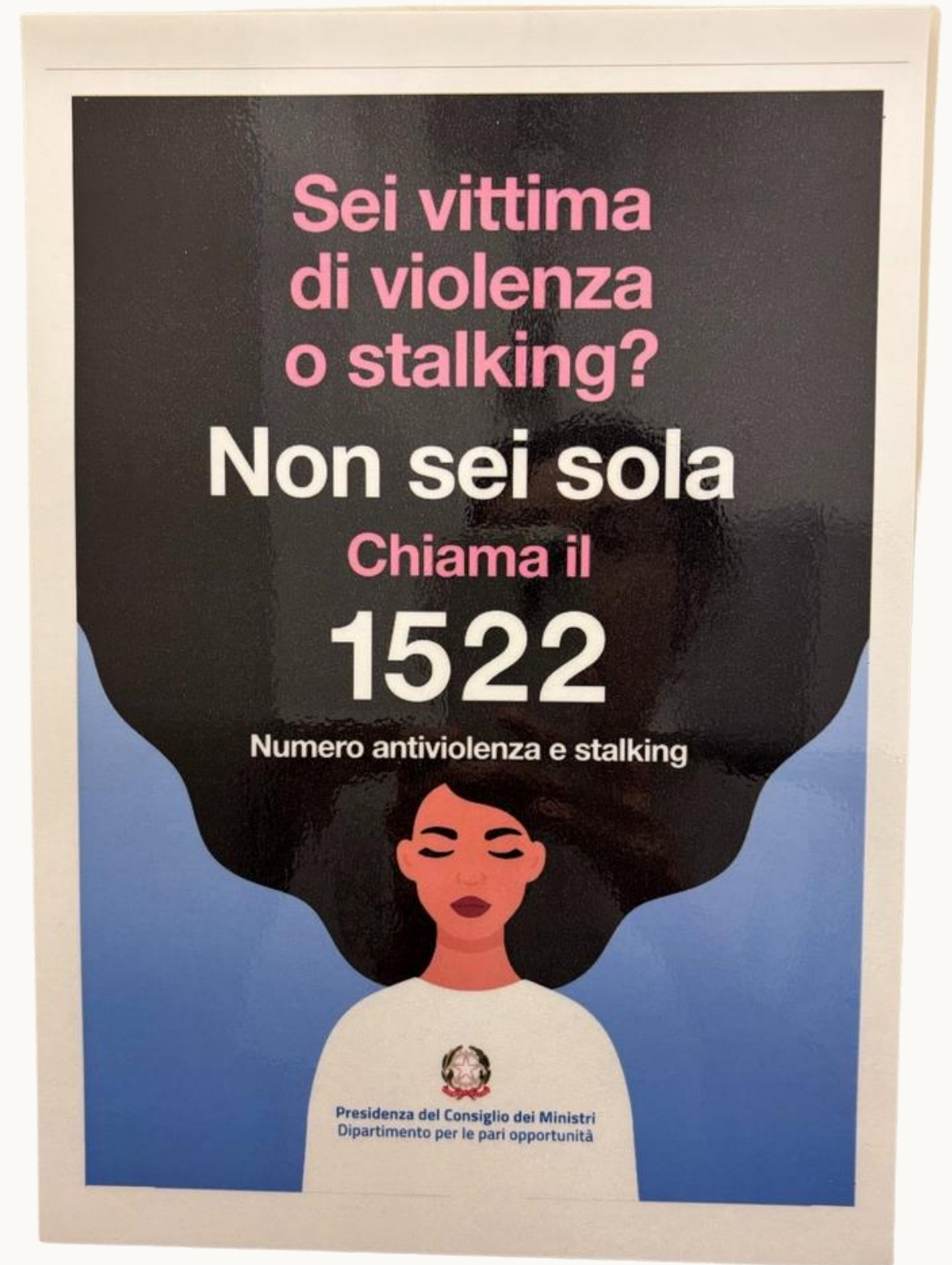
Fear of Retaliation

Employer Action	White	Black	Latino	Total/All
Employer did not respond negatively	35%	30%	35%	34%
Created unsafe work environment	26%	21%	26%	26%
Denied a promotion or opportunity	7%	14%	23%	17%
Fired due to threat from person who hurt	7%	13%	12%	8%
Fired for attending legal proceedings	6%	6%	9%	6%
Fired for taking time off to get better	10%	9%	14%	10%
Given fewer hours or responsibilities	18%	14%	16%	16%
Harassment or discrimination	24%	30%	27%	25%
None of the above	18%	20%	21%	19%

Communications



Bell
Let's Talk



Sei vittima
di violenza
o stalking?
Non sei sola
Chiama il
1522
Numero antiviolenza e stalking


Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri
Dipartimento per le pari opportunità

What to expect

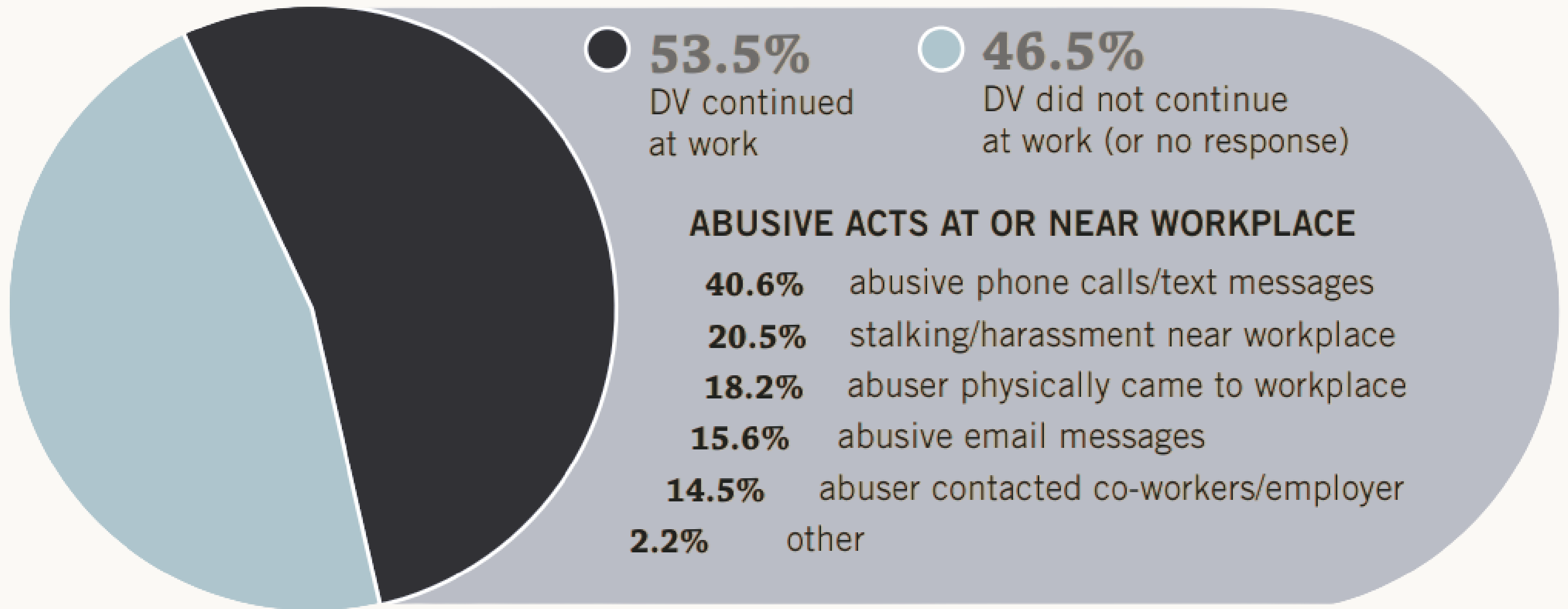
Confidentiality

No judgment

Survivor-centric

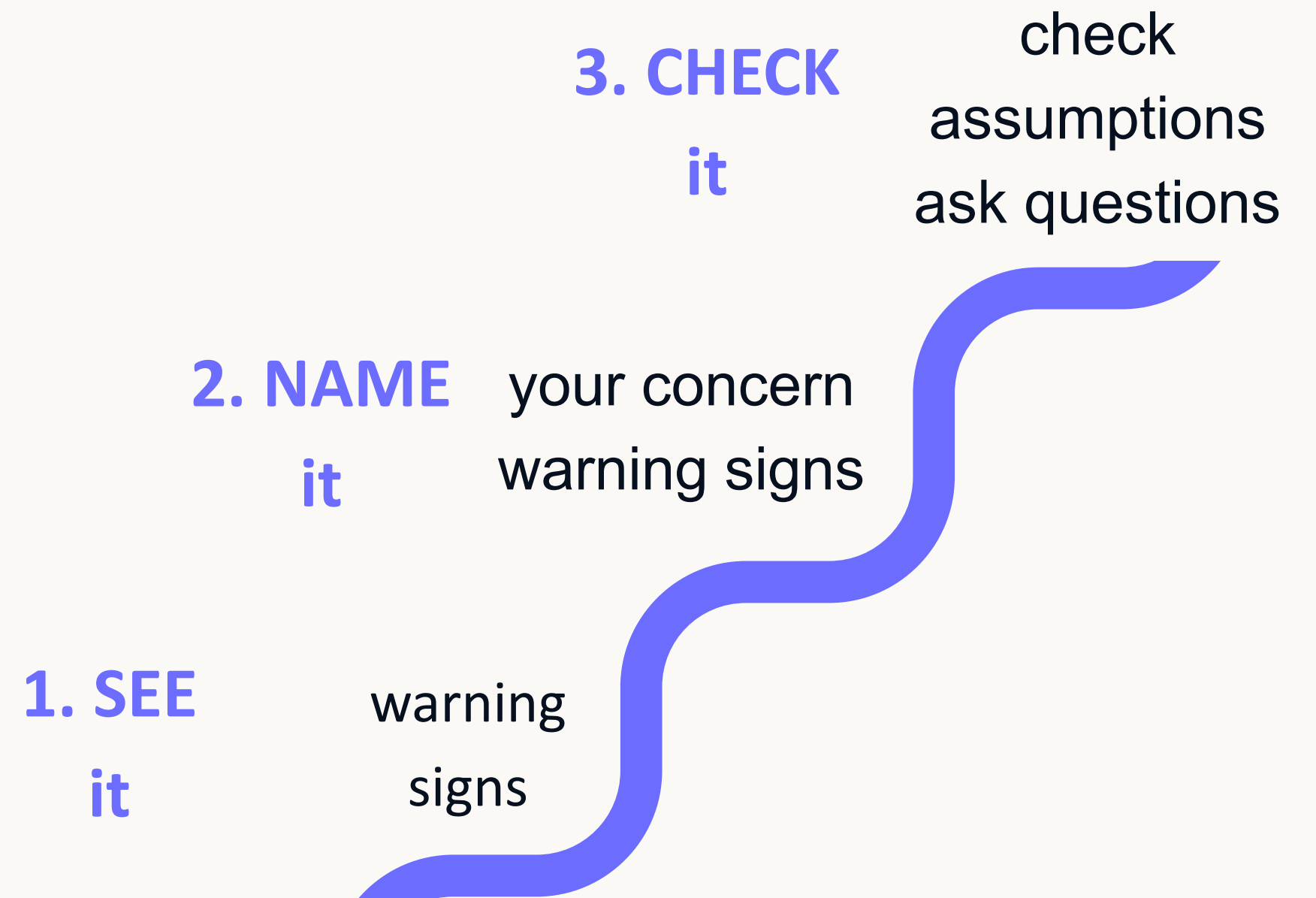
Is it safe for colleagues to check in?

Recognizing IPV



Checking In vs Reporting

SNCit Conversation Framework



- CREVAWC

Is it safe for managers to do the work?

Team-based TVI

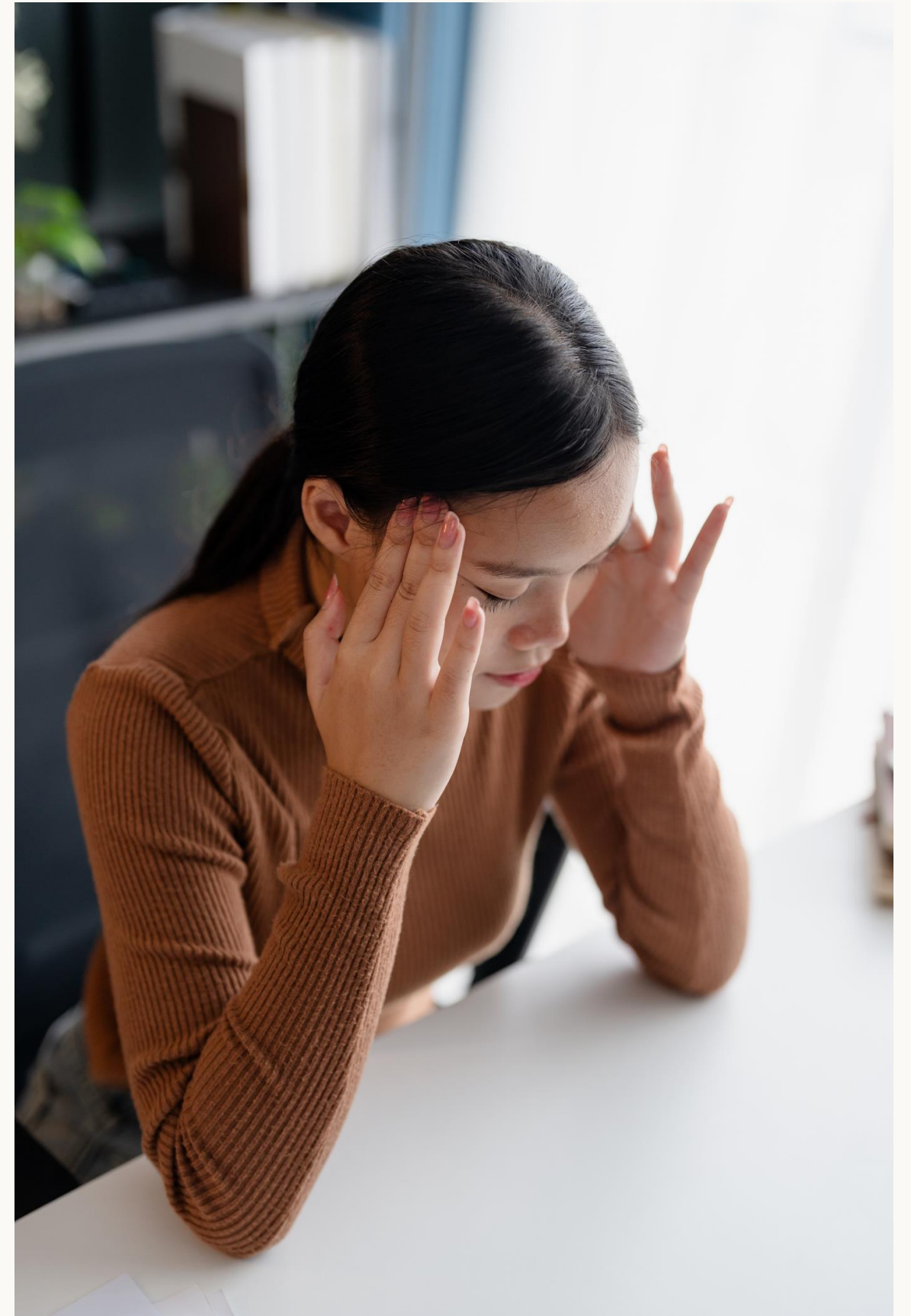
Team-based debriefing

“Trauma review”

Buddy system

“Tap out”

Supports



Do you reinforce safety in your process?

Manager Training

Reflective Practice

What's going on with me?

How can I engage with everyone?

What can I do about the context in which I work to improve cultural safety for all?

~~What's wrong with this person?~~

What happened, and is it still happening?

Intersectional Accommodation

**Failure to address
domestic violence issues
interferes with
treatment effectiveness
and contributes to
relapse.** - Treatment Improvement Protocols, 1997

Accommodation vs Discipline

The Worker has taken out of the realm of conjecture that domestic violence is connected to sex and gender, and like sexual harassment, is a form of **sex discrimination**.

Accommodation vs Discipline

There is a logical connection between domestic violence and the ground of **marital status**. By its very nature, this type of violence occurs within the context of an intimate relationship....

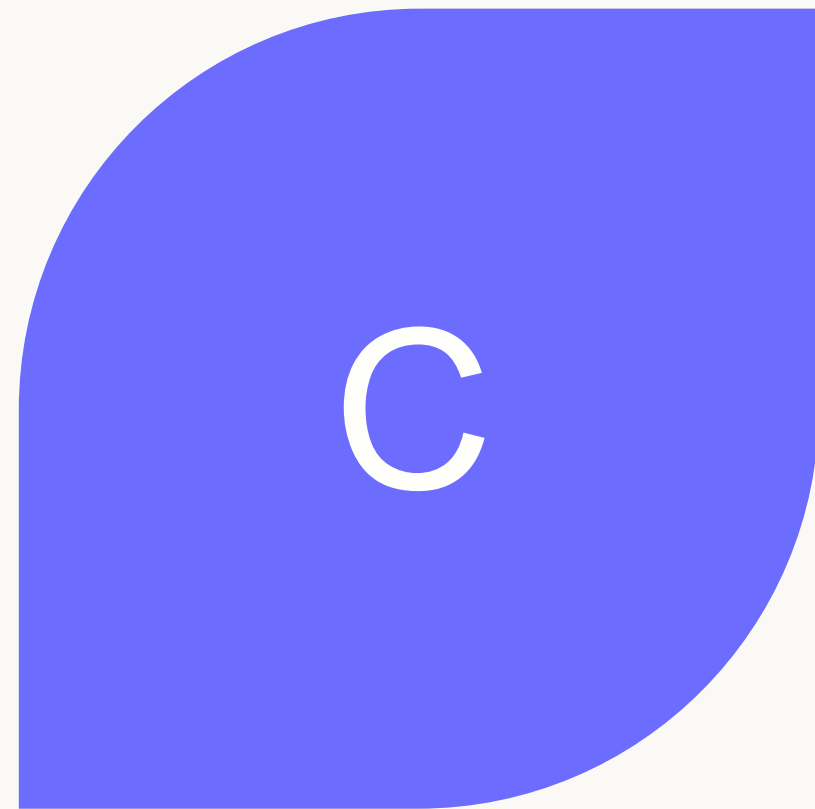
Absence Management

Women wanted employers to offer paid leave or additional sick leave to help cope with intimate partner violence, including time to move house or access counselling.

- WomanACT, 2022

Choice

Foster opportunities
for choice,
collaboration, and
connection



Real Choice

One option that comes to mind is x. If you're up to it, let's walk through what each step might look like to see if there are any challenges we should consider.

Know your community resources

Shelters: 0 tolerance **vs** harm reduction

Inpatient programs: single **vs**
multidisciplinary



S

Strengths-Based

Provide strengths-based and capacity-building ways to support employees

Get curious

What's the story behind the behaviour?

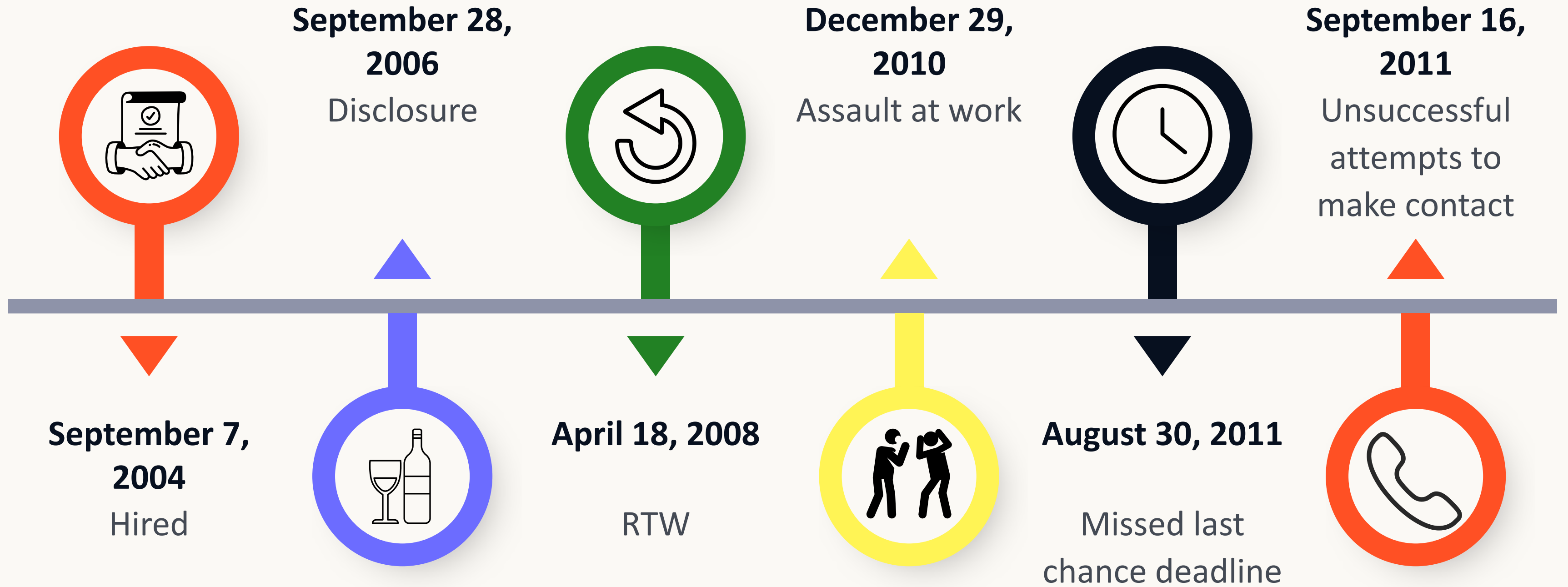
“Non-cooperative” = brain functioning in a way necessary for self-preservation

What they've achieved on their own despite their struggles = a lot of positives to build on

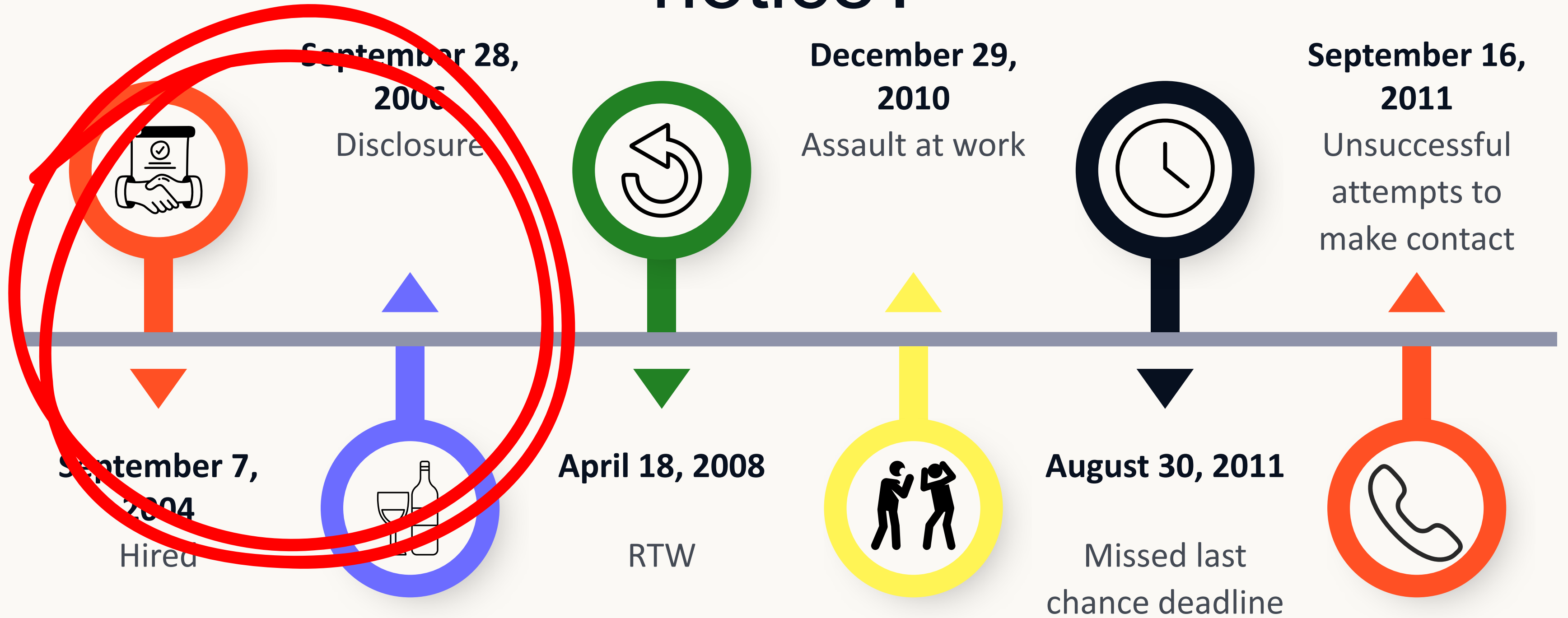
Blaming a person for the reaction we're seeing just adds on to the stigma they've already experienced. They just internalize the stigma further and leave without help.

Let's apply these
TVI principles to
Jane →

How many missed opportunities did you notice?



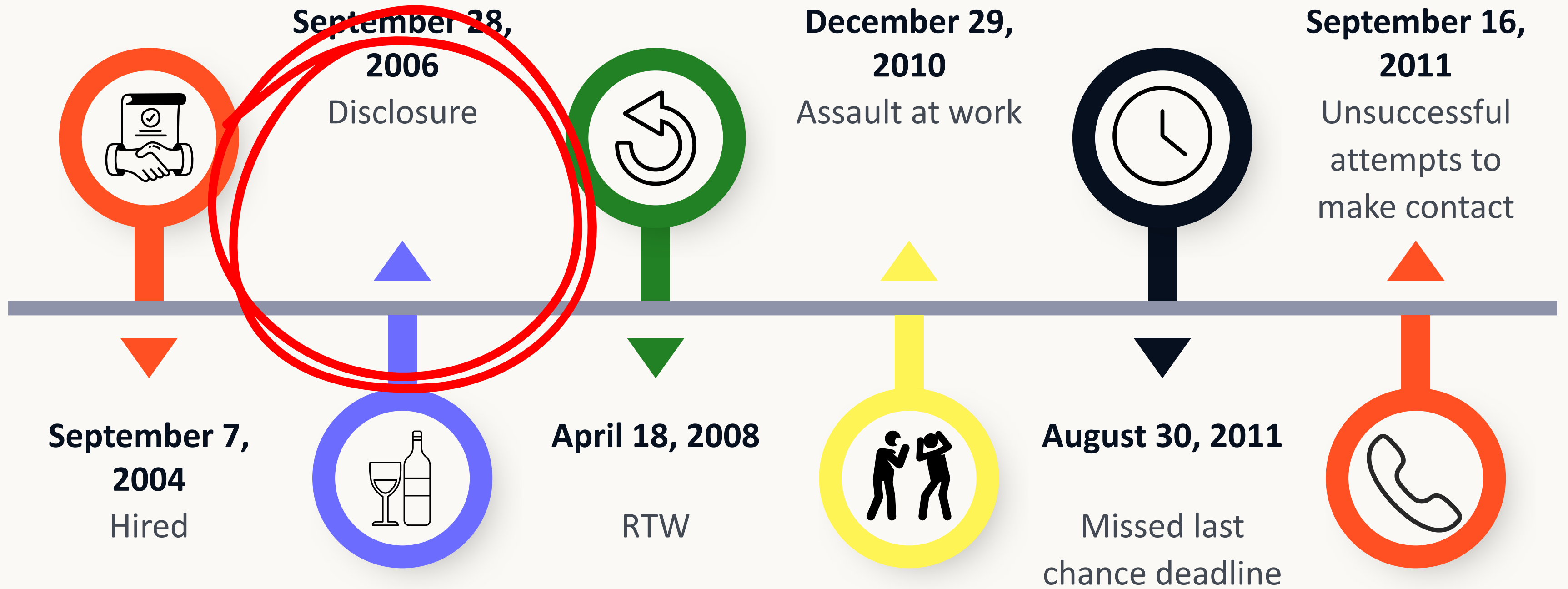
How many missed opportunities did you notice?



What if the policies
showed Jane that the
store “gets it”?

What if her coworkers
knew how to check in?

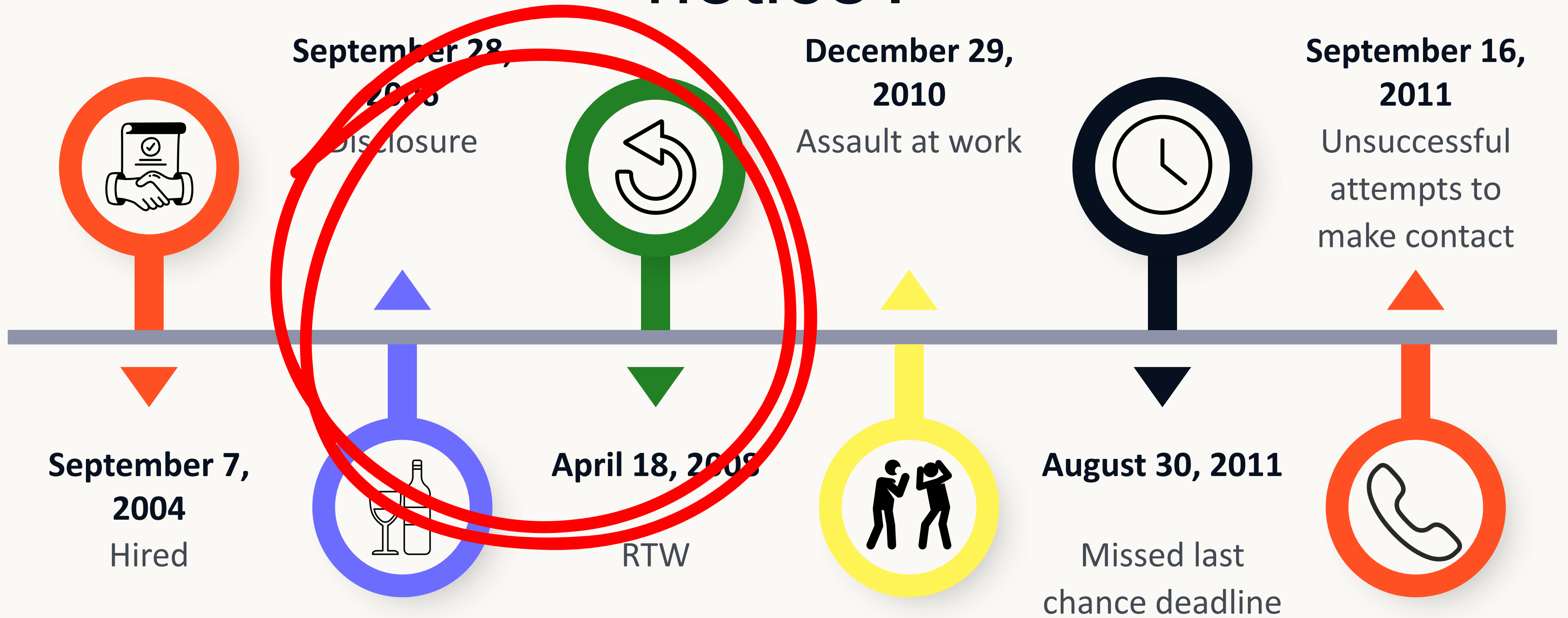
How many missed opportunities did you notice?



What if the store had asked, “Would you feel comfortable sharing how your use of alcohol relates to the abuse you’re being subjected to?”

What if the store had asked, “Can you share with me the approach you take to staying safe at home? If you feel up to it, let’s build on that to create a safety plan for the workplace and while you’re on leave.”

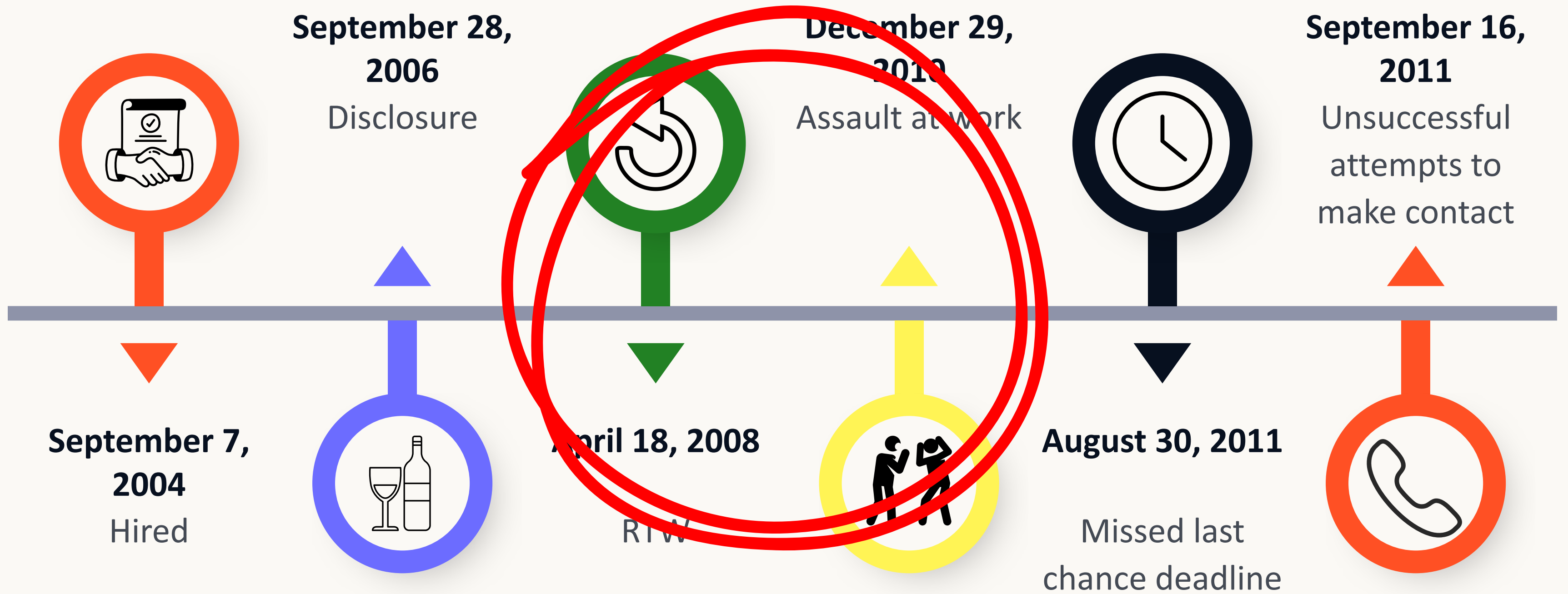
How many missed opportunities did you notice?



What if the store had asked, “Is there anything that might make it difficult for you to go to these sessions?”

What if the store had checked in with Jane to see if the counselling sessions and safety plan were still working for her?

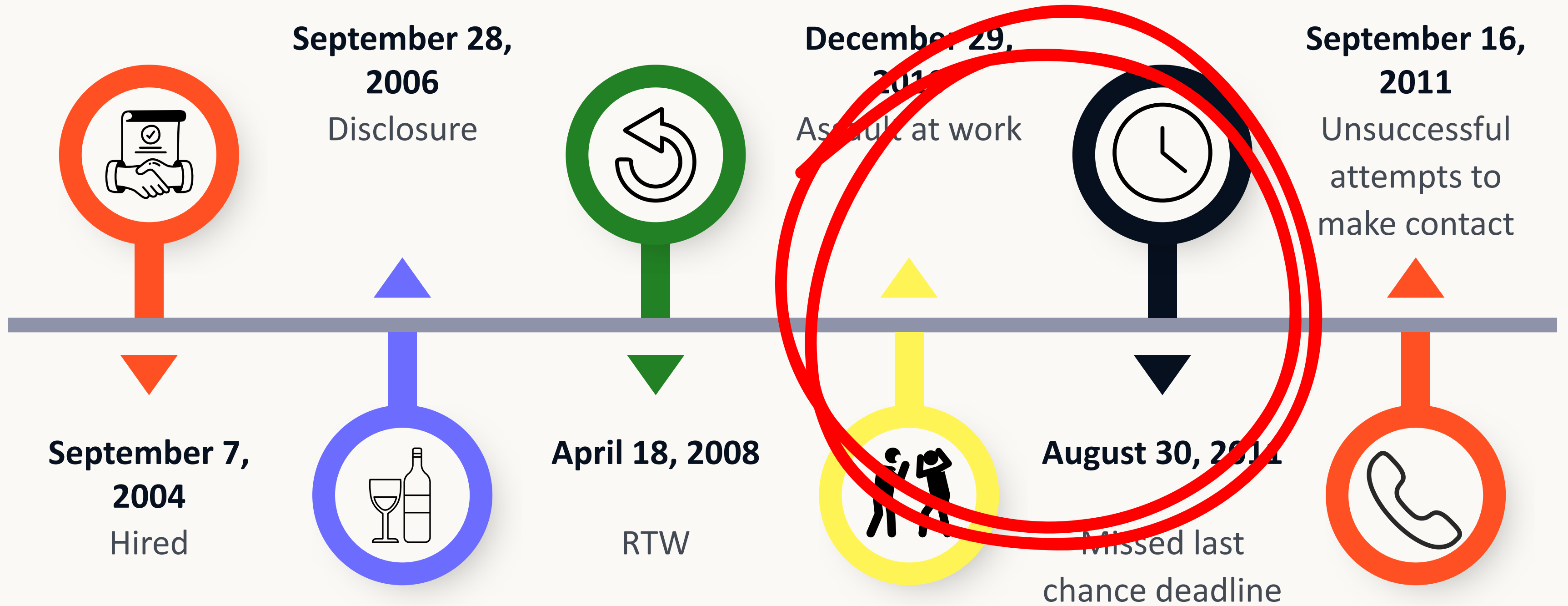
How many missed opportunities did you notice?



What if the store had said, “We can see you’ve been working hard and that our initial idea had some external barriers we hadn’t thought of before. Would you feel up to talking about what might work better for you?”

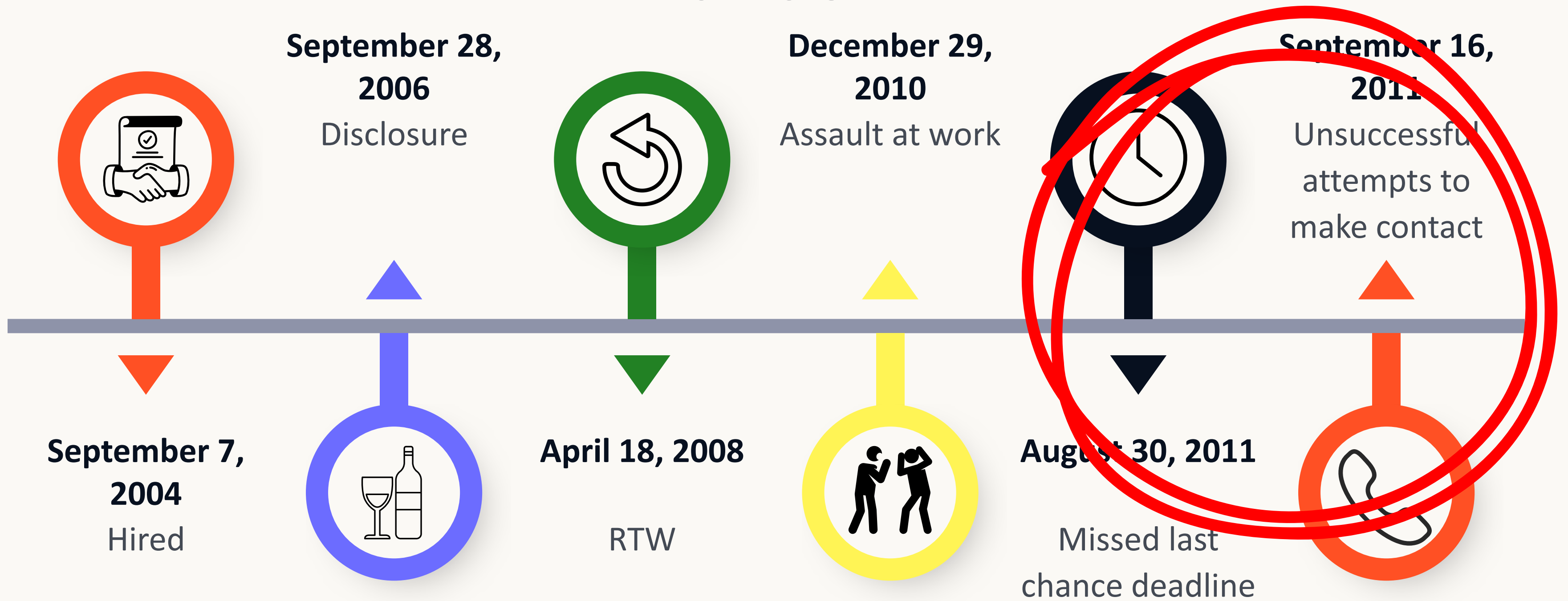
What if the store had responded, “We have a legal duty to create a safety plan, and here’s what that’ll involve. And if you change your mind, we’d love to get your input.”

How many missed opportunities did you notice?



What if the store had recognized that she was absent for legitimate reasons and was facing escalating danger?

How many missed opportunities did you notice?



What if the manager had ended the call, or at least acknowledged Jane's presence?

What if the District Manager had a tap out protocol?

Do you think the outcome would have been different?

Recap

Policies

Do you define IPV?

Do you name the risk factors?

Do you acknowledge structural violence?

Do you eliminate fear of stigma/judgment?

Do you explain what to expect?

Training

Do you teach everyone how to SNCit?

Do you provide continuous team-based TVI training?

Does HR know how to administer intersecting accommodations for substance use and IPV?

Do you know when discipline vs accommodation is appropriate?

 dvatwork.ca

 equiphealthcare.ca

Response Plans

Do you focus on the survivor's strengths?

Do you explore **real** options?

Are you plugged into your local community?

Do you explore barriers despite lack of engagement?

Do you conduct risk assessments and create safety plans despite lack of engagement?

 dvatwork.ca

 equiphealthcare.ca

Bigger Picture

C Suite buy-in

Build an interdisciplinary, organization-wide team

Workplace Violence Policy

Communications

Training

Child abuse reporting

Accountability for person doing harm

Risk assessments & safety planning

HR accommodations

Unique vulnerabilities awareness

Digital abuse flagging

Financial abuse workarounds

Community engagement

Q&A

Get in Touch



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OPSEU (Anagnostopoulos) v Ontario (LCBO), 2017 CanLII 25442 (ONGSB, Watters)
<https://canlii.ca/t/h3jqd>

dvatwork.ca

equiphealthcare.ca

CREVAWC et al, “Can Work Be Safe When Home Isn’t?” (2014)
<https://www.uwo.ca/projects/heritage/heritage3/img/survey-report.pdf>

Ontario, “Employment Standards Act, 2000 Policy and Interpretation Manual:
Domestic Violence Leave” [https://www.ontario.ca/document/employment-standard-act-policy-and-interpretation-manual/part-xiv-leaves-absence#section-](https://www.ontario.ca/document/employment-standard-act-policy-and-interpretation-manual/part-xiv-leaves-absence#section-13)

13

Resource Page

<https://www.theduluthmodel.org/>

Futures Without Violence et al, “The Intersection of Work and Abuse” (2025)
https://www.thehotline.org/wp-content/uploads/media/2025/11/2509-Hotline-WorkplaceSurvey_R05.pdf

Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, “Treatment Improvement Protocol Series: Substance Abuse Treatment and Domestic Violence” (1997)
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK64437/>

workplacesrespond.org

WomanACT, “Intersections Between Employment and Safety Among Racialized Women” (2022) https://womanact.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/WomanACT_Intersections-between-employment-and-safety-among-racialized-women.pdf

Learning Network, GBV in Rural, Remote, & Northern Communities (2021)
https://www.gbvlearningnetwork.ca/our-work/issuebased_newsletters/issue-35/Issue-35.pdf

Resource Page
