

Facts

Workplace violence can be generally defined as verbal or physical assault or any violence that happens at work, even if its source is unrelated to the work environment, such as suicide.

Job stress can be both the cause and effect of workplace violence and harassment. Workers with high levels of stress experience twice the rate of violence and harassment as less stressed employees.

Workplaces that have the greatest risk of violence include retail and services agencies, such as taxicab establishments, liquor stores, and gas stations. Violence in these settings is often connected with attempted robbery. In other settings, such as office environments, causes of violence are generally linked with frustrated workers and clients, or by family violence that carries over to the workplace.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health reports that an average of 15 people are murdered at work each week in the United States.

Reducing Violence in the Workplace

The rate of workplace violence can be significantly lowered if employers:

- Create workplace environments that promote employee safety.
- Develop and practice violence prevention strategies, including conflict resolution training.
- Provide personal counseling to employees through employee assistance programs.
- Provide effective job counseling for employees who have been laid off or fired.
- Provide services for employees who have difficulty with anger.

Recognizing Violence in Others

Warning signs which indicate violence is a serious immediate possibility:

- Loss of temper on a daily basis
- Frequent physical fighting
- Significant damage to property
- Increase in use of drugs or alcohol
- Increase in risk-taking behavior
- Detailed plans to commit acts of violence
- Plans or threats to hurt others
- Enjoyment from hurting animals
- Possession of a weapon

Warning signs which indicate a potential for violence:

- a history of violent or aggressive behavior
- serious drug or alcohol use
- access to or fascination with weapons, especially guns
- threatening others regularly
- trouble controlling aggressive feelings, anger
- withdrawal from friends and usual activities
- having been a victim of bullying
- history of discipline problems
- talking of feeling disrespected, rejected or alone
- failing to acknowledge the feelings or rights of others

Tips on Managing Conflict

- Learn to understand your own feelings about conflict and recognize your “triggers,” words or actions that make you have an emotional response such as anger. Once you know your “triggers” — such as a facial expression, tone of voice, pointing finger, certain phrase— you can better control your emotions.
- Express yourself calmly. Express criticism, anger, disappointment, or displeasure without losing your temper. Ask yourself if your response is safe and reasonable.
- Listen to others carefully and respond without getting upset when someone gives you negative feedback. Ask yourself if you can really see the other person’s point of view.
- Negotiate — Explain your needs and define the problem. Talk about the issues without insulting or blaming the other person. Work out your problems with someone else by looking at different solutions and compromises. Make it your goal to defeat the problem, not the person.
- Learn to talk about your feelings. If you’re afraid to talk or can’t find the right words to describe what you’re going through, find a trusted friend or professional to help you.

Sources:

Mental Health America
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health
Center for Mental Health Services
Consumer Information Center
American Psychological Association

Serving people in Crawford, Grand Traverse, Leelanau, Missaukee, Roscommon and Wexford Counties.

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