



GUIDE

Workplace Violence

4 Things You Need to Know

Violence in the workplace is becoming increasingly common with often fatal consequences. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) cites that every year, 2 million American workers report having been victims of workplace violence, and many more incidents go unreported.¹ Homicides account for ten percent of all fatal occupational injuries. The number of workplace homicides in the U.S. reached 500 in 2016 — an 83 percent increase over 2015 — and that number is climbing.²

On top of the human cost, there are considerable costs to businesses due to absenteeism and lowered productivity. The U.S. Department of Labor estimates that workplace violence results in 1.2 million lost workdays a year and \$55 million in lost wages.³ In the U.K., the economic cost of workplace injuries is an estimated £15.0 billion annually.⁴ Employees are often not sure of what to do in the situation of workplace violence or even what legally constitutes workplace violence. Here are four things that employers should know about workplace violence to prepare both themselves and their team members should a situation arise.

1. WHAT IS WORKPLACE VIOLENCE (AND WHAT ISN'T)

Workplace violence and workplace bullying are often confused and can lead people to mistake one for the other. Workplace bullying is offensive behavior that is systemic, repeated, and involves mistreatment of another at work. It can include public criticism,

insults, intimidation, teasing, and spreading malicious rumors — so long as it does not involve physical contact or the threat thereof.

The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) defines workplace violence as “violent acts (including physical assaults and threats of assaults) directed towards persons at work or on duty.”⁵ It is important to remember that workplace violence doesn't have to result in an injury or an act of assault — even the threat of assault is considered violence.

THE 4 TYPES OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

NIOSH SPECIFIES 4 TYPES OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

TYPE 1: Violence committed during a crime. (Ex: An employee is assaulted during a robbery, and he or she fights back.)

TYPE 2: Violence committed by customers. (Ex: A client assaults an employee during a meeting.)

TYPE 3: Violence committed by a fellow employee. (Ex: An employee attacks a colleague.)

TYPE 4: Violence committed by people with whom employees have relationships outside the workplace. (Ex: One employee's family member assaults another employee.)

¹ “OSHA Fact Sheet: Workplace Violence.” Occupational Safety and Health Administration, 2002.

² “There were 500 workplace homicides in the United States in 2016.” Bureau of Labor Statistics, United States Department of Labor, 2018.

³ “Workplace Violence Prevention: Health Care and Social Service Workers.” Occupational Safety and Health Administration, 1996.

⁴ “Violence Occupational Hazards in Hospitality by NIOSH.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2002.

⁵ “Costs to Great Britain of workplace injuries and new cases of work-related Ill Health.” Health and Safety Executive, 2017.

2. THE WARNING SIGNS OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

How can you tell the difference between a person who is going through a rough patch and one who may become violent? Typically, a person just doesn't become violent; they will go through a series of stages that lead them to a breaking point.

There are two types of warning signs: personal indicators and aggravating issues. When these warning signs add up, it could lead to violence. Personal indicators include the way a person is dressed, or seeing a decline in punctuality or productivity. Aggravating issues are external factors that amplify personal problems and are usually out of the person's control. It is important to note that single factors are not a clear sign that someone may become violent. It is when there are a number of factors that add up, or there is a radical shift in a person's personality.

By recognizing the warning signs early, a simple, "How's everything going?" from a colleague or manager can help.

3. HOW TO RESPOND TO WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

If you are confronted with the threat of workplace violence, it can be hard to know what to do, especially if the assailant is a manager or executive — or threatens you further to stay silent. Determining the proper channels for action is the best way to respond. It is typically best to bring in another person in authority to respond on your behalf. As with any situation, you can always reach out to HR to discuss the problem.

However, if you are confronted by a violent individual, there are some important things to remember.

1. **Keep yourself safe.** There is no need to be the hero in a situation, unless you are presented with no other option.
2. **Stay at a distance.** Try to keep some space from your aggressor to help prevent a sudden attack.
3. **Stay relaxed and focused.** Do not assume a defensive or aggressive stance. If the aggressor feels threatened, he or she is more likely to attack. If the opportunity arises for you to escape, you should do so, but only if you know you can get out of harm's way.

4. PREPARATION AND RESPONSE TO A WORKPLACE SHOOTER

The worst case scenario for workplace violence is if the perpetrator attacks with a deadly weapon. Shootings account for 79% of workplace homicides, so it is important to have a plan ready.⁶ Most workplace shootings do not target specific individuals; the assailant usually will attack indiscriminately and the average assault time is only 12 minutes, so it is important to act swiftly and surely.

Before a situation ever arises, it is important to have at least worked out some sort of escape plan. The best escape plan is the shortest way around the assailant to the nearest exit. You should know the number of directions and exits that can be reached from your location. Having multiple plans ready and having thought about them lets you react faster, which could save your life. It is important to not be frozen by fear. Acknowledge how you feel, but move swiftly to get yourself to safety. Do not worry about grabbing anything other than your cell phone (if possible), and try to make your escape.

Hiding should only be an option if there is no accessible escape route for you. The best hiding places have multiple exits and can be locked or barricaded. If you are hiding, turn off the lights, silence your phone, and keep quiet. If possible, call 911 and leave the phone on; this allows the operator to hear what is going on and relay it to the police. Turn the volume of the operator down, so the assailant cannot hear them. If you are hiding with multiple people, do not group together. Spread out and quietly develop a plan. Attacking the assailant should be a last resort measure, and if you are working with multiple people, make it coordinated and make it quick. If you do have to attack, use something heavy and take the mindset of an aggressor.

Remember, your safety is paramount. Thinking about workplace violence can be uncomfortable and frightening, but preparation is key. Reacting swiftly and decisively can save your life.



Click to watch a sample course video from our award-winning Active Shooter Training series.

⁶ "There were 500 workplace homicides in the United States in 2016." Bureau of Labor Statistics, United States Department of Labor, 2018.

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE RESPONSE

PLAN A ESCAPE

- Find Nearest Exit
- Leave Belongings
- Alert Others but Don't Stop



PLAN B HIDE

- Silence your Phone
- Turn off the Lights
- Keep Low to the Ground
- Do Not Group Together



PLAN C NEUTRALIZE

- Find an Improvised Weapon (keyboard, potted plant, fire extinguisher) to Use if Attacker Approaches



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