



TIPS FOR PREVENTING AND MANAGING INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE OR HARASSMENT

SILOAM UNITED CHURCH

PREVENTING WORKPLACE VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

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INTRODUCTION:

Violence and harassment include behaviours such as: physical assault or aggression, unsolicited and unwelcome conduct, comment, gesture or contact which causes offense or humiliation, and physical harm to any individual which creates fear or mistrust, or which compromises and devalues the individual.

Violence and harassment can come from anyone in the workplace and be directed at anyone. It can be subtle or overt. Abuse may be deliberate or unintended.

The test? Would a reasonable person know, or should know, that their behaviour would be considered unwelcome or inappropriate by the recipient. It may be a single event or may involve a continuing series of incidents. It may involve the abuse of authority or position, or it may involve relations among co-workers and affiliated personnel.

Abuse can victimize both men and women, and may be directed by or towards workers, clients and members of the public.

TIPS FOR SELF- PROTECTION

Though acts of workplace violence are rare, it is better to be informed and aware of your options.

These practical suggestions are from the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (1999) can help you be aware of tested strategies.

PERSONAL VERSUS SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Many employers recognize the potential for violence and harassment in their workplace violence. As a result, they have developed strategies to address the problem. Increased awareness is often followed by a decrease in abusive incidents.

The list below contains some, but not all actions that the Canadian Human Rights Commission considers personal harassment:

- verbal abuse or threats
- unwelcome remarks, jokes or innuendoes or taunting about a person's body, attire, age, marital status, ethnic or national origin, religion, etc.
- displaying pornographic, racist or other offensive or derogatory pictures
- practical jokes which cause awkwardness or embarrassment
- unwelcome invitations or requests, whether indirect or explicit, or intimidation, leering or other gestures
- condescension or paternalism which undermines self-respect
- unnecessary physical contact such as touching, patting or pinching, or punching or physical assault.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Education is a key component in reducing workplace violence and harassment. Often workers, volunteers and others are unfamiliar with their organization's policies on violence and harassment. Better knowledge of these policies and procedures can reduce the stresses that result from an incident.

PREVENTION

Prevention is always preferable to intervention or response.

Risk assessment is a logical and organized method of identifying and quantifying risks, allowing the employer to better manage these risks.

You can assess risk by considering the severity of consequences and frequency of exposure to the risk. Following risk identification, appropriate prevention strategies can be developed and implemented. The intent of these tips is to provide some practical suggestions and to identify resources that may assist in creating a program supporting a workplace free of violence

Dealing With A Potentially Violent Person

1. 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.
 - Avoid communicating a lot of technical and 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.

2. Tips for non-verbal behavior and communication:

- Use calm body language – relaxed posture with hands unclenched, attentive expression.
 - Position 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.
- 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 co-workers or police.

NON-VERBAL FEATURES

- ✓ Facial gestures
- ✓ Eye contact
- ✓ Voice
- ✓ Clothing
- ✓ Posture

3. 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.
- If available, 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 the police immediately after the incident.

Be Prepared

- Take a self-defense course. .
- Try to imagine yourself responding successfully to different types of attacks.
- Practice your responses.

Remember! These actions are helpful in personal and workplace situations.

4. Working Off-Site

When working away from a traditional office setting you must exercise extra caution. In those situation cases you may have little—or no—ability to control your work environment. Working alone, with no colleagues available to call on for help is also a situation of higher-than-usual risk.

The following preventative tactics or procedures are suggested as means to minimize risks associated with working alone or off-site:

- Have ready access to a cellular telephone or other means of emergency communication.
- Establish a check-in procedure that allows you to keep a reliable contact informed of situations where you may require assistance. This includes such actions as letting others know where you will be and your expected schedule.
- When working alone with others who cause you concern, arrange to meet in a safe environment on or off-site.
- Be aware of your surroundings upon arrival at a new or different setting. Park your vehicle in a well-lit area facing the exit. Do not let anyone of concern come between you and an exit.
- 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 On 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.
- Prepare in advance by reviewing the available information about the individual(s) you will meet.
- Terminate the appointment in a non-confrontational manner if the individual appears to be:

- Intoxicated
- Under the influence of drugs
- Emotionally disturbed, 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 e.g. remain near an exit.
- Do not turn your back on the person or enter a room first.

5. Dealing with a Violent Situation

- Whenever possible, conduct the interaction with a third party present
- Respectfully but firmly take control of the conversation
- Tell the person that you:
 - Do not like the tone of the conversation.
 - Will not allow the behavior to continue.
 - Will end the conversation if necessary.
- Advise the person to leave the building.
- If the behavior persists, end the conversation and leave the scene. Call police.
- Advise other staff and have them leave the immediate area.
- File an incident report.



Keep Calm,
Be Firm