
Workplace Violence

Overview

Introduction

Workplace violence is a national concern, having tripled in the last decade. While stories of homicides and violence by disgruntled employees capture the headlines, such incidents are not prevalent. The majority of violent incidents consist of intimidation, threatening behavior, or physical aggression. People, with whom we deal on a daily basis, including current and former coworkers, spouses, relatives, and friends, usually commit these acts. Whatever its form, violence or the threat of violence by or against any employee of DLA is unacceptable. DLA's commitment to provide a healthful, safe work environment for all employees mandates a zero tolerance for workplace violence.

In this module we will discuss the following topics:

- What workplace violence is
- Supervisors' responsibilities
- Identifying violent situations
- Prevention

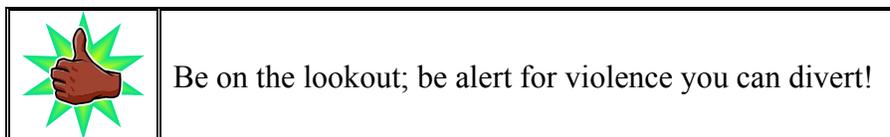
What is workplace violence?

Workplace violence can be any act of physical violence, threats of physical violence, harassment, intimidation, or other threatening, disruptive behavior that occurs at the work site. Workplace violence can affect or involve employees, visitors, contractors, and other non-Federal employees.

Supervisors' responsibilities

These are the responsibilities of every supervisor:

- Inform employees of Department/agency workplace violence policies and procedures.
- Ensure that employees know specific procedures for dealing with workplace threats and emergencies, and how to contact police, fire, and other safety and security officials.
- Ensure that employees with special needs are aware of emergency evacuation procedures and have assistance (as necessary) regarding emergency evacuation situations.
- Respond to potential threats and escalating situations by utilizing proper resources from the local law enforcement and medical services, human resources staff, and the Employee Assistance Program.
- Take all threats seriously.



Identifying Potentially Violent Situations

Introduction

A number of different actions in the work environment can trigger or cause workplace violence. It may even be the result of non-work-related situations, such as domestic violence or “road rage.” An abusive employee, a manager, supervisor, coworker, customer, family member, or even a stranger can inflict workplace violence. The key is to be on the lookout for potential warning signs. Whatever the cause or whoever the perpetrator, workplace violence is not to be accepted or tolerated.



Behavioral warning signs

The following are behavioral warning signs of potential workplace violence:

- Intimidating, harassing, bullying, belligerent, or other inappropriate and aggressive behavior.
- Numerous conflicts with customers, coworkers, or supervisors.
- Bringing a weapon to the workplace (unless necessary for the job), making inappropriate references to guns, or making idle threats about using a weapon to harm someone.
- Statements showing fascination with incidents of workplace violence, statements indicating approval of the use of violence to resolve a problem, or statements indicating identification with perpetrators of workplace homicides.
- Statements indicating desperation (over family, financial, and other personal problems) to the point of contemplating suicide.
- Direct or veiled threats of harm.
- Substance abuse.
- Extreme changes in behaviors.

Identifying Potentially Violent Situations, Continued

Other indicators

In addition to the behavioral warning signs that are so often associated with a potentially violent employee, there are other indicators available to supervisors. These indicators are oriented to a supervisor's view of employee behavior and may be more easily utilized than some of the specific behavioral warning signs discussed previously.

An employee exhibiting these indicators is not necessarily an individual who is prone to violence; however, violence is always a possibility when these warning signs are evident. These indicators are typical of an employee in difficulty; they strongly suggest that some kind of immediate intervention is needed. Look for these indicators:

- Excessive tardiness
- Increased need for supervision
- Reduced productivity
- Inconsistency
- Strained workplace relationships
- Inability to concentrate
- Violation of safety procedures
- Changes in health or hygiene
- Unusual behavior
- Fascination with weapons
- Substance abuse
- Stress
- Excuses and blaming
- Depression

Prevention of Workplace Violence

Introduction

There is no sure way to predict human behavior and, while there may be warning signs, there is no specific profile of a potentially dangerous individual. The best prevention comes from identifying any problems early and dealing with them. Training about workplace violence is one of the best ways to prevent any situation from escalating. Each agency has an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) in place that serves as an excellent, confidential resource available to all employees to help them identify and deal with problems.

Awareness/training

One of the most critical components of any agency's prevention program is training. Training is necessary for employees and supervisors, as well as for staff in offices that may be involved in responding to an incident of workplace violence.

Employee training

All employees should know how to recognize and report incidents of violent, intimidating, threatening, and disruptive behavior. All employees should have phone numbers for quick reference during a crisis or an emergency. In addition, workplace violence prevention training for employees should include the following topics:

- Agency's workplace violence policy
- Encouragement to report incidents and procedures to do so
- Ways of preventing or defusing volatile situations or aggressive behavior
- Ways to deal with hostile persons
- Managing anger
- Techniques and skills to resolve conflicts
- Stress management, relaxation techniques, wellness training
- Security procedures, e.g., the location and operation of safety devices such as alarm systems
- Personal security measures
- Programs operating within the agency that can assist employees in resolving conflicts



Prevention of Workplace Violence, Continued

Supervisory training

It is important that supervisory training include basic leadership skills such as setting clear standards, addressing employee problems promptly, and using the probationary period, performance counseling, discipline, and other management tools conscientiously. These interventions can keep difficult situations from turning into major problems. Supervisors do not need to be experts in dealing with violent behavior but need to know which experts to call, and be committed and willing to seek advice and assistance from those experts.

The following are areas that should be included in supervisory training:

- Ways to encourage employees to report incidents in which they feel threatened for any reason by anyone inside or outside the organization
- Skills in behaving compassionately and supportively towards employees who report incidents
- Skills in taking disciplinary actions
- Basic skills in handling crisis situations
- Basic emergency procedures, including who to call and what support resources and services are available
- Appropriate screening of pre-employment references
- Basic skills in conflict resolution

Threat assessment

Determining the seriousness of a potentially violent or stressful situation and how to best intervene is the basis of a threat assessment. Since it is impossible to know with any certainty whether a threat is going to be carried out, the agency should always treat threats in a serious manner and act as though the person may carry out the threat.

Prevention of Workplace Violence, Continued

Employee Assistance Program

Each agency has a confidential Employee Assistance Program (EAP) with trained counselors who can address workplace stress and violence issues. You can use these counselors as a way to assess whether a situation needs to be brought to the attention of management. You can also use them to strategize ways to deal with uncomfortable or threatening situations.

Seemingly insignificant conflicts between coworkers or managers can sometimes erupt into dangerous situations—especially if the problem goes unchecked. In many cases of worker-on-worker violence, minor non-violent conflicts that went unresolved built up until they were no longer manageable. By intervening early in a conflict between two people, whether it's two workers or a worker and supervisor, you may be able to resolve the problem before it gets out of control.

Professional counselors are available to discuss problems that can adversely affect job performance and conduct. EAP is required to help employees' deal with alcoholism or drug abuse problems, and most EAP counselors also help employees with other problems, for example, marital or financial. EAP counselors often refer employees to other professional services and resources within the community for further information, assistance, or long-term counseling.

Confidentiality is an important issue for EAP. Employees who seek EAP services are afforded considerable privacy by laws, policies, and professional ethics of EAP providers. It is common practice for the EAP to inform employees in writing about the limits of confidentiality at the first meeting.