



Safety Talks

April 2021

Workplace Violence

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SAFETY TRAINING TOPIC

Workplace Violence

It is estimated that 15% of all crimes committed in the United States occur in the form of workplace violence. However, even though you immediately think of physical assaults and crimes against people as violent behavior there are a wide range of other activities that can fall into that category as well. It is important that you know what workplace violence is.

Workplace violence is defined as any act or threat of physical violence, harassment, intimidation, or other threatening disruptive behavior that occurs on the job. However, it can include:

- Beatings
- Stabbings
- Suicide
- Suicide-attempts
- Homicide
- Sexual Assaults
- Sexual Harassment
- Intimidation
- Vandalism
- Bullying
- Shootings
- Obscene Phone Calls
- Fights
- Verbal Abuse
- Stalking
- Psychological Traumas
- Physical Assaults
- Physical Threats

You should also understand who commits workplace violence. It is not always an employee. Sometimes it occurs when a criminal attempts to commit a crime on a jobsite, whether it is against a person or property. Other times you may encounter violence from customers or clients.

In other scenarios you or a colleague might be targeted by someone who doesn't work at your place of employment. This might occur when there is a personal relationship with an employee as a result of life outside of work. Finally, worker-on-worker violence does occur as well. You may observe this behavior from coworkers, supervisors or managers, or by a former employee.

There are some responsibilities and work environments that have higher risk factors for violent encounters. This may include tasks such as carrying or exchanging money or when working with volatile, unstable people. If you are required to work alone in isolated areas or low-lit areas or high-crime areas, you face a higher risk factor as well.

REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

- Identify five forms of workplace violence.
- Who commits workplace violence?

SAFETY TRAINING TOPIC

Behavioral Warning Signs

There are five indicators or warning signs that are often pre-cursors to violent behavior in the workplace. By familiarizing yourself with them you may be able to mitigate a future incident and/or develop the appropriate response in each situation.

The five warning signs are as follows:

- Confusion
- Frustration
- Blame
- Anger
- Hostility

When a potentially violent person becomes confused, they seem distracted and are unsure of their next move. In the event that you are put into a scenario where you encounter a person in this state, you should listen to what they have to say and offer any factual information regarding their concerns that you can. You can also ask them clarifying questions as to why and what they are confused about.

The next level of escalation is frustration. If the individual is exhibiting the warning signs of frustration, they are resistant to information provided to them when confused. They may also be characterized as impatient at this point, and they may be feeling a sense of defeat. At this stage you may consider attempting to move them to a quiet setting, reassuring them that everything will be fine. You should also try to clarify any concerns that they have.

Blame is the next warning sign for potentially violent behavior. During this stage the person will try to find fault with others for the way they are feeling. In fact, they may attempt to place blame directly on you. If this is the scenario, you should bring in a colleague or another person to help mitigate the situation as a team. You may consider using probing questions and relying on facts to help create a “yes” momentum.

In the event that the individual does not calm down after beginning to blame others for the situation, they are likely to become angry. This will become evident by a change in body posture and demeanor. They may begin pointing fingers and yelling, which can escalate quickly to a physical conflict. At this point you should not attempt to reason with them or argue with them. Prepare to remove yourself from the situation and contact supervisor and/or security immediately.

If you can isolate the person safely, you should do so. However, when all else fails and the individual becomes hostile and physical actions or threats appear imminent remove yourself from the situation and call 911 or other number used in your area for emergency assistance.

REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

- What are the five warning signs of a potentially violent individual in the workplace?

SAFETY TRAINING TOPIC

Dealing with Workplace Violence

In the event that an individual or colleague does become violent there are some deliberate actions that you can take to mitigate the situation or help prevent these acts from occurring all together.

When encountering a potentially violent person, it is important to remain calm. When speaking to them, you should do so slowly, quietly and confidently. Avoid tones or mannerisms that could escalate the situation.

You should position yourself at a right angle instead of immediately in front of them. Try to not to encroach on the personal space of the individual. You should be standing at least 3 to 6 feet away from them, making sure to never put yourself between them and any means of exit for you or the individual.

When they are speaking try to be empathetic and acknowledge that you understand their feelings. It is important that you do not criticize, threaten or challenge the person in any way. You should also avoid any sudden movements as this can be seen as threatening and make the situation worse.

When the person is vocalizing specific reasons for their demeanor, be willing to accept criticisms. You might also consider asking them for possible solutions or recommendations to de-escalate the situation. However, do not promise anything to resolve the problem that you cannot deliver. Make sure you never immediately dismiss the individual's demands from the outset.

You may also attempt to reason with the person by breaking bigger problems into smaller, more manageable ones. Do not brush them off or behave in a condescending or impatient manner. Avoid making their problem seem less serious than it is.

You should also never point your finger at the person or make eye-contact for an extended period of time. Don't cross your arms or put your hands on your hips either. That can also come across as threatening.

In the event that the person cannot be reasoned with, call for help. Do not attempt to bargain with them or try to take sides. Explain to them potential consequences if their behavior persists. You can also ask for small favors, such as requesting that they go to a quieter area. You may also try to use delaying tactics until additional support can help resolve the disturbance. This may include offering the individual a glass of water.

REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

- What manner should you speak to a potentially violent individual?
- How far away should you be standing from a potentially violent person when speaking to them?
- What would an example of a delaying tactic be?

SAFETY TRAINING TOPIC

Active Shooter & Workplace Violence

An active shooter is an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and other populated area. In most cases, active shooters use firearms and there is no pattern or method to their selection of victims. Active shooter situations are unpredictable and evolve quickly. You should understand what to do if you are placed in such a situation.

If you are in harm's way, you will need to decide rapidly what the safest course of action is based on the scenario that is unfolding. You should follow these recommendations in order: 1) Evacuate, 2) Hide out, 3) Take action. However, you should only take action as a last resort, and if your life is in imminent danger, attempt to disrupt and/or incapacitate the active shooter attempting to move them to a quiet setting, reassuring them that everything will be fine.

The first recommended action is to evacuate. If there is an accessible escape path, attempt to evacuate the premises. When evacuating, have an escape route and plan in mind; leave your belongings behind; help others escape, if possible; evacuate regardless of whether others agree to follow; warn individuals not to enter an area where the active shooter may be; prevent individuals from entering an area where the active shooter may be; do not attempt to move wounded people; keep your hands visible; follow the instructions of any police officers; and call 911 when it is safe to do so.

The next recommended action is to hide out. If safe evacuation is not possible, find a place to hide from the active shooter. The hiding place should be out of the active shooter's view; provide protection if shots are fired (for example, an office with a closed and locked door); and not restrict options for movement. To prevent an active shooter from entering a hiding place, lock the door; blockade the door with heavy furniture; and close, cover, and move away from any windows.

If the active shooter is nearby, take the following actions, lock the door; hide behind a large item (for example, a cabinet or desk); silence your cell phone and/or pager. (Even the vibrate setting can give away a hiding position.); and remain quiet.

Consider the difference between cover and concealment. Cover might protect a person from gunfire, while concealment will merely hide a person from the view of the shooter. If you are in an active shooter situation, you should quickly choose the best space that is available. Finding cover is preferable, but if cover is not available you should find a position of concealment.

When possible, provide the following information to law enforcement officers or 911 operators: location of the active shooter; number of shooters (if more than one); physical description of the shooter(s); number and type of weapons held by the shooter(s); number of potential victims at the location.

Finally, as an absolute last resort, and only if in imminent danger, attempt to disrupt and/or incapacitate the active shooter by acting as aggressively as possible, improvising weapons, throwing items, yelling and committing to your actions.

REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

- What type of Personal Protective Equipment could have prevented this fatality?