

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA DULUTH
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

PREVENTING EMPLOYEE VIOLENCE
IN THE WORKPLACE

Revised March 2003
March 1999

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Preventing Employee Violence in the Workplace

Audience	This handbook was developed to help members of the University community recognize and effectively deal with the potential for employee workplace violence. It is for all who lead or direct the work of others, especially if you are responsible for assigning tasks and evaluating the work of others.
Proactive approach	The proactive approach to employee violence is designed to assist supervisors by: C providing suggestions on how to lessen or prepare for violence, C describing the possible predictors of workplace violence, and C encouraging departments to develop plans to deal with emergencies, including traumatic incidents like employee workplace violence.
Context for handbook	Incidents of workplace violence have tripled in the last decade. With stressors like a changing work environment, they are likely to continue. You are in a position to play a critical role in reducing the potential for conflict.
Objectives	This handbook is meant to provide information in an organized and calm manner in order to assist you in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • raising your awareness of employee workplace violence; • increasing your sensitivity to your supervisory style and its impact on employees; and • recognizing and implementing those actions that, for you, are reasonable, possible, and likely to be effective.
Risk of other violence in the workplace	While threats and violence from the public, from employees' families and friends, or from strangers sometimes pose a risk for employees in the workplace, this handbook deals only with reducing the potential for <u>employee</u> workplace violence. Of course, good interaction skills are important in all contacts, including those with any upset or angry person. For assistance in preventing and dealing with threats and violence from the public, please contact your departmental training officer. For assistance with troubled family situations, call the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) at (218) 726-4885 or 1/800/577-4727.

Introduction

Looking at this guide, you may wonder:

- A "Where do I start?"
- A "What's most important?"
- A "What difference can I make, anyhow?"

Your feeling is understandable--you can't do everything and, even if you wanted to, you can't single-handedly change the whole organization. However, you can start somewhere, and this handbook is designed to help you to do so.

Step	Action
Reviewing and Learning	
1	Read carefully, highlighting information particularly relevant and useful for you in preventing and preparing for employee workplace violence.
2	Record department-specific information in the space provided.
3	Ask for help in securing missing information or resources.
4	Review your supervisory behaviors, enlisting the help of another supervisor or your manager, and, if you're comfortable, employees. Practice more effective behavior, <u>if appropriate</u> .
5	Rehearse all difficult interviews before actually meeting with an employee.
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report all threatening behavior to your manager, Department of Human Resources, and Campus Police, when appropriate. • Do not let yourself be intimidated by any employee. Stay calm!
7	Utilize EAP either by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • referring an employee, or • requesting a supervisory consultation for assistance in dealing with difficult situations.

Section 1: Building Awareness

Each week, an average of 20 people are murdered and 18,000 are assaulted while working or on duty in the United States (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, 1996).

Workplace violence occurs when a person inflicts, or threatens to inflict, maltreatment to others in the workplace. This may include:

- A damage to property;
- A serious harm;
- A injury; or
- A death.

You and other supervisors probably have read considerable information about the predictability of behavior and the interaction between personality and the work environment. This section provides some assistance in addressing and avoiding violent behavior in the workplace.

Policy Statement

The University of Minnesota Duluth is committed to providing a safe work environment for its students, faculty, staff, and visitors. Therefore, the University holds a “zero tolerance” for violence as well as a “zero tolerance” for retaliation. Any incidents should be reported to Human Resources or Campus Police for appropriate action.

Your behavior. The assessments included in this chapter can help you to heighten self-awareness in your supervisory role and how your behavior affects the likelihood of a violent response from employees. It discusses how to recognize and assist employees who are "potentially violent," i.e., are at risk of expressing anger through violence.

Employee behavior. This information cannot be used to predict how any particular employee will behave at any specific time. It is not a formula. It can, however, help you to recognize those situations and characteristics that might indicate that an employee may become violent.

Potential Employee “Triggers”

There are many internal and external conditions inside and outside the workplace that may cause frustration and anger in an individual. These conditions can lead to stress, conflicts, and possibly workplace violence. Obsessive love affairs and domestic disputes that spill over into the workplace can also cause violence.

Potential Workplace “Triggers”

Workplace violence is more likely to occur during “employment junctures” than at other times. An “employment juncture” is defined as a situation in which there is a major change in an employee's status or perceived status. This is usually a change that will be viewed as a negative action by the employee. The most common types of employment junctures are:

- A discipline;
- A job reassignment (non-voluntary);
- A layoff or potential layoff;
- A lateral position (non-selection);
- A promotion (non-selection);
- A termination; and
- A work environment deterioration-- for example, more duties and uncertainty as to job security.

Supervisory Behavior

How you behave as a supervisor can create either:

- A a supportive and fair workplace environment, resulting in good communication and mutual respect, or
- A one that is perceived as unfeeling and unfair, involving intimidation and coercion.

Workplace violence is less likely to occur when employees think that their supervisor is fair and participatory rather than unfair and authoritarian. This section provides information on supervisory behaviors likely to help or hinder the establishment of a positive work environment.

Ineffective Supervisory Behavior

Ineffective supervisory behavior can be divided into three types:

Type	Description
Abusive	Harsh and authoritarian practices that fail to respect employees’ rights and dignity
Negligent	Failure to adequately and honestly explain such decisions as performance ratings, promotions, layoffs, and dismissals
Unjust	Unfair employment practices-- e.g., misuse of promotion, discipline, and grievance procedures.

Supervisors should be:

- A sensitive but direct; and
- A should apply rules evenhandedly.

Skillful and Effective Supervision

Skillful and effective supervision can create a positive environment in the workplace. It can have the positive effect of supporting a team atmosphere in which problems can be aired and solutions can be

identified and enacted. You can maintain your current effective supervisory behaviors, or improve them, using the techniques described below.

As a supervisor, one can also promote a healthy workplace by emphasizing stress management by all employees. This includes such items as good nutrition, adequate exercise, and plenty of sleep.

Ineffective Behavior	Behavior
Allowances, Favoritism, or Inconsistency	Making special allowances; letting any employee "act out" beyond what would be acceptable from other employees
Anger, Fear, Guilt, or Paralysis	Over-reacting with tension and emotionality that interferes with rational problem-solving and good communication with employees
Denial	A Ignoring poor work habits and job performance problems that require supervisory intervention, e.g., counseling or discipline A Giving standard performance appraisal ratings when inappropriate A Ignoring threats rather than reporting them to the appropriate level of management
Transfer	Transferring the employee to another work unit without confronting or dealing with any ongoing problems

Employee Behavior

Based on the statistics, it is highly unlikely that you will have to respond to an actual incident of workplace violence. In addition, as discussed previously, your supervisory style can make a big difference in further reducing that likelihood.

This material is provided to increase your awareness of the possibilities for workplace violence. When you are more aware, you can prepare, take precautions, and be more sensitive to your own behavior toward any employee who is potentially violent.

Violence, Including Threats

Violence is intense and extreme behavior used to frighten, intimidate, injure, damage, or destroy another person or property. It is usually an expression of anger and can take the following forms:

- A gestures;
- A innuendo;
- A intimidation;
- A physical force;
- A retaliation;
- A rough action;
- A self-prediction of loss of control;
- A stalking;
- A strong negative feeling or emotion;
- A threats;
- A violation of another's rights or sensibilities; or
- A "joking" or "playful" threats and behavior.

These are some verbal and behavioral examples of violence, implied and actual:

- A "You'd better not treat me like this."
- A "Employees who kill their supervisor have the right idea."
- A "Someone ought to show these supervisors."
- A "I'm afraid I'm going to lose control--and I have guns."
- A Making a hitting motion.
- A Making an obscene gesture.
- A Pushing someone.
- A Breaking objects.

Cautions in Labeling Employees

Your observations of an employee's behavior may help to identify times when employees are experiencing stress. At these times, inappropriate outbursts may be more likely. Many employees will exhibit some of the following behaviors at times. These behaviors do not necessarily predict violence. Remember, a supervisor should never try to diagnose a condition as this would be a medical determination. In addition, Federal law prohibits an employer from inappropriately regarding an employee as having a substantially limiting impairment, such as mental illness. Therefore, do not label employees or make employment decisions based on such assumptions.

Description of Event	Description of Change
Pattern	There is a change in an employee's behavior pattern.
Frequency	The behaviors occur too often to be acceptable.
Intensity	The intensity of the behaviors is disruptive to the work environment.
Number of Behaviors	The employee is exhibiting many of these behaviors rather than just a few.

Problem Behaviors

Behaviors such as the following may be precursors to other more serious, inappropriate behaviors. These behaviors should be addressed promptly and directly so problems do not escalate.

Characteristics	Behaviors
Emotionality	Displays emotional distress and behaviors suggestive of substance abuse, for example: Acrying Ascreaming; Asulking; or Atemper tantrums
Irresponsibility	Displays: Absenteeism; Aisregard for the health and safety of others; Aefusal to acknowledge job performance problems; or Aardiness
Language	Auses vivid and emotional language
Negativity	Ablames others for mistakes and problems; or Acomplains about unfair treatment
Obsessiveness	Atalks about the same problems repeatedly without resolving them
Physical illness	As out of work for longer than expected
Religiosity	Areferences morality and/or religion to explain actions; or Ansists <u>that he/she is always right</u>
Social contacts	Asolates self, alone most of the time, a "loner;" or Amisinterprets communications from supervisor and co-workers
Threats	AMakes threats; or Atalks about retaliation
Weapons	Arequent or unusual references to weapons

Section 2: Handling a Hostile Person

Guidelines for Handling a Hostile Person

Being confronted by a hostile person is stressful. When you observe a supervisor or co-worker being confronted by an employee who appears volatile:

- A Monitor the situation closely while alerting others to summon security and
- A Watch for clues that help is needed.

Handling an Incident

This section will help you deal with an incident of employee workplace violence and its consequences for other employees and the work unit. These incidents can occur at the time of a termination interview or other employment junctures as previously described.

No Opportunity for De-escalation

Frequently the violence in these incidents, such as a termination interview, occurs very rapidly, in a matter of seconds. There is no opportunity to use the de-escalation skills. This section describes what can be done when an incident actually is in progress or has occurred.

Dealing with an Incident

During an incident, follow these steps to the fullest extent possible. There will be an opportunity for debriefing following an incident by someone appointed by Human Resources or EAP.

Step	Action
1	Recognize the reality of what is happening, remembering that it may seem unreal because it is so far removed from your normal experience.
2	Remain calm and proceed in a logical, rational manner.
3	Take shelter, assisting others if necessary and possible; i.e., "Duck and Cover."
4	Assess the situation in terms of the degree of threat, injury, or damage.
5	Summon help as appropriate using the following table.

IF the situation.....	THEN....
is threatening in any way,	Call for help as soon as possible: 911 or Campus Police, 7000. <u>Caution:</u> For on campus calls, please wait for response. There may be up to a 20-second delay. Stay on the line to answer questions.
includes injuries.	Locate and support first-aid providers. Call 911 or 9-911 for medical help.

Taking Immediate Action After an Incident

You should be aware of specific procedures unique to your department.

IF....	THEN....
someone is injured,	A Give proper first aid and A Call 911 or Campus Police, 7000, if help is needed
someone is still violent or threatening violence,	Call 911 or Campus Police, 7000, and other assistance in accordance with departmental policies and procedures
there is damage,	Assess its extent, what help is needed and contact, as appropriate: A your supervisor; A department emergency coordinator; A law enforcement; or A other emergency personnel.
evacuation of the site is needed,	Implement evacuation or Readiness Plan.
any of the above traumatic incidents have occurred,	Report it using the following procedure.

Reporting an Incident

By telephone. Follow these steps when telephoning to report an incident.

Step	Action
1	Tell the contact person: A your name, A the exact location of the traumatic incident, and A your telephone number and extension.
2	Give a clear, complete description of the incident.
3	Describe the condition of the victim(s), including whether the injuries are life-threatening.
4	Identify any remaining hazards at the scene.
5	Remain on the line for further questions or instructions. Do <u>not</u> hang up the telephone until told to do so by the contact person.

In Writing. Follow your department's procedures.

Section 3: Help in an Emergency

Gathering Information

An emergency is an urgent, sudden, or unforeseen situation that requires immediate action to protect life and/or property. There is a continuum of situations in which immediate help is needed, from situations that just "don't feel right" to actual emergencies where, for example, an employee is threatening to do harm to others or himself/herself.

IF the situation...	THEN ...	
is threatening or frightening, but not yet damaging to property or a life-threatening emergency,	Call assistance as determined by departmental policy, which is likely to be one of the following sources:	
	Agency	Phone
	Duluth Police Campus Police	911 or 9-911 7000 or 911 after hours
causes property damage or if there is immediate danger of property damage or of life-threatening behaviors,	Call Emergency Response	7000 or 911

Employees - Giving and Gathering Information

Supervisors can prepare employees for emergencies which include violence in the workplace by:

- A giving the information below, and
- A gathering information on a personal data sheet.

Employees Should Know

Each employee should be directed to review the following:

- A Bomb threat procedures;
- A Departmental chain of command;
- A Employee Orientation Handbook;
- A Evacuation routes; and
- A Location and function of panic buttons and/or alert systems.

Employee Resources

Employee awareness is critical. You can provide information and training to employees that:

A Develop listening skills and sensitivity to signs of stress in others;

A Acquaint employees with the warning signals for violence;

A Promote awareness of the services provided by the Employee Assistance Program;

A Create awareness of possible perpetrators who should not be allowed in work areas; and

A Practice general office safety.