

Workplace Violence and Dealing with Aggressive People

North Dakota State University
University Police & Safety Office

NDSU Policy 163.1

- NDSU does not tolerate workplace violence, threats, intimidation, and other disruptive behavior
- All reports of incidents will be taken seriously and will be dealt with appropriately
- Such behavior can include, but is not limited to, oral or written statements, gestures, expressions that communicate a direct or indirect threat of physical harm, or acts of violence against person or property

Workplace Violence

- Statistics

- The Bureau of Labor Statistics' reported 13,827 workplace homicide victims between 1992 and 2010. Averaging over 700 homicides per year, the largest number of homicides in one year (n=1080) occurred in 1994, while the lowest number (n=518) occurred in 2010. More than 2 million Americans are victims of physical attacks in the workplace each year.
- Workplace violence is the leading cause of on-the-job death for US women!

What is Considered Workplace Violence

- It is the exertion of force ...
 - in order to cause physical or emotional injury, abuse or destruction while on the workplace premises.
- Verbal abuse or harassment
 - (including sexual harassment).
- Destroying or damaging property
- Use of weapons
- Bombing or arson

What is Considered Workplace Violence

- Physical aggression
- Rape
- Robbery
- Kidnapping or stalking
- Suicide
- Murder
- Threats to do any of the above

Who Commits Violence At Work?

Anyone is capable of violence!

- The Stranger – has no legitimate relation to workplace – on-site to commit robbery or other criminal act.
- The Customer – who is either the recipient or the object of a service provided by the affected workplace or the victim.

Who Commits Violence At Work?

- Co-Worker/Employee – has some employment-related involvement with the workplace.
 - Violence may be in retaliation for some perceived unfair treatment, lay-off, loss of promotion
- Spouse/Family Member – has personal relationship with victim.
 - Domestic or personal dispute may spill over into the workplace.

How to Prevent Workplace Violence

- Learn and follow safety and security procedures
- Learn how and who to report an emergency
- Learn how to warn and signal others of danger
- Learn how to reach safety quickly from any area of your workplace
- Report any suspicious persons or security violations to police immediately

Why Do People Become Violent

- To Punish Others
 - Obtain justice, revenge or result of a victim's rage
- Freedom
 - Result of a threat or loss of freedom
- Control
 - Fear of losing control or anger over losing control.

Why Do People Become Violent?

- Carry-over
 - Ongoing aggression or violence at the moment
- Contempt or Sadism
 - Expression of contempt or behavior of a sadistic personality
- Blaming, Acting Out
 - Blaming others or taking problems out on others

Why Do People Become Violent?

- Image, Status, Role, Reputation
 - To defend, change or establish a reputation with others
- Protection, Survival Reaction
 - Means to protect one's self, property, family or friends
- Self Punishment, Guilt, Relief
 - As a response that meets a desire to be punished or to reduce feelings of guilt

Why Do People Become Violent?

- Civil or rationalized disobedience
 - Violent behavior in form of a protest
- Mental illness or medical condition
 - Result of impaired thinking and judgment or strange or bizarre beliefs that are caused by illness, disease, drugs, toxic chemicals, or severe medical problems.

Critical Risk Factors that Identify Possible Violence

- Has the person made a direct threat?
- Has the person been violent recently?
- Has the person made any threatening statements?
- Has the person intentionally frightened someone?
- Has the person been stalking or following people?

Critical Risk Factors that Identify Possible Violence

- Is the person preoccupied or dwelling on injustices or unrealistic fears?
- Does the person have a history of anger problems?
- Has their behavior become increasingly lethal?
- Has the person made a statement that he has a plan?

Critical Risk Factors that Identify Possible Violence

- Has the person made a statement that he has identified a target?
- Has the person made statements about weapons?
- Has the person brought weapons to a place that is inappropriate?

Contributing Factors

- Does the individual use drugs or alcohol?
- Has there been domestic disputes?
- Is there a history of self-destructive behavior?
- Is there a history of suicidal threats or attempts?
- Has the person stopped taking necessary medications?

Contributing Factors

- Does the person have unstable health or medical problems?
- Is the person acting in a way that is unusual or strange?
- Has the person been hospitalized for mental illness?
- Does the person have a history of mental problems?

Contributing Factors

- Does the person blame authorities, an employee, management, the employer, the organization or others?
- Has the person experienced civil or criminal charges?
- Has the person experienced a significant life change, loss of job, marital status, child custody, death of a family member or friend?

The Ground Rules When Dealing With Violent Situations

- Establish common ground
 - We tend not to hurt those we think are similar to ourselves.
- Don't shame the aggressor
 - Pride is a powerful motivator.
- Don't shame yourself
 - Don't portray yourself as not deserving respect.

What Are Some Verbal Warning Signs of Aggression?

- Use of angry or threatening tone of voice
- Making verbal threats
- Making unreasonable demands
- Talking irrationally or not making sense.
- Cursing, shouting, or screaming
- Defiantly challenging rules or authority
- Making lewd, sexual, or degrading comments
- Suicidal threats

Some Physical Warning Signs of Aggression?

- Angry looks or staring
- Agitation and inability to make eye contact
- Clenching of jaw or fists, tightly gripping objects
- “Grooming” Behavior
- Nervously pacing or restlessness
- Slurred speech, stumbling, or other signs they are under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- Violent gestures - beating, pounding, or breaking objects

De-Escalation Techniques

- Remain calm and listen attentively
- Keep the situation in your control
- Contact police, if necessary
- Be polite and avoid being defensive
- Show confidence, not fear
- Relate to the person and acknowledge their concerns

De-Escalation Techniques

- Sympathy vs. Empathy
 - Sympathy implies pity and over involvement
 - Empathy implies objectivity and understanding
- Offer choices, not blame
- Set limits, “ I cannot help you if you do not calm down.”
- Apologize, if appropriate

De-Escalation - Active Listening

- Emotional Labeling
 - This is the first active listening skill to be used in any incident involving an aggressive person
 - Intent of labeling is to respond to the emotions that you hear in the subject's voice rather than the content
 - Shows you are really listening to what the person is emotionally experiencing
 - Example: "you sound frustrated" or "I hear anger in your voice"

De-Escalation - Active Listening

- Paraphrasing
 - Demonstrates you are listening
 - Summarizes in words what you are hearing
 - Creates empathy and rapport, shows you heard and understand
 - Examples: “Are you telling me _____?”, or “Are you saying _____?”

De-Escalation - Active Listening

- Reflecting/Mirroring
 - Repeating back the last words or phrase the subject said
 - Speak slowly, softly, and clearly
 - Example: “So what you are saying is that you are angry because your family doesn’t understand your problems”

De-Escalation - Active Listening

- Effective Pauses
 - Silence is effective if it serves your purpose
 - Most people are not comfortable with silence and will fill in with talk
 - Effective uses of silence:
 - When you are about to say something important
 - When you just said something important
 - When the subject is trying to psyche you out

De-Escalation - Active Listening

- Minimal encouragers
 - These are sounds you make to show you are listening
 - They do not interfere with the conversation flow and often help build rapport
 - It encourages the subject to continue talking
 - Persons are less likely to be hostile when they are engaged in conversation

Personal Safety Techniques

- Keep your distance and stay calm
- Utilize barriers
- Have an escape route
- Command presence
- Try to get other people out of harms way
- If the person has a weapon, do not try to disarm them, call 9-1-1
- Your last resort is to use physical force. Get out or evacuate the area

Things to Avoid

- Do Not make false statements or promises you can't keep
- Do Not explain technical, complicated information when emotions are high
- Do Not take sides or disagree
- Do Not take remarks personally
- Do Not show anger
- Do Not patronize
- Do Not invade the individual's personal space

Things to Avoid

- Avoid verbal and non-verbal (body language) hostile style of communicating
- Do Not make threats or dares
- Do Not belittle or make the person feel foolish
- Do Not criticize or act impatient
- Do Not attempt to “bargain” with a threatening individual

Report To Your Supervisor

- If there is any behavior that could be taken as threatening, intimidating or might lead to violence by a co-worker, customer, or anyone else at the workplace, report it to your supervisor immediately

Supervisors Must

- Take threats seriously so that all employees may feel secure in the workplace
- Avoid minimizing the danger that can occur by not addressing the many warnings signs that can make danger apparent

Workplace Violence is a Serious and Deadly Hazard

- It can cause physical injury and serious psychological damage
- Injuries and deaths related to workplace violence cannot be tolerated any more than any other workplace injury or death
- It is the employer's responsibility to take reasonable measures to minimize the risks for workplace violence

Remember!

- Most violent incidents are predictable and preventable.
- Take reasonable measures to minimize the risks for workplace violence.
- Make your workplace a safe place for everyone.