

TIPS FOR PREVENTING AND MANAGING INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE OR HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

Although no incident of abuse is deserved, there are steps that workers can take to reduce the incidents of violence or harassment on the job. The following practical suggestions are from a guide entitled “Violence in the Workplace” from the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (1999).

Tips for Verbal Communication...

- ✓ Focus your attention on the other person to let them know you are interested in what they have to say
- ✓ Do not glare or stare, which may be perceived as a challenge
- ✓ Remain calm and try to calm the other person; do not allow the other person’s anger to become your anger
- ✓ Remain conscious of how you are delivering your words
- ✓ Speak slowly, quietly and confidently
- ✓ Speak simply; do not rely on official language or complex terminology
- ✓ Avoid communicating a lot of technical or complicated information when emotions are high
- ✓ Listen carefully; do not interrupt or offer unsolicited advice or criticism
- ✓ Encourage the person to talk; do not tell the person to relax or calm down
- ✓ Remain open-minded and objective
- ✓ Use silence as a calming tool
- ✓ Acknowledge the person’s feelings; indicate that you can see he or she is upset

Tips for Non-Verbal Behaviour and Communication...

- ✓ Use calm body language - relaxed posture with hands unclenched, attentive expression
- ✓ Arrange yourself so that your exit is not blocked
- ✓ Position yourself at a right angle rather than directly in front of the other person
- ✓ Give the person enough physical space ...this varies by culture, but normally 1-2 metres is considered an adequate distance
- ✓ Get on the other person’s physical level; if they are seated try kneeling or bending over, rather than standing over them; do not pose a challenging stance such as:
 - standing directly opposite someone
 - putting your hands on your hips
 - pointing your finger
 - waving your arms
 - crossing your arms
- ✓ Do not make sudden movements which can be seen as threatening
- ✓ Do not fight; walk or run away; get assistance from security or police

Responding to a Physical Attack...

If you are attacked:

- ✓ Make a scene, yell or scream as loudly as possible; try shouting words like STOP, FIRE or HELP

- ✓ If you are being pulled along or dragged, fall to the ground and roll
- ✓ Blow a whistle, activate your personal security alarm or push the security alarm
- ✓ Give bystanders specific instructions to help you; single someone out and send them for help (for example, 'You in the yellow shirt, call the police')
- ✓ If someone grabs your purse, briefcase or other belongings, do not resist; throw the item to the ground several feet away from the thief and run in the opposite direction, yelling HELP or FIRE
- ✓ Do not chase a thief
- ✓ Run to the nearest safe place, a safe office or an open store
- ✓ Call security or the police immediately after the incident
- ✓ If the attack does not warrant calling the police, inform your supervisors or the authorities at your workplace
- ✓ File an Incident Report; be prepared
- ✓ Take a self-defence course
- ✓ Try to imagine yourself responding successfully to different types of attacks; practice your responses

Working Off-Site...

If you work away from a traditional office setting you must exercise extra caution. In many cases you have less or no ability to control your work environment. You may require special training to avoid violence by using conflict resolution and mediation tactics. Nevertheless, the following specific preventive tactics or procedures will minimize or prevent risks associated with working off-site:

- ✓ Have access to a cellular telephone or similar means of communication
- ✓ Use an established check-in procedure that allows you to manage typical situations you may encounter off-site
- ✓ Prepare a daily work plan so that you and others know where and when you are expected somewhere
- ✓ Arrange to meet in a safe environment
- ✓ Be alert and make mental notes of your surroundings when you arrive at a new or different setting
- ✓ Use the "buddy system", especially when you feel your personal safety may be threatened
- ✓ Determine under which circumstances unaccompanied visiting would involve unacceptable risk
- ✓ Exercise your right to refuse to work in clearly hazardous situations
- ✓ Disclose any feelings of discomfort or apprehension about an impending appointment to your supervisor
- ✓ Do not enter any situation or location where you feel threatened or unsafe
- ✓ Carry hand-held alarms, noise devices or other effective alarm devices

When you are in unfamiliar premises...

- ✓ Check for escape routes and position yourself near an escape route
- ✓ Mentally rehearse what you will do if an individual becomes aggressive or hostile; decide what your best preventive tactic will be
- ✓ Take control of the seating arrangements; if possible, seat yourself near the door

- ✓ Maintain a 'reactionary gap' between you and the person - out of reach of the average person's kicking distance; increase the gap by sitting at a table; be aware of the person's proximity at all times
- ✓ Be well prepared for an appointment; review the available information about the individual(s) you are meeting
- ✓ Terminate the appointment in a non-confrontational manner if the individual appears to be:
 - intoxicated
 - under the influence of drugs
 - emotionally disturbed and threatening or out of control
- ✓ Do not allow yourself to be backed into a corner; leave a clear path to the exit
- ✓ Do not venture too far into the premises (for example: remain near an exit)
- ✓ Do not turn your back on the person or enter a room first

Terminating a Potentially Abusive Interaction...

- ✓ Interrupt the conversation firmly but politely
- ✓ Tell the person that you:
 - do not like the tone of the conversation
 - will not accept abusive treatment
 - will end the conversation if necessary
- ✓ Tell the person that you will ask them to leave the building, or that you will leave (if working off-site)
- ✓ If the behaviour persists, end the conversation
- ✓ Ask the person to leave the building or leave yourself
- ✓ If the person does not agree to leave, remove yourself from the scene and inform your manager or supervisor immediately
- ✓ Do not return to the person if you believe they pose a physical threat
- ✓ Advise other staff and have them leave the immediate area
- ✓ Call security or your local police
- ✓ File an Incident Report