

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE: AWARENESS AND PREVENTION

**A one hour course providing information
on violence in the workplace and steps
for safety and prevention.**

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WORKPLACE VIOLENCE: AWARENESS AND PREVENTION

Objectives:

At the conclusion of this lesson you will:

- **Have insight into the issue of violence in the workplace**
- **Recognize early warning signs and risk factors**
- **Understand steps for prevention**
- **Be familiar with risk management strategies**

“You don't go from a normal guy to a mass killer in one easy step.” Steve Kaufer, co-founder of the California-based Workplace Violence Research Institute.

There are many factors to be considered to promote safety in the workplace. Increasingly, violence in the workplace is an issue of concern. Economic downturns often lead to employee cuts which, in turn, can contribute to workplace violence. Knowing early warning signs and risk factors as well as protective measures can reduce the risk for violence and promote the safety of all employees. Additionally, utilizing risk management strategies to create an attitude of awareness provides an environment in which employees feel more secure. Knowing subtle forms of aggression, having awareness of the significance of verbal threats, and recognizing potential triggers for violence will support prevention.

Workplace violence is a serious safety and health hazard in many workplaces. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, homicide is the second leading cause of death to American workers, claiming the lives of 912 workers in 1996 and accounting for fifteen percent of the 6,112 fatal work injuries in the United States (BLS, 1997). Violent incidents at work also resulted in 20,438 lost work-day cases in 1994. (BLS, 1996) (Ohio Safety and Health Administration, 1999).

What is Workplace Violence?

Any act that serves as a threat of harm or actual harm against a co-worker, employer, or other person conducting business in the workplace, including all facilities, parking lots, etc. It can range from verbal abuse to threats to physical assaults to homicide.

Early Warning Signs in an Individual

Most people can experience stress in their lives, even a fairly high degree of stress without being at risk for becoming violent. It is when high degrees of stress are combined with other identifiable factors that the risk for violence goes up. Stressors can arise from various aspects of life such as family, peers, work, school, etc. Monitoring early warning signs becomes important to the individual and those around them to promote safety for everyone.

- A change in mood (i.e., expansive, elevated, anxious, depressed)
- Anhedonia (loss of pleasure in activities that used to bring pleasure)
- Sleep changes
- Changes in patterns of behavior
- Social withdrawal
- Cognitive distortions (irrational ways of looking at life)
- Excessive worry or guilt
- Angry outbursts (represent a change in behavior)
- Financial stress/worries
- Persistent headaches/pain

Individual Risk Factors

As stress goes up so does risk. In addition to stress levels going up, life events, social problems, emotional and psychological problems and physical illness all contribute to workplace violence.

- Inadequate life skills
- Lack of self-control
- Lack of assertiveness
- Low self esteem
- Emotional and psychological problems
- Favorable attitudes toward substance use
- Rejection of commonly held values
- Resists authority
- Intimidating, verbally abusive, harasses or mistreats others
- Threats
- Stalking
- Failure at work
- Early antisocial behavior
- Family conflict/domestic violence
- Heightened family stress
- Lack of family cohesion

Workplace Factors

- Work environment that does not include a format for discussing problems
- A Workplace that does not provide safety education for employees
- Excessive workload
- Poor supervision or job management practices
- Climate in organization that makes continuity uncertain

Protective Measures

Primary Prevention

Management develops policies and procedures covering issues such as: 1) management of personal stress, 2) How to cope with disgruntled coworkers, clients, etc., 3) Handling of cash and how to minimize risk, 4) Instructing employees not to enter any location where they feel unsafe and how to utilize a buddy system, 5) Have a zero-tolerance policy toward any form of violence. Employees will learn how to recognize, avoid, or diffuse potentially violent situations by learning more about personal safety. They should respond to disruptive, threatening or violent behavior. They will bring any concerns about safety or security to the attention of their supervisors. Additionally, employees will embrace and utilize the agency's policies and procedures regarding workplace violence and assume an attitude of personal responsibility for safety of self and others.

Taking a proactive stance against violence will include learning, monitoring, and evaluating methods of prevention. Regardless of which model an organization chooses to utilize, the effort will be most likely to succeed when it is embraced by management and employees.

An effective approach to preventing workplace violence includes five key components: (1) management commitment and employee involvement, (2) worksite analysis, (3) hazard prevention and control, (4) safety and health training, and (5) evaluation.

Management provides the motivation and resources to deal effectively with workplace violence. Employee involvement is important for several reasons. First, front-line employees are an important source of information about the operations of the business and the environment in which the business operates. Second, inclusion of a broad range of employees in the violence prevention program has the advantage of harnessing a wider range of experience and insight than that of management alone. Third, front-line workers can be very valuable problem solvers, as their personal experience often enables them to identify practical solutions to problems and to perceive hidden impediments to proposed changes. Finally, employees who have a role in the developing prevention programs are more likely to support and carry out those programs.

Management commitment and employee involvement are complementary elements of an effective safety and health program. To ensure an effective program, management, front-line employees, and employee representatives need to work together in the structure and operation of their violence prevention program. (Occupational Safety and Health Administration. 1989)

The following are warning indicators of potential workplace violence:

- **Intimidating, harassing, bullying, belligerent, or other inappropriate and aggressive behavior.**
- **Numerous conflicts with customers, co-workers, 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 normal behaviors. Once you have noticed a subordinate, co-worker, or customer showing any signs of the above indicators, you should take the following steps:**
- **If you are a co-worker, you should notify the employee's supervisor immediately of your observations.**
- **If it is a customer, notify your supervisor immediately.**
- **If it is your subordinate, then you should evaluate the situation by taking into consideration what may be causing the employees problems. (The USDA Handbook on Workplace Violence Prevention and Response)**

Secondary Prevention

Once a potential problem has been identified, the management of the stress in the identified person(s) is very important. Management needs to act promptly on any incident. They should be clear about the facts of the problem and complete some form of incident report in writing to include eye witness accounts and the perceptions of everyone involved. Management should also assess the needs for additional resources and outside help. Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) are an excellent resource for managing the incident and preventing things from getting worse.

Critical Incident Stress Management

Employee assistance providers may offer critical incident stress management (CISM) services as part of their product line. A critical incident is defined as a sudden, unanticipated situation or circumstance that produces a high degree of distress, such as a natural disaster, accidental or sudden deaths, assaults, workplace accidents, robberies, homicides, suicides, and terrorist attacks.

Varying program responses may be effective after these events, depending on the intensity or details, the culture of the organization, and the level of impact on an

individual worker or groups of workers. These responses are known as defusing and debriefing. Defusing occurs within hours after the event; debriefing could be provided within 24 to 48 hours following the event.

Providing support and consultation to management after a critical incident is also necessary, and EAPs typically play a key role. Management should be educated regarding what to expect, likely reactions, performance issues, and types of recourses available to employees and dependents. (Employee Assistance Programs in the Year 2002

How to Respond to Threatening or Violent Behavior:

Stay calm and quiet and non-confrontational

Leave your feelings out of the situation – be as neutral as possible

Keep them talking and ask open-ended questions

Be truthful

Never touch them

Help them set limits on their behavior. “Please lower your voice.”

Be firm. “If you can’t stop cussing, I am going to have to ask you to leave.”

Let someone know you need help. Use a code word established before by policy.

If things get worse, find a way to leave and get yourself and others to safety and call 911.

Risk Management Strategies

The development of a program for risk management is part of any good workplace violence prevention plan. The problem of violence represents loss in many forms for employers and a strategy for managing risk keeps loss to a minimum.

Workplace violence costs employees in many ways such as; interruption to service, employee productivity goes down due to the employees directly involved not being on the job, pay to those injured, loss of clients, worker’s compensation costs, etc.

Risk management is the sound practice of identifying risk and making informed, calculated decisions to avoid or control these risks, thus enabling your organization to minimize or eliminate events that contribute to loss. (Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) Collins, 2005)

CARF has identified seven standards of risk management that prevent loss:

1. Identifying loss exposures
2. Evaluating and analyzing loss exposures
3. Identifying how to rectify identified exposures
4. Implementing actions to reduce risk
5. monitoring actions to reduce risk
6. Reporting results of actions taken to reduce risks; and

7. Including risk reduction in performance improvement activities (CARF, Lehrfeld 2005)

The many factors involved in workplace violence must be considered if primary and secondary prevention are to be achieved. Identifying early warning signs and risk factors as well as protective measures and risk management strategies lessens the loss for employees and management and promotes a safe and healthy environment for everyone involved.

No amount of effort on the part of management and employees can guarantee safety in the workplace against all forms of violence; however, risk can be greatly reduced with education, safe practices, and an attitude of cooperation between employers and staff.

RESOURCES

American Association of Occupational Health Nurses (AAOHN). Workplace Violence Prevention. (2004)

Bureau of Labor Services. Statistics. (1996)

Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF). Managing Your Risk with CARF Standards. (Lehrfeld. 2005)

CARF. Reduce Your Organization's Risk. (Collins. 2005)

Center for Substance Abuse Prevention. Understanding Substance Abuse Prevention: Here's Proof That Prevention Works. (Rockville. 1999)

Department of Justice. National Crime Victimization Survey. (1994)

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). Statistics. (1996)

Ohio Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). P.L.91-596. The General Duty Clause. 29 U.S.C. 654 (a) (1). (1990)

OSHA. Safety and Health Program Management Guidelines. Fed Reg 54.3904-3916. (1989)

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Workplace Violence

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City/State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: Work: _____ Home: _____

Email Address: _____

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WORKPLACE VIOLENCE
POST TEST QUESTIONNAIRE

Please circle the correct answer:

1. Three risk factors for workplace violence are:
 - A. Feeling a little grumpy, not getting enough sleep last night, feeling a little down.
 - B. Inadequate life skills, emotional and psychological problems, lack of self control.
 - C. Just getting by in some tasks, feeling tired, feeling sleepy.
 - D. Having a few friends, having some positive bonding experiences, having some social competence.

2. A protective factor against the development of violence is:
 - A. Failing in school
 - B. Low self esteem
 - C. Inflexibility
 - D. Good communication skills

3. An example of a CARF standard for risk management is:
 - A. Implementing actions to reduce risk.
 - B. Not reacting to the uses of dangerous substances in the workplace.
 - C. Allowing workers to consistently reject mainstream activities and pursuits.
 - D. Considering ambiguity and inconsistency as unavoidable in some people.

4. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, what percentage of the 6,112 fatal work injuries is accounted for by homicides at work?
 - A. 30%
 - B. 15%
 - C. 10%
 - D. 5%

5. According to OSHA's violence prevention approach, which of the following is a suggested step?
 - A. Management commitment and employee involvement.
 - B. Metal detectors at all entrances and exits.
 - C. Mandatory periodic psychiatric examination for all employees
 - D. Providing self defense classes for all employees.

Please indicate a T for True and F for False:

- _____ Management provides the motivation and resources to deal effectively with workplace violence..**

- _____ To ensure an effective program, management, front-line employees, and employee representatives need to work together in the structure and operation of their violence prevention program.**

- _____ A worksite hazard analysis involves a step-by-step, common-sense look at the workplace to find existing and potential hazards for workplace violence.**

I, _____ (name of participant) affirm that I am the person who completed this home study and am responsible for this post test.

Signature: _____

