

# Dealing with Aggressive People and Workplace Violence



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# Workplace Violence

- Statistics have shown that:
  - Acts of violence in the workplace have accounted for 17 % of all occupational fatalities in the US.
  - 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!
  - 5-10% of workplace homicides are due to be disgruntled worker, approximately 100 per year

# What is Considered Violence in the Workplace

- 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
- Stalking

# What is Considered Violence in the Workplace?

- Physical aggression
- Rape
- Robbery
- Kidnapping
- 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 Violence in the Workplace

- Learn and follow safety and security procedures.
- Learn how, and who you should report emergencies.
- Learn how to use warning codes and signals to alert 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 or friend?

# The Ground Rules When Dealing With Violent Situation

- 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.

# The Ground Rules

- Flexible path to a destination
  - High levels of stress can cause tunnel vision
  - Choose a goal early in the aggressive stage.
- Listen to your intuition
  - What is your gut feeling?
  - Conscious and subconscious minds.

## 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

## Emotions vs Content

- Content – The simple facts.
- Emotions – The emotional response to facts.
- Remember to listen for the emotions not just the content.... How the person is feeling will greatly influence what they do!

# What Are Some Physical Warning Signs of Aggression?

- Angry looks or staring.
- Clenching of jaw or fists.
- “Grooming” Behavior
- Tightly gripping objects.
- 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
- Contact police, if necessary
- Be polite
- Show confidence, not fear
- Talk in clear voice
- Relate to the person
- Give them choices

# De-Escalation Techniques

- Sympathy vs Empathy
  - Sympathy implies pity and over involvement
  - Empathy implies objectivity and understanding
- Offer choices....not blame
- Set limits, “ I can not 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 heard 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
  - That might lead to violence by a co-workers, customers, or anyone else at the workplace,

## Supervisors Must .....

- Take such threats seriously so that all employees may feel secure in the workplace.
- No one should minimize 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 as well.
- 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.