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Work relationships can contribute to a range of positive workplace outcomes, including increased job satisfaction, stronger organizational commitment, improved morale, and enhanced collaboration and teamwork. (Unsplash+)

## Is it wrong to date a coworker? Not necessarily — but it can get complicated

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The workplace has long been a setting for connection — and sometimes romance. In Canada, these relationships are far from rare.

A [2019 ADP Canada survey](#) of 885 employees found that one in three have been romantically involved with a colleague. Younger workers aged 18 to 34 were especially likely to report such relationships (41 per cent).

Similar patterns emerge in the [United States](#) and [the United Kingdom](#), where surveys have found that 18 per cent of partnered respondents (those married, living with a partner or in a committed relationship) met their significant other at work.

It's no surprise. We spend much of our waking lives with colleagues, [building shared experiences and discovering common values and interests](#). At a time when [finding and keeping love seems harder than ever](#), the office can feel like a [rare place where authenticity and comfort come naturally](#).

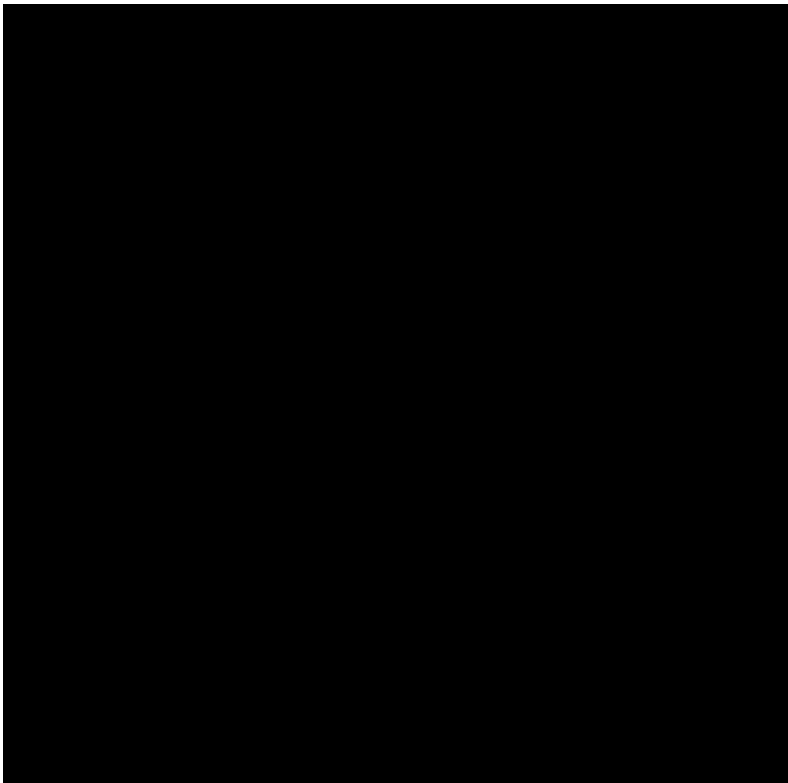
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***Read more: [How rising living costs are changing the way we date, live and love](#)***

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Workplace relationships can contribute to a [range of positive workplace outcomes](#). Most notably, they are linked to [increased job satisfaction, stronger organizational commitment, improved morale and enhanced collaboration and teamwork](#).

However, workplace relationships can also create [significant organizational challenges](#), which is why knowing how to handle them is key.



*Dating today can feel like a mix of endless swipes, red flags and shifting expectations. From decoding mixed signals to balancing independence with intimacy, relationships in your 20s and 30s come with unique challenges. [Love IRL](#) is the latest series from Quarter Life that explores it all.*

*These research-backed articles break down the complexities of modern love to help you build meaningful connections, no matter your relationship status.*

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## When work and love mix

Workplace romance refers to sexual or romantic relationships between members of the same organization that both parties recognize as more than strictly professional.

These relationships can include dating, extramarital affairs, casual hook-ups, flings or friends-with-benefits arrangements.

While many romances have minimal impact, some erode organizational trust by creating perceptions of favouritism, exclusion or manipulation, especially when they involve a power imbalance.

When trust is undermined, research shows that collaboration suffers, morale declines and workplace culture deteriorates. This is why organizations often have policies surrounding workplace romances.

## The risks of workplace romance

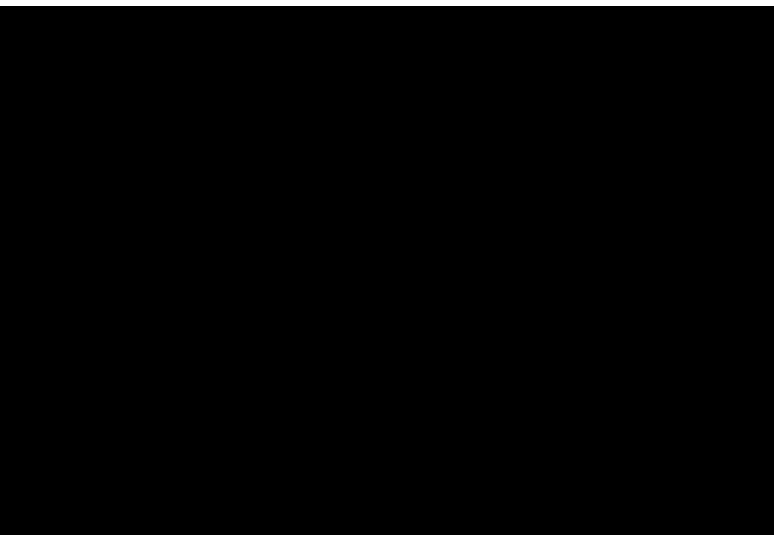
In Canada, there are no laws that prohibit consensual relationships at work, and most countries similarly don't have laws governing workplace relationships.

However, Canada does have legal frameworks that require employers to maintain a safe, respectful workplace. These include the Canadian Human Rights Act, provincial human rights codes, and occupational health and safety legislation.

To meet these obligations, many organizations implement policies that prohibit supervisor-subordinate relationships or require disclosure.

These policies exist for good reason: workplace romances can blur professional boundaries, increase the risk of sharing confidential information inappropriately, allow personal feelings to influence decisions, or create situations where one partner feels pressured to act in ways that conflict with organizational policies or ethical standards.

For individuals, the risks can also be just as real. While some workplace romances lead to enduring partnerships — Michelle and Barack Obama famously met at a Chicago law firm when she was a junior associate and he was an intern — others can end less happily.



Former U.S. president Barack Obama hugs Michelle Obama as he is introduced during the Democratic National Convention in August 2024 in Chicago. (AP Photo/Paul Sancya)

Failed relationships can leave both people vulnerable to reputational damage, career derailment and, in the worst cases, allegations of harassment that can result in termination.

These concerns are underscored by the prevalence of misconduct. According to a 2024 Statistics Canada report, almost half of women and nearly one-third of men say they have experienced inappropriate sexualized behaviour at work.


### **Why some couples keep it quiet**

Many employees choose not to disclose their workplace relationships. According to the ADP Canada survey, nearly half (45 per cent) of those in workplace relationships kept it secret from someone at work, most often management or human resources.

Similarly, a 2023 survey of more than 600 working Americans from the Society for Human Resource Management across a variety of ages, industries and job levels found that 82 per cent of workers who had been in a workplace romance kept it secret from their employer.

Reasons for secrecy range from a desire for privacy to concerns about gossip, judgment or professional repercussions.

This lack of disclosure means employers may be unaware of relationships and therefore less able to protect all parties if conflicts, ethical concerns or allegations arise.



Workplace relationships can create significant organizational challenges, which is why knowing how to handle them is key. (Unsplash+)

## **Making love work in the workplace**

If you find yourself navigating romance at work, here are five steps to protect both your relationship and your career:

1. Reflect on your motivations. Ask yourself why you want to pursue the relationship and whether it aligns with your personal and professional goals. Consider how it might affect your career, the people you work with and the overall workplace culture. This kind of honest self-check can help you make clear, confident decisions.

2. Know the rules. Review your organization's policy on workplace romance. While the law may not always address it directly, many employers require disclosure or limit relationships within reporting lines. Understanding these rules early can help you avoid misunderstandings or career surprises.

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***Read more: Workplace romance: four questions to ask yourself before dating someone from the office***

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3. Be transparent. If disclosure is required, share the news directly with your manager or human resources, rather than letting it spread through gossip. Research shows that others in the workplace respond more positively when they hear it from you directly.

4. Manage perceptions and set boundaries. Even if your relationship doesn't affect your work, others may see it differently. Agree with your partner on boundaries, communicate thoughtfully and commit to upholding professional conduct.

5. Think long-term. Relationships can change. Decide in advance how you'll handle working together if it ends, and consider how it might shape your reputation, network and opportunities beyond your current role.

Handled well, these steps won't just protect your career but also help your relationship stand on solid ground.

Falling for someone at work can be both exciting and rewarding. With mindfulness, open communication and respect for professional boundaries, it can become a story you cherish and proof that romance and professionalism can flourish together.