

# **PRESENTER'S GUIDE**

## **"WORKPLACE VIOLENCE"**

**Part of the General Safety Series**

# **OUTLINE OF MAJOR PROGRAM POINTS**

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The following outline summarizes the major points of information presented in the program. The outline can be used to review the program before conducting a classroom session, as well as in preparing to lead a class discussion about the program.

- **Some people believe that a "certain amount of conflict" on the job is normal. But where do we draw the line?**
  - Most incidents begin as just a disagreement between co-workers.
  - All too often argument can escalate into insults, challenges, even threats.
  
- **Bystanders often ignore these confrontations, dismissing them as "personality conflicts".**
  - But eventually "push comes to shove", and the "personality conflict" becomes physical.
  - Once they become violent, these incidents can result in serious injuries... even death.
  
- **So how much conflict is too much?**
  
- **OSHA requires that employers provide "a place of employment free from recognized hazards that are likely to cause death or serious physical harm to employees."**
  - Any type of "workplace violence" should be considered one of those hazards.
  - It is stressful, bad for morale, and downright dangerous.
  - We have to take steps to prevent any violence in the workplace.
  
- **When it comes to violence, the media always latches onto the headline makers, like "murder".**
  - Other types of workplace violence occur far more frequently.

- **Before we go any further, we need to define the word "violence".**
  - The first thing that comes to mind is a physical confrontation.
- **But violence also includes verbal and emotional attacks.**
  - The psychological harm caused by threats, verbal abuse and intimidation can be as serious as any physical injury.
- **There are several sources of violence in the workplace.**
- **"Outside threats" are created by people who commit acts of violence, but who aren't employed by your company.**
  - Customers or vendors may seek revenge for some perceived wrongdoing.
  - Terrorists could even target your business to "set an example".
- **In healthcare environments, patients or their families can sometimes become hostile, and assault medical personnel.**
  - The workplace isn't immune to incidents of "domestic violence", either.
- **Another type of outside threat is "commercial crime".**
  - A robber can enter a business looking for some "quick cash".
  - If things go wrong, people can get hurt, even killed.
- **The workers at greatest risk from commercial crime are those who:**
  - Exchange money with the public.
  - Work alone or in small numbers.
  - Work late-night or early-morning hours.
- **Another source of workplace violence is "inside threats".**
  - All organizations are at risk from aggressive or violent people who are working in their facilities.
  - We're not talking only about disgruntled employees who take out their frustrations on their supervisors.

- **Disagreements or personality conflicts between coworkers are the most common causes of workplace violence.**
  - They involve people we know and work with.
- **Fortunately, violence rarely happens without warning.**
- **Although we can't predict when and where workplace violence will strike, there are usually "warning signs", "red flags" that tell us to proceed with caution.**
  - A coworker may suddenly become irritable and prone to emotional outbursts or mood swings.
  - They may get defensive and over-react to comments or criticism.
  - Both of these are "warning signs" of potential violence.
- **An individual may also start complaining frequently, or blame others for their problems.**
  - They may talk about "getting back" at someone or be fascinated by other incidents of violence.
  - These can be warning signs as well.
- **Other "red flags" include being late or absent more often than usual or disappearing during the work day.**
  - These can be indications that someone may be having trouble coping with their problems.
- **You may notice a coworker becoming careless, reckless or having accidents on the job.**
  - These signs can also suggest that they may be frustrated or distracted.
- **But remember, these types of warning signs don't always indicate future violence.**
  - Everyone has "bad days", and may blow off a little steam now and then.
  - What you really need to watch for is when these start to lead to aggressive or violent behavior.

- **"Aggressive behavior" doesn't just mean causing physical harm. It can be any attempt to hurt or demean someone.**
  - Aggressive behavior includes threats, sexual harassment and verbal abuse.
- **There are basically three types of threats... "veiled", "conditional" and "direct".**
- **Veiled or "hidden" threats suggest that a person intends to do harm.**
  - But the aggressive individual doesn't actually "spell out" what they plan to do.
- **Conditional threats always are used to intimidate people.**
  - Their intent is to make a person do something or to prevent them from doing it.
- **Direct threats always come through loud and clear.**
  - With a direct threat, a person declares their intention to commit an act of violence.
- **Even though we don't usually think of it this way, "sexual harassment" is also a form of violence, and women aren't the only victims.**
  - "Sexual harassment" is defined as repeated, unwanted behavior based on an individual's sex or sexual identity, whether they are male or female.
- **Sexual harassment includes:**
  - "Sexist" as well as sexual remarks.
  - Any unwanted physical contact.
  - Sexual advances.
  - Hazing or practical jokes based on an individual's gender or sexual orientation.
  - Assigning someone menial or demeaning tasks because of their gender.
- **The bottom line is...**
  - It's not acceptable to treat anyone differently because of their gender or sexual orientation.
  - Sexually explicit language or behavior of any kind has no place in the workplace.

- **"Verbal abuse" is another type of aggressive behavior, and can include bullying, mocking, intimidation and insults.**
  - This shouldn't be dismissed as someone "just being mean".
  - There is no excuse for using language or behavior to hurt someone's feelings.
  
- **While it's important that any type of aggressive behavior be nipped in the bud, some people don't want to get anyone "in trouble" by reporting these kinds of incidents.**
  - They don't want to be seen as a "tattle-tale", or would like to think that the problem will just "go away" on its own.
  
- **The fact is, making a report is your best opportunity to solve the problem once and for all.**
  - It's a chance for a troubled person to get the help they need.
  - Making a report can often prevent a more serious incident from occurring.
  
- **So report any aggressive behavior you experience or witness to your supervisor, your Human Resources Department, or your company's security personnel.**
  - Your company may also have an independent hotline or Employee Assistance Program that allows you to make reports confidentially.
  - Local law enforcement agencies should be notified of incidents that involve threats of violence or physical assaults.
  
- **Regardless of who you report the incident to, make sure they document it for future reference.**
  
- **Another situation that you should report immediately is the presence of a weapon in your facility.**
  - Even a licensed, authorized weapon can be very dangerous.
  - If you see one, tell your supervisor, security personnel or an HR representative about it immediately!

- **You should also report any unfamiliar or unauthorized people that you see.**
  - It's better to be safe than sorry!
  - If it turns out they have been approved to be in the facility, there's no harm done.
  
- **Getting involved with violence in any way, such as "fighting", can have serious consequences.**
  - By definition, any attempt to cause physical injury, or a physical threat to do bodily harm, is an "assault".
  
- **Even if you aren't the one who starts it, you could get injured, suspended or fired, possibly even arrested or sued by your assailant.**
  - Try to avoid arguments, and never get caught up in a shouting match.
  - Attempt to resolve disagreements peacefully.
  - Offer a compromise, or suggest asking another person to step in.
  
- **If an unreasonable or irrational person confronts you, remain calm.**
  - Keep your arms low, in a non-threatening position.
  - Try to stay at least five feet away, and avoid physical contact.
  - Maintain a soothing tone of voice.
  
- **Let them know that you understand their concerns.**
  - Don't judge, argue, or disagree with them.
  
- **If the person becomes violent:**
  - Try to get away.
  - Call for help (it's usually nearby).
  
- **If someone challenges you to a fight, turn them down.**
  - Fighting always causes more problems than it solves.
  - The best response is to just walk away.
  - Don't fight back unless your life is in danger.

- **You need to report any incident of physically violent behavior to your employer.**
  - Since assault is a crime, local law enforcement agencies should also be informed.
- **Any situation that involves a weapon is very dangerous and requires extreme caution, whether it's a personal dispute, a robbery, or something else.**
- **Never confront an armed assailant if you can avoid it.**
  - The best plan is to get as far away as possible.
  - Stay low and out of sight.
  - Help others get to safety if you can.
- **In general, don't sound any alarms if it will put someone in danger.**
  - Check your company's policy to determine how they want these situations handled.
  - Contact security or law enforcement personnel only when you can do it safely.
- **If you come face-to-face with an armed assailant, remember "The person with the gun is in charge".**
  - Follow their instructions to the letter.
  - Repeat their commands as you do as they ask.
  - Don't make any sudden moves, and keep your hands visible at all times.
- **Never resist an armed assailant unless you feel they are going to kill you.**
  - This is the only time it's worth risking your life to fight back.

**\* \* \* SUMMARY \* \* \***

- **Watch for the warning signs of violence, such as mood swings, defensiveness and acting recklessly.**

- **Report incidents of threats, intimidation, and sexual or verbal harassment, as well as aggressive and violent behavior.**
- **Try to resolve conflicts peacefully.**
- **If you're confronted with violence, try to escape from your attacker or call for help.**
- **Never "fight back" unless you feel that your life is in danger.**
- **Remember, no amount of aggressive or violent behavior is acceptable on the job. If we all work on it together we can help to prevent workplace violence, and keep ourselves and our coworkers safe... every day!**