



Resource Type: **Workplace Guide**
Primary Audience: **Employers**

Navigating the Risk & Protective Factor Assessment: A Guide for Small Businesses

Small businesses—generally defined as having 20 employees or less¹—play a vital role in creating safe, respectful workplaces. Yet limited staff, informal structures, and close-knit teams can make it harder to address domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and sexual harassment (DVSASSH). This overview accompanies the [Risk & Protective Factor Assessment](#) and provides small business–specific guidance for practical, sustainable improvements.

Why This Assessment Matters for Small Businesses

For small organizations with staff who work closely together, a single incident of harassment or violence can have outsized impacts on morale, productivity, safety, and retention. Without formal HR systems or written policies, employees may be unsure how to report concerns or access support. The assessment helps identify these risks early and offers realistic steps small businesses can take to build safer, more supportive environments—using structures and approaches that work in small settings.

¹ Under federal law, “small business” or “small organization” generally refers to an independently owned and operated entity that is not dominant in its field; size may also be based on employees, revenue, or other factors. Employers with ≥1 employee must pay federal taxes, provide a safe workplace, comply with minimum wage laws, report serious injuries to OSHA, and prohibit pay discrimination based on gender. Other federal laws apply only if the employer meets certain size thresholds: for example, Fair Labor Standards Act (all employers), Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (≥15 employees), Family and Medical Leave Act (≥50 employees).

For more information, visit: <https://www.shrm.org/content/dam/en/shrm/topics-tools/legal-compliance/Federal-Labor-Laws-by-Number-of-Employees.pdf>

Protective factors are conditions that reduce the likelihood of violence or strengthen a business's ability to prevent and respond to DVSASSH. For small businesses, protective measures may look different than in larger organizations.

How Small Businesses Can Complete the Assessment

1. Designate one point of contact.

Many small businesses do not have a [dedicated HR staff member, but can still select](#) a single person—an owner, supervisor, or trusted manager—to lead the process assessment. This person should:

- Coordinate completion of the assessment tool;
- Serve as the main contact for questions or disclosures; and
- Ensure policies and practices are applied consistently.

2. Pair assessment results with staff input.

Small workplaces often rely on informal communication, which can mask concerns or make it difficult for employees to speak up. To get an accurate picture of the work environment, pair the assessment with a short, anonymous survey (paper or digital).

Anonymous feedback is especially important in small teams where employees may hesitate to raise concerns about supervisors, owners, or other influential staff. Even a simple survey can reveal gaps between leadership perception and employee experiences in the workplace.

3. Use preexisting information related to workplace policies and practices—even if informal

You do not need to review formal HR documents to complete the assessment. Draw from:

- Written or verbal policies
- Notes from staff meetings
- Past employee concerns
- Onboarding materials, schedules, or safety guidance

4. Focus on realistic actions with an established timeline

Small businesses can make meaningful improvements even with limited resources. After reviewing assessment responses, focus on actions that are achievable with your current capacity. Examples include:

- Writing or updating a DVSASSH prevention and response policy.
- Hanging posters or other materials about worker rights and anti-harassment laws.
- Sharing brief reminders about respectful workplace practices during staff meetings.
- Incorporating education on domestic and sexual violence into new employee onboarding.
- Keeping safety resources, hotlines, or local support contacts visible and easily accessible.

Next Steps After the Assessment

Once the assessment is complete, review areas with higher risks and select practical changes to implement in the coming months. Share the results and planned actions with your team to foster trust, transparency, and a shared commitment to a safer workplace. Use available resources, including free technical assistance, to support policy development, staff training, and ongoing improvements. Taking these steps turns the assessment into meaningful, sustainable actions that enhance both safety and workplace culture.

Workplaces Respond offers free resources, training, and technical assistance to employers, workers, and advocates to prevent and respond to domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and sexual harassment impacting the workplace. Scan this QR code to access the technical assistance request portal.



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