

Work Violence Prevention

Sterling Police Department
Crime Prevention
(978) 422 - 7331

Definitions of Violence

“The abusive or unjust exercise of power: an outrage or wrong. Physical force exerted for the purpose of violating, damaging or abusing.” *Webster’s Encyclopedic Dictionary*

“For the purpose of establishing power and control, a pattern of coercive behaviors toward one or more individuals that places recipient(s) in fear. Behaviors can include emotional, verbal, psychological, physical and sexual abuse.” *Workshop Presenter*

Stalker: “any person who willfully, maliciously and repeatedly follows or harasses another person and makes a threat with the intent of placing that person in imminent fear of death or serious bodily injury.” *MA General Law*

Violence rarely occurs without some precursor signs and indicators. We must learn to identify these signs before they erupt into violence and become a disaster affecting many staff, coworkers, their families, friends and the community at large.

Workplace Violence: Can happen to anyone, anywhere, anytime.

Statistics published in *Public Management* by the International City-County Association:

- Murder comprises 40% of female on-the-job fatalities, and a major contributor to that statistic is violence by current and former parties.
- Workplace homicide is the fastest-growing type of homicide; there are more than 2 million workplace assaults in the U.S. every year. There are 16 million workers who are harassed and 6 million who are threatened.
- A study estimated that for every five workplace violence incidents that occur, only one is reported.
- Government employees are at even greater risk than those in the private sector. While government employees only made up 18% of the workforce, 30% of victims were federal, state or local government employees.
- The rate at which supervisors are murdered at work has doubled since 1985.
- The U.S. Dept. of Justice found that 1 out of every 6 crimes occurs at work.
- In 1993, there were 110,000 reported incidents of violence in U.S. workplaces, causing 750,000 deaths and costing employers \$4.2 billion.

Myths About Workplace Violence:

- A person’s angry or violent tendencies are their own personal problem to be handled on their own; it’s not anyone else’s business.
- If you ignore angry, disgruntled employees/customers, they will go away.
- If you terminate or relocate a problem employee, the problem is resolved.
- Giving in to an angry person’s unreasonable demands will stop the behavior.
- Bending rules for an angry employee de-escalates and resolves the situation.
- Just agreeing with the unreasonable person has long-term positive effects.
- No one but the immediate victim and perpetrator is affected by the violence.

Violence in the Workplace

The effects of workplace violence costs businesses in the U.S. \$3-5 billion annually with lost wages, decreased productivity and increased medical insurance. The workplace has added expenses through litigation, negligent hiring claims, property damage, and increased security and public relations costs.

Red Flags for Perpetrators-98% Males

- Recent Family, Financial or Personal Problems
- Intimidating or Instilling Fear/Controlling
- History of Violent Behavior
- Holds a Grudge/Does Not Accept Criticism Well
- Sees Self as a Victim-“People have done me wrong”
- Obsessive Behavior w/Partner, Job, Co-Workers, Weapons
- Tests Limits of Acceptable Behavior
- Loner – Isolates Self – Centered Around Partner
- Direct or Veiled Threats
- Jealous/Possessive/Isolates Partner
- Unwanted Interest in Ex-Partner or Co-Worker
- Paranoid/Bizarre Behavior
- Interest in Recent Publicized Violent Event
- Stress in Workplace: Layoffs/Labor Disputes
- Substance Abuse
- Low Tolerance for Frustration
- Overly Suspicious of Others
- Identifies Self by Their Job
- Displays Open Distrust of Authority Figures
- Stalking Behavior

Domestic Violence Victim Indicators

- Dropped Performance
- Absenteeism
- Tardy/Leaving Early
- Unexplained Injuries
- Unbelievable Explanations
- Change in Appearance
- Change in Behavior
- No Staff Socializing
- Difficulty Making Decisions
- More Emotionally Upset
- Focus on Partner/Kids
- Long Sleeves/Sunglasses
- Increased Telephone Calls
- Frequent Partner Contact
- Substance Abuse
- Frequent Crying
- Upset When Partner Calls
- Unexplained Nervousness
- Quiet and Withdrawn
- Tired or Disheveled

High Risk Employees

1. Staff who tend to act on the basis of their emotions.
2. Staff who do not think about consequence to actions.
3. Staff who focus only on their own needs.
4. Staff who have an inflexible approach to life.
5. Staff who behave in passive-aggressive ways.
6. Staff who avoid reality, lie and deceive.
7. Staff whose behavior and performance change.

Indicators That Situation Could Become Violent

- Person gets red in face, starts to shake, clenches a fist, can't sit still.
- Person invades your personal space, becomes “pumped up” and stares at you.
- Person uses overt or veiled threats, finger pointing, menacing looks.
- Person speaks disjointedly, mumbles to self, looks around in searching manner.

If you notice any of these indicators...carefully pull away and immediately contact 1) Supervisor 2) Human Resources or EAP 3) Police or Security. Check perception with others. Remember, these are only indicators, not absolute criteria. Some people with these characteristics may never become violent and some violent people may not display these characteristics.

Defusing Aggressive Behavior

When to Use “Passive” Behavior: *(does not set limits, confront or take any action)*

- The other person is out of control.
- You need to buy time to get to safer ground.
- Others use threatening gestures.
- To let aggressor vent anger when enraged.

When to Use “Aggressive” Behavior: *(loud, abrasive, demanding, physical, up close)*

- May be necessary if others are actively coming at you.
- May be indicated when other’s safety is in danger.

When to Use “Passive-Aggressive” Behavior: *(doesn’t mean what they say, sarcastic, lies)*

- This style is never appropriate as a response.

When to Use “Assertive” Behavior: *(sets limits, means what they say, keeps emotional control, does not become defensive or accusatory, listens to others’ point of view, takes control and confronts, does not display anger, takes action after gathering facts, does not lie)*

- Almost always appropriate when handling aggressive people.
- Assertive people are confrontational when necessary, not combative.

When Confronting Aggressive Behavior:

1. Ask yourself if confronting is the best choice.
2. If so, where do you confront?
3. Start with an “I” ownership statement.
4. Describe specific behaviors, not general attitudes.
5. Acknowledge, don’t argue.
6. Request specific behavior changes.

De-Escalating a Potentially Explosive Situation:

- Ask for a time out to allow everyone to re-group.
- Invite the person to follow you to another safer place.
- Keep your voice level calm, low and in control.
- Do not become argumentative.
- Regardless of how distorted the person’s view, acknowledge it.
- Do not try to reason when others are out of control.
- Take long, deep breaths to calm yourself down.
- Focus on listening; acknowledge the person’s strong feelings.
- Assure others that you would like to find a solution.
- Repeatedly reassure others that there is a way to work this out.

Calming an Irrate Person Over the Telephone:

- Listen without saying anything for about a minute.
- If necessary, interrupt by saying “Excuse me” in a soft voice.
- Calmly acknowledge the person’s feelings.
- State immediately that you intend to get an answer for the person.
- Do not become argumentative, defensive or accusatory.
- If the person continues to threaten, state that you will need to hang up.
- If you need to hang up, close with “we can speak again at a later time”.

Coping with Threats and Violence:

For angry or hostile customer or co-worker:

- Stay calm, listen attentively.
- Maintain eye contact.
- Be courteous and patient.
- Keep the situation in your control.
- Offer suggestions and solutions.
- Get supervisor to find solutions.
- Signal co-worker or supervisor (code words).
- Do not make calls yourself; stay focused on the person.

For someone threatening with a gun, knife or other weapon:

- Stay calm, signal quietly for help (code words).
- Maintain eye contact.
- Stall for time; ask questions.
- Keep talking, but follow instructions from assailant.
- Don't risk harm to yourself or others.
- Don't try to be a hero; this could be more risky.
- Never try to grab a weapon.
- Watch for a chance to escape to a safer place.



Taking Action in the Workplace:

- Identify specific behaviors, not general descriptions.
- Explain why the behavior is inappropriate.
- Document the high risk behavior in writing.
- Do not try to give advice and/or guidance; refer to HR or EAP.
- Provide on-going workplace violence training.
- Develop a risk assessment team to regularly assess employees.
- Make sure all records are kept accurately.

Build Safety Measures into Termination:

- Treat individual with respect and dignity.
- Rehearse ahead of time what you intend to say; review with manager.
- Prepare for the worst; have personnel nearby.
- Do not do this alone; have witness.
- State your understanding of specific unacceptable behaviors/performance.
- Keep discussion to a minimum without debating.
- Let the person know that there is no choice.

Other Employees:

- Staff will want to know what happened.
- Staff may feel threatened that they will be fired.
- Gossip will be rampant; take steps to stop it.
- A short factual debriefing to employees will help.
- Safety planning measures for all should be outlined for staff.

Workplace Violence Intervention:

- Be aware of signs and indicators: educate and train staff.
- Respect employee privacy vs. liability to provide a safe work environment.
- Immediately contact HR, EAP, Police or Security for consultation.
- Maintain confidentiality where possible; discuss with victim and perpetrator.
- Respect victim's personal choices while holding abuser accountable.
- Assist with following through on safety plan for victim (s) and all employees.

Safety Planning in the Workplace: (done in conjunction with HR)

- Confidential Emergency Contacts for Victims.
- Relocation of Employee – Photo of Violent Person.
- Security Escorts – Priority Parking – Lighting.
- Screen Calls – Cameras – Alarms – Cell Phone.
- Flex Time – Grant Work Leaves for Victim.
- Victim Time Off: Court, Medical, Legal, Counseling.
- Comply with Court Orders: Call Police with Any Violation.
- Document Performance, Incidents, Injuries.
- Follow Policy to the Letter.



**KNOW
YOUR
VIOLENCE
POLICY!!**

Prevention: Interviewing Employees to Screen for Violent Tendencies:**Ask Open-Ended Questions about How Candidate Handles Conflict:**

- When have you thought you were treated unfairly in your life?
- What did you do about this?
- What would you have like to have done about it?
- What complaints have you had about your supervisors in the past?
- What might a supervisor do that would make you angry?

Other Questions to Gather Impressions About Character:

- When is it hard for you to admit that you have made a mistake?
- What do you do to control your anger?
- When have you taken insults well?
- What do you do to avoid arguments?
- In what ways can you be difficult?
- When do you fail to confront people, when perhaps you should?
- When can you be gruff?

Background Check Assistance in Recognizing Potentially Violent Employee:

- Work History: gaps in employment, why they left, relationships with staff.
- Military History: signs of disciplinary action, suspension or discharge.
- Criminal Record: legal to ask about convictions, what kind of crime.
- Credit History: bankruptcy, liens, large credit debt, foreclosure – all possible signs of not seeing personal responsibility or consequence to actions; blames others.
- Driving Record: verify license, look for history of DUI, unpaid tickets, suspended license.

Use caution when interpreting records; it's a red flag if you see a pattern emerging that suggests irresponsibility.

Remedies within Domestic Violence Policy

Examples of appropriate utilization of time off:

- To obtain a restraining order.
- To attend any civil, criminal, or probate court hearing.
- To participate in counseling, support groups, medical treatment.
- For children to participate in counseling, medical treatment.
- To deal with severe emotional effects of domestic violence.
- To go to an emergency shelter.
- To leave the area for a period of time for safety.
- To relocate due to safety concerns and work site of abuser.
- To arrange child care.
- To seek and obtain legal counsel.
- To arrange visitation through a visitation center.

Do's and Don'ts in Domestic Violence Intervention:

- DO help the person look at ways to keep safe or refer them to someone who can.
- DO be supportive giving emotional comfort, listening non-judgmentally.
- DO reassure this person that they are not to blame and/or not responsible for another's behavior.
- DO reinforce that we all expect to live free from abuse; violence in the home is a crime.
- DO encourage action; but support person's choices.
- DO provide information and referrals to specialized services particularly around language barriers.
- DON'T make decisions for the victim or tell the victim to leave.
- DON'T ask what they did to provoke the violence or investigate the victim's story.
- DON'T suggest the victim try again or suggest couples counseling.
- DON'T show disapproval of decisions or expect victim to reach a decision quickly.
- DON'T call victim at home without first checking if it's safe to do so.
- DON'T inform anyone of a changed address or discuss the victim's story with anyone.
- DON'T mediate, or get involved in abuser's justifications.
- DON'T give up on the victim if she/he leaves and goes back.
- DON'T spend off hours assisting the victim: talking, offering money, legal advise, shelter.

Keep in Mind the Obstacles to Leaving an Abusive Relationship:

May want relationship to continue – just wants violence to stop; may still be in love; be pregnant; feel to blame; fear social stigma; blames external causes – stress, alcohol, drugs; hope for change; believes promises to change; fears threats to do further harm or to take the children; experiences partner as loving some of the time; religious or cultural beliefs; feel responsible to help; believe the children need two parents; socially isolated; feels no real support available; fear of being alone or loss of financial security; feel depressed, afraid, anxious, or too confused to making decisions; pressure from family or friends to return; blame or poor response from family, friends or insensitive “helpers”; fear of not being believed; fear of being murdered; fear of not making it on their own; fear of other threats made; fear of being deported; fear of the unknown...

Prevention

In Keeping with OSHA guidelines, (providing a safe workplace):

- Enforce a “zero-tolerance” policy.
- Establish a reporting system; make it user friendly, no retaliation.
- Establish a risk-assessment team to follow up.
- Train all employees on written policies including consequences.
- Make sure there is follow through with consequences.
- Train all employees on defusing potentially violent people.
- Make it clear that law enforcement will be contacted.
- Contact HR or EAP for consultation and referral.
- Add additional safety measures to your workplace; ask for suggestions.

Maximizing Safety: Keeping Your Work Area Safe

- Arrange desks and chairs to prevent trapping of employees.
- Remove items from top of desks that are potential weapons.
- Install panic buttons; establish & share code words.
- Install plexi-glass payment windows for employees who handle money.
- Install locks on restroom doors; leave the keys at reception areas.
- Encourage employees to use the buddy system when feeling unsafe.
- Supply cell phones to employees in the field or in remote areas.
- Control access to building; use sign in and name tags.
- Limit entry and exit ways.
- Employ security guards if necessary.
- Train all employees in emergency response.

Know Your Resources

Human Resources _____ EAP _____

Local Police _____ Security _____ Fire _____

National Crisis Prevention Institute, Inc.
National Trauma Services
National Domestic Violence Hotline
Asian Domestic Violence Task Force
Fenway Community Health: Same Sex DV
Boston Area Rape Crisis Hotline
Immigrant & Refugee Advocacy
Reporting Child Abuse
Reporting Elder Abuse
Reporting Abuse of the Disabled
Safelink: MA Domestic Violence Hotline (Multi-lingual)



(800) 558-8976
(800) 398-2811
(617) 492-7273
(617) 338-2350
(800) 799-SAFE
(617) 267-0900
(617) 350-5480
(800) 792-5200
(800) 922-2275
(800) 426-9009
(877) 785-2020

*Language **DON'TS***



- “Are you a victim of DV?”; “Does your partner beat you?”; “Are you a battered woman?”
- “So what did you do to make him angry?”; “Well, I’ll talk to him about this.”
- “Have you tried couples counseling...or giving him another chance?”
- “I can’t believe you could feel that way after all you’ve been through...how could you...?”
- “You’ve been through this before...you should have...”
- “That doesn’t make sense...this is what you have to do...”
- “But just yesterday you said you were willing to...what are you waiting for?”
- “I’m writing you up for being uncooperative...for poor decision making/judgment.”
- “If you don’t take court action, I’ll...”
- “I’m going to inform all staff about this so we can keep you safe.”
- “If you’re staying with him; I’m calling you every night to check on you.”
- “Well, he told me you were drunk/drugging/in need of psychiatric help.”

Language When Assisting Victims



- “I’m concerned about your performance/absenteeism/concentration, is there anything going on at home/outside of work making it difficult for you to perform at work?”
- “I understand problems at home can affect work performance, would you be willing to speak to...”
- “Are you OK? It appears you have a bruise.”
- “Take your time, tell me what you’re concerned about.”
- “It took a lot of courage for you to tell me this.”
- “I’m not an expert, I’d like you to talk to...who can review options available to you and support you throughout...”
- “It may be helpful for you to speak with...who can review your options within our policy.”
- “Do you feel ready to talk to someone about this?”
- “I understand you have mixed feelings...staff are available whenever you need them for more information or assistance.”
- “Abusers need help; changing your behavior will not stop the abuse.”
- “There is no quick fix; it takes a lot of time & commitment to change.”
- “Is there anything going on that is making it hard for you to reach out to the agencies we spoke about? What is your greatest concern right now?”
- “Domestic violence is a crime; this is not your fault; no one deserves...”
- “Regardless of what you said/did, walking away is always an alternative to violence.”
- “I’ve learned that domestic violence escalates over time; I’m concerned for your safety and the safety of your children.”

***SURVIVORS MAY
MINIMIZE OR DENY
ABUSE – REMAIN NON-
JUDGMENTAL AND
SUPPORT THEIR
CHOICES***

Test Your Knowledge

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| T | F | It is appropriate to ignore verbal threats when you believe the person is only kidding. |
| T | F | Some physical and verbal sparring should be tolerated in the workplace as long as it does not go too far. |
| T | F | There is no need to be concerned about professional personnel committing acts of violence. We need to focus our efforts on the non-professional personnel. |
| T | F | Family violence is a “family affair” and business should not interfere. |
| T | F | It is a manager’s responsibility to provide a safe workplace for the employees. |
| T | F | Violence is the result of having a bad temper. |
| T | F | Employees should report threats of violence to their supervisor. |
| T | F | People who exhibit violent behavior are most likely alcoholics or drug addicts. |
| T | F | Men perpetrate 95% of workplace violence. |
| T | F | An employee with poor performance is the most likely employee to commit an act of violence. |
| T | F | Employees who talk about/threaten violence at work are not the ones who act. |

Workplace Violence Scenario

It's midday Friday, on a hot summer's day in Boston. You are _____ (work role: supervisor, manager, dept. head, employee) at _____ (location). Staff from one department are busy talking about their weekend plans as they begin to assemble in the lunchroom to celebrate Mrs. Smith's retirement. The newest employee is left to handle the rush of inquiries from irate _____ (students, customers, co-workers, claimants) due to recent breakdown of the computer system.



This new employee _____ (name) is doing the best she can to explain the delays due to the computer problems. The rush of frustrated people is fueling one another as they begin to realize this individual is not resolving their problem. Out of the crowd comes _____ (name) a notorious troublemaker, who is difficult to handle and seems always to blame others for everything that goes wrong in his/her life. Staff call this person the "pain" and try to redirect him/her someplace else with the complaint. This new trainee, unaware of the history of threats from this disgruntled complainer, is shocked to find a handgun pointed at her face, when she warily repeats her computer breakdown excuse for the 10th time. She hears, "I'm tired of lame excuses, I'll blow you away!"

What should the new employee do to de-escalate the situation?

- Shout loudly, "He's got a gun, everyone run for your lives!"
- Grab the nearest phone and dial 911.
- Tell the assailant that he/she won't get away with this...so put the gun down.
- Freeze in place and do nothing, allowing the potential assailant to make the next move.
- Look the man directly in the eye. As she calmly explains the delay because of computer problems, she should press the under-the-counter duress alarm or signal someone to get help.
- Ask the assailant to write his name and social security # on a piece of paper so she can ask her supervisor to do something to correct the problem.

When the supervisor receives the crisis information, he/she should:

- Rush to the new employee's side and try to disarm the potential assailant.
- Walk right over to the situation and firmly tell him/her that they're tired of this bullying.
- Carefully and slowly look over the situation from afar without alarming the assailant. Pass the information on to the police or security personnel.
- Immediately call the agency security guards and/or 911.

What should the departmental staff have done to prevent the possibility of this happening?

- Told the new trainee to brace herself for the tough customer and called it initiation.
- Made sure one or more experienced staff were left to handle the crowd.
- Consulted with or had training from security guards about what to do if someone becomes dangerously irate or violent; also developing a policy around it.
- Had a seasoned staff member handle the "pain" before going to lunch.
- Conducted a staff meeting to discuss and brainstorm how to "handle" the "pain".
- Rescheduled the retirement party for after work hours or after the computer problem is cleared.

Confrontations with an armed man or woman are the most dangerous of all situations involving violent persons and the most difficult for inexperienced people to deal with. Review your answers with your group and discuss why you agree or disagree with each choice. Think about how to incorporate violence prevention into your workplace. Discuss how you might handle irate calls and threatening people without weapons.

New York State
Occupational Safety & Health
Hazard Abatement Board

Public Hearing on

"Proposed Standard on Workplace Safety and
Security in the Public Sector throughout New York
State"

Testimony of Diane Schrader, RN

on behalf of the New York State Public Employees Federation

AFL-CIO

June 24, 2003

I appreciate the Hazard Abatement Board giving their time and attention to this very important topic, and giving me, a victim of workplace violence, a chance to make a difference by sharing my story. Eighteen thousand workers are the victims of violence every week. Not enough is being done to make workplace environments safer. In my case, I believe a workplace violence standard would have prevented my assault. Basic workplace safety is often ignored and continues to have low priority with my employer, the SUNY Health Science Center in Stonybrook.