
Dealing with Violence in the Workplace:

Causes of Violence

Violence in the workplace can have many roots. An employee may feel threatened if their job seems at risk. Personal problems can make workplace conflict more likely. Read below to learn the warning signs and find out what to do if violence happens.

Red flags

Violent behavior is more likely to occur when a person is faced with stressful situations such as:

- A company merger
- A job layoff or being fired
- A demotion, disciplinary action, or other possibly upsetting changes in job duties
- A major personal loss, such as divorce or death
- A holiday season
- Money problems

If you see warning signs

If you see warning signs of violence, try to respond right away. Try talking with the person to build trust. Talking may help stop violence before it happens. It can create understanding between employees in conflict. Always notify superiors of your concerns. Do it right away and follow up in writing. If you feel you are in immediate danger, notify security or call the police. Never put yourself in danger.

If violence does happen

- **Be prepared.** Learn your employer's policies for handling violence. Find out who to contact and what to do.
- **If possible, defuse the anger.** If it's safe and the anger is directed at you, try to defuse it. Problem solving may reduce an employee's anger. The anger may be directed at someone else. In that case, after a cooling-off period, ask the employee to talk with the correct supervisor or coworker. Focus on the problem and look for an answer together. Treat your coworker with respect. Don't get defensive or sarcastic.
- **Stop the action.** If a fistfight is in progress, yell to try to break it up. But don't put yourself in a position to be hurt. Call company security if needed. Or if you don't have on-site security, call the police. Report any act of aggression, including verbal or online threats, to your supervisor. Make the report in writing and copy yourself.
- **Tell supervisors.** Don't put yourself in danger. Report concerns right away in writing.

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- **Seek safety and get help.** If a situation is life-threatening and you can safely exit the building, get out and call for help. Call 911 or your local emergency number. If you can't get out and an armed assault is under way, seek protective cover. Call for help if you can.