

Action steps for responding to violent behavior

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Before you begin

Review your organization's violence in the workplace policy. Brainstorm disruptive, threatening or violent behavior scenarios that could happen within your facility with managers, employees and customers. Respond to these situations by asking the group members to role play the action steps they would take to manage the crisis situations.



Step 1:

General response to disruptive behavior (no threats or weapons)

1. Respond quietly and calmly. Try to defuse the situation.
2. Do not take the behavior personally. Usually, the behavior has little to do with you, but the person is using you as a target in the situation.
3. Listen with empathy and ask questions. Respectful concern and interest may demonstrate that aggression is not necessary.
4. Consider offering an apology. Even if you have done nothing wrong, an apology may calm the individual and encourage cooperation. "I'm sorry that happened. What can we do now that will solve the problem?"
5. Summarize and document what the individual says. Make sure you are communicating clearly. In crisis, a person feels humiliated and wants respect and attention. Your summary of the individual's concerns reflects your attention.
6. Focus on areas of agreement to help resolve the concern.

If this approach does not stop the disruption, assess whether the individual seems dangerous. If in your best judgment he or she is upset but not a threat, set limits and seek assistance as necessary.

Step 2:

Step 1 response, ineffective, individual does not seem dangerous.

1. Calmly and firmly set limits. For example, say, "Please lower your voice. There will be no disruptions in this office." "Please be patient so that I can understand what you need and try to help you."
2. Ask the individual to stop the behavior and warn that you may take official action. For example, say, "Disruption is subject to further action. Stop or you may be reported."
3. If the disruption continues despite a warning, tell the individual he or she may face discipline or prosecution, state that the discussion is over, and direct him or her to leave the office. Say, for example, "Please leave now. If you do not leave, I will call security and the human resource manager."
4. If the individual refuses to leave after you direct him or her to do so, state that this refusal is also a violation subject to disciplinary action.

Step 3:

Step 1 response ineffective and the individual seems dangerous

1. If possible, find a quiet, safe place to talk, but do not isolate yourself with an individual you believe may be dangerous. Maintain a safe distance, do not turn your back, and stay seated if possible. Leave the door open or open a closed door, and sit near the door. Be sure a co-worker is near to help if needed.
2. Use a calm, non-confrontational approach to defuse the situation. Indicate your desire to listen and understand the problem. Allow the person to describe the problem.
3. Never touch the individual yourself to try to remove him or her from the area. The agitated individual may interpret even a gentle push or holding his or her arm as an assault and may respond with violence toward you or file a lawsuit later.
4. Set limits to indicate the behavior needed to deal with the concern. For example, say, "Please lower your voice." "Please stop shouting (or using profanity) or I'll have to ask you to leave."
5. Signal for assistance. The individual may be antagonized if you call for assistance, so use a prearranged distress signal to have another staff member check on you to determine how you are. If you need help, the co-worker should alert your supervisor and/or the police.
6. Do not mention discipline or the sheriff's office if you fear an angry or violent response.
7. If the situation escalates, find a way to excuse yourself, leave the room or area and get help. Say, "You've raised some tough questions. I'll consult HR to see what we can do."

In an emergency

For violent incidents in progress or specific threats of imminent violence, call the local law enforcement. Immediately contact a member of management (human resources, the general manager or the health and safety supervisor). Have someone call for you if an individual:

- Makes threats of physical harm toward you, others or him or herself;
- Has a weapon;
- Behaves in a manner that causes you to fear for your own or another's safety.

Use a phone out of sight/hearing of the individual. The law enforcement agency will respond and take appropriate action.

1. Do not attempt to intervene physically or deal with the situation yourself. It is critical that the local law enforcement agency take charge of any incident that can or does involve physical harm.
2. Get yourself and others to safety quickly.

Post-incident response

Violent incidents affect many people: the victim, witnesses, bystanders, as well as friends and co-workers of those involved in or witnessing the event. To avoid long-term difficulties following a violent event (often called post-traumatic stress syndrome), be sure to take appropriate follow-up actions and interventions. There are crisis management companies and counselors available who can guide you in taking the appropriate steps for post-event counseling and intervention.

BWC always strives to improve the *Safety Leader's Discussion Guide*. Your feedback can help. Please send your comments via e-mail to Safety@ohiobwc.com.