

Global Wellness Monthly

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Preventing Violence at Work

Workplace Violence Defined

Any act or threat of physical violence or intimidation at work is classified as workplace violence; meaning harassment or other behaviors that disrupt the workplace. Examples include any form of a true threat, verbal abuse, physical assault, and even homicide. In short, workplace violence is any behavior that is disruptive, threatening, and/or violent.

- **Disruptive behavior** - These disorderly acts involve yelling, using profanity, pointing fingers, and verbal abuse.
- **Threatening behavior** - This type of bullying threatens people or property in a verbal or written manner. For example, "I'll make you wish you hadn't done that!" or "Just you wait..." are considered threatening behaviors.
- **Violent behavior** - When someone physically assaults another with or without a weapon, throws an object, or destroys property they are exhibiting violent behavior.

High-Risk Workplaces

Some workplaces are at a higher risk of violence due to the location and nature of the job. Healthcare professionals, public service employees, customer service representatives, and law enforcement officers are all considered to have a higher-risk workplace. Other jobs with a higher likelihood of violence include businesses where money or alcohol is exchanged with the public, services that work with volatile or unpredictable people, or jobs that require late-night hours or are located in a high crime area. Working alone or in an isolated place can also pose a greater threat of workplace violence.

Indicators of Potential Risk

Hindsight is always 20/20, but there are obvious signs of potential workplace risks. The following are all signs that could point to a viable threat of violence:

- Sudden changes in job performance and behavior
- Outbursts of anger and an inability to control emotions
- Paranoia about co-workers
- Romantically obsessing, stalking, or sexually harassing a co-worker
- History of violent behaviors or discussing violent topics in nature
- Threats that are direct or indirect
- Drug or alcohol problems
- Carrying a concealed weapon or flashing one around

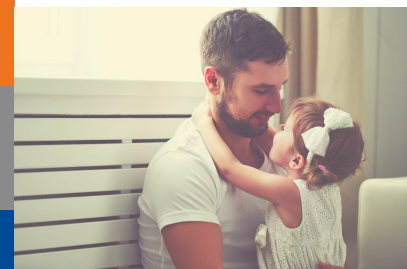
Diffusing Potentially Violent Behavior

Emotions and situations can quickly escalate when people blame others or feel confused, frustrated, and angry. The following information suggests how to dial down potentially violent workplace behavior.

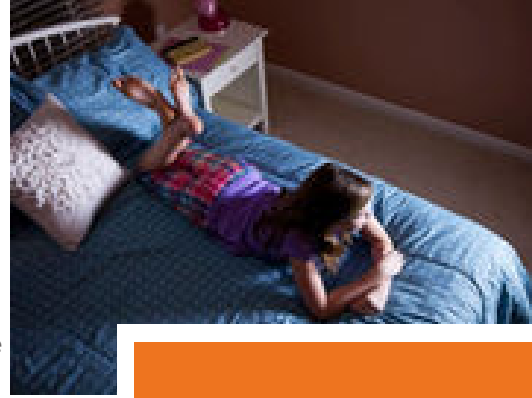
- **Confused** - This person will seem distracted or uncertain. The best way to diffuse this behavior is to be patient; listen to their concerns and provide them with facts.

At a glance

- Making Sense of Senseless Violence
- 2 of 3 Americans OK With Doctors Discussing Gun Safety
- TV Ratings for Parents Let Violence, Drinking Slip Through



- **Frustrated** - Individuals who react easily to stress and resist problem solving are typically very frustrated. They may seem defeated even if they accomplish something. A good way to engage this person is to provide a calm environment in which to listen to their concerns. Clarify any misconceptions they might have in a peaceful manner.
- **Blaming others** - This person won't take responsibility for his or her own problems, and they continually find fault with others. The quickest way to diffuse this individual is to focus on the facts of "how" a situation occurred rather than "who" caused it. Create a listening environment and include others when needed.
- **Angry** - When someone's body language clearly communicates anger, arguing with him or her is not helpful. They might be shouting, pointing at others, hitting things, or using profanity. The best thing to do is to get your supervisor or security officer immediately. Protect your personal safety and the safety of your co-workers by intervening carefully and constructively.



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Workplace Violence Prevention

The most effective way to eliminate workplace violence is to prevent it. The following are four strategies for preventing violence, protecting workers, and creating a peaceful work environment:

- **Education** - Learn how to recognize, escape, or diffuse potentially volatile situations to maintain your personal safety. Attend trainings to be informed as they are made available.
- **Zero-tolerance** - Encourage your employer to establish a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to violence and intimidation. The policy should be written; and all employees, customers, clients, and consultants must adhere to it or face consequences.
- **Reporting** - Employers should provide a safe and easy means for employees to report violence or threats of violence. Alert your supervisor or human resources personnel immediately if you feel a situation is escalating toward potential violence.
- **Good judgment** - Employees should not enter anywhere they feel unsafe. Especially at night, it's good judgment to implement a "buddy system" or call for security to escort you.

If you are an employer, take every security measure necessary to create a safe working environment for your employees. For employees, share your ideas regarding workplace safety with your supervisor or employer. If you are one of the two million victims of workplace violence, seek counseling. Even witnesses to violence might need to reach out for help. Check with your human resources department, a licensed therapist, or another health professional to get the support you need.

Sources:

- <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/workplaceviolence/>
- <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/violence/>
- <http://www.doli.state.mn.us/WSC/wvp.asp>

Upcoming articles:

March

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