

## VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE

### INTRODUCTION

Workplace violence has emerged as an important occupational safety and health issue in many industries. Not only does violence in the workplace cause direct harm to employees of an organization, it also causes worker burnout, lower productivity, and increased health costs. Violence in an organization not only affects the victims but also co-workers, who feel angry, fearful, stressed, and depressed as a result.

### Definitions:

To assist in defining incidents of violence or abuse, the following information is provided:

**Workplace** is defined as any location, permanent or temporary, where an employee performs work or work-related activities. Workplace facilities include lunchrooms, restrooms, breakrooms, vehicles used for work, and parking facilities.

**Abuse** is defined as the willful infliction of injury, unreasonable confinement, intimidation, or punishment with resulting physical harm, pain or mental anguish, or deprivation by an individual, including a caretaker, of goods, or services, that are necessary to attain or maintain physical, mental and psychosocial well-being.

**Neglect** is defined as, failure to provide goods and necessary services to avoid physical harm, mental anguish or mental illness.

**Verbal abuse** is defined as any use of oral, written, or gestured language that includes disparaging and derogatory terms to residents or their families, or within their hearing distance, to describe residents, regardless of their age, ability to comprehend or disability.

**Sexual abuse** is defined as, but not limited to, sexual coercion, sexual assault or sexual harassment.

**Physical abuse** is defined as hitting, slapping, pinching, kicking, etc. It also includes controlling behavior through corporal punishment.

**Involuntary seclusion** is defined as separation of a resident/patient from other resident/patient's or from their room against their will or the will of the resident/patient's legal guardian or representative.

**NOTE:** Temporary monitored separation from other resident/patient's will not be considered involuntary seclusion and may be permitted when used as a therapeutic intervention to reduce agitation as determined by a physician, multidisciplinary care planning team, and such action is documented and consistent with the resident/patient's plan of care.

**Mental abuse** is defined as, but not limited to, humiliation, harassment, threats of punishment or withholding of treatment of services.

Incidents of abuse can occur employee to employee, stranger to employee, partner to employee, resident to staff, staff to resident, resident to resident, resident to family and family to resident. All must be reported, investigated and acted upon.

## **POLICY**

Our company policy is to prohibit all acts of threats of violence and threatening behavior by or against it employees during assigned duty times. Management commitment will include the endorsement and visible involvement of top management providing the motivation and resources to deal effectively with workplace violence. Violations of this policy by employees of the company will lead to disciplinary action which may include termination of employment.

Violent acts or threats of violence include any activity by an individual that would cause another individual to feel unsafe due to the threat of physical harm. The violent behavior may take the form of verbal threats to harm another person or damage property, physical aggression, or harassment including sexual harassment. Threats of violence include possession or display of a weapon of any type or exhibiting an object in such a manner that it appears to be a weapon.

Employees who are subject to or become aware of any violent acts or threats of violence shall immediately report the matter to their supervisor or any higher level authority.

Supervisory or management personnel who receive a report of violent activity or a threat of violence shall take them seriously and immediately assess the situation, determine the nature of the threat and action to be taken.

## **PROCEDURE**

The following recommendations offer a systematic framework to help protect employees from risks of injury and death from occupational related violence. By addressing workplace violence as a preventable hazard, we can develop practical and effective strategies to protect employees from this serious risk and provide a safe and healthful workplace.

- a. When it is apparent that one or more individuals may be in immediate physical danger, the endangered employee or any observing employee shall notify the nearest available security or police unit. When action is taken by supervisory personnel, the information shall be reported to the department manager or director as soon as possible.
- b. When the danger of physical harm does not appear to be immediate, gather all available information and, when reported to supervisory personnel, provide a full report of circumstances to the department manager or director.

There are different types of workplace violence, depending on the relationship between the employee and the person committing the violence.

1. **Stranger on Employee:** Violence is committed by a stranger. There is no known relationship to the employee or workplace. The stranger may enter the workplace to commit a violent act or they may act outside the "traditional" workplace while the employee is in the course of their job, such as making a delivery or bank deposit.
2. **Customer on Employee:** Violence is committed by someone who receives a service, such as a current or former customer, client, patient, or passenger. The violence can be committed in the workplace, but while the employee is performing a job-related function.

3. **Partner on Employee:** Violence is committed by someone who has a personal relationship with a worker, such as a current or former spouse or partner, a relative, or a friend. This would include the attacker who has a personal dispute with a worker and enters the workplace to harass, threaten, injure, or kill.
4. **Employee on Employee:** Violence is committed in or outside the workplace by a current or former employee, a prospective employee, or a current or former supervisor or manager.

Potentially violent people feel a need to dominate or be the leader – especially in the presence of others. Warning signals may alert you to any person who could become violent. Keep in mind that what is considered acceptable or inappropriate behavior varies from person to person. Warning signals may include:

- Increased absenteeism.
- Major changes in personal appearance, attitude, or behavior.
- Change in personal relationships (such as the break-up of a relationship).
- Reduction in job efficiency or productivity.
- History of violent, reckless, or antisocial behavior.
- Unusual interest in or unexplained pre-occupation with weapons, or bringing weapons to work.
- Serious stress in the employee's life (such as finances, personal, or health)
- Substance abuse.
- Unexplained signals of physical injury (such as bruises, injuries, or cuts).
- Loitering around the worksite.
- Agitation.
- Inability to make eye contact.
- Unexplained interest in what you do at work (such as your schedule, procedures for

Usually a person does not abruptly become violent. A person's violent behavior gradually escalates over time. After experiencing a trigger event, the perpetrator may exhibit physical or behavioral signs that violence may occur. Three levels of violence and what to do:

### **Level One**

- Refuses to cooperate
- Spreads rumors
- Consistently argues
- Belligerent
- Constantly swears
- Unwanted sexual comments

### **Level Two**

- Argues increasingly
- Refuses to obey
- Sabotages
- Verbalizes
- Sees self as victim
- Overly interested in weapons

### **Level Three**

- Suicidal threats
- Physical fights
- Destruction
- Use of weapon
- Commits murder, rape and/or arson

### **What to do if you are confronted in the workplace:**

- Stay calm, listen attentively, and ask the person to sit down.
- Ask the person questions relevant to his or her complaint.
- Acknowledge the person's concerns and try to find solutions.
- Maintain eye contact.
- Speak slowly, softly, and clearly. Avoid being defensive.
- Identify violent behaviors, especially before they escalate.
- Set ground rules/boundaries, such as, "When you shout at me, I can't understand what you are saying."
- Signal a co-worker or supervisor that you need help by using a panic button or predetermined code word or signal. Do not make any calls yourself. Have someone notify security or the local police.
- Keep the situation in your control.
- Talk to your supervisor.

### **What to do for Level Three:**

- Get yourself and others away from the potentially violent person.
- Follow the workplace emergency action plan.
- Call 911 or workplace emergency number.
- Get out or hide. Evacuate the area.

### **Things to Avoid:**

- Make false statements or promises you can't keep.
- Explain technical, complicated information when emotions are high.
- Take sides or disagree.
- Take remarks personally.
- Show your anger.
- Patronize.
- Invade the individual's personal space.
- Verbal & non-verbal (body language) hostile style of communicating.
- Making threats or dares.
- Belittle or make the person feel foolish.
- Criticize or act impatient.
- Attempt to "bargain" with a threatening individual.

Employees are to report to their immediate supervisor, every behavior of co-workers, customers, or anyone else at the workplace that could be taken as threatening or intimidating or that might lead to violence. Additionally, all supervisors are to take such threats seriously so that all employees may feel secure in the workplace. No one should minimize the danger that can occur by not addressing the many warning signs that can make danger apparent. Those employees,

who with good intentions provide such information, shall be protected from retaliation in any form. This shall be done by making sure all reports are handled with respect to confidentiality. The organization will act on all reports appropriately upon gathering the facts.

When a conflict has been identified, supervisors are to attempt to defuse the situation. However, if the customer or co-worker persists in their threats, they will be reported to the police. If the person should reappear after such action, the supervisor and/or the police shall be contacted again. All actions shall be documented by the person taking the action. Emergency phone numbers and escape routes are posted at (location).

## **SCREENING OF APPLICANTS FOR EMPLOYMENT**

Prior to employment:

All potential employees shall have previous and current employees contacted for references, and notations will be made on application.

1. All potential employees will have registry and licensing board checks done. Registry and licensing checks will be completed in all states where the applicant has been previously employed to validate potential employee i
2. is free of abuse.
3. All potential employees will have registry/licensure checked for current certification/licensure in North Dakota. A copy of current certification card/license with valid expiration date will be obtained for the employee file.
4. All potential employees will be drug screened prior to employment or in accordance with our company policy.

## **TRAINING AND EDUCATION**

Training and education ensures that all staff are aware of potential security hazards and the procedures for protecting themselves and their co-workers. The training program will involve all employees, including supervisors and managers. New and reassigned employees will receive an initial orientation prior to being assigned their job duties and required training will be provided to employees annually.

Following training, supervisors and managers will be able to recognize a potentially hazardous situation and to make any necessary changes in the physical building, patient care treatment program, staffing policy and procedures to reduce or eliminate the hazards.

## **CONCLUSION**

We have and will continue to survey the workplace to provide the best possible security for our employees. To provide a safe and secure workplace, we reserve the right to search employees locker/storage areas and cars on the premises.

Upper management shall support the appropriate actions taken by the supervisors to deal with any threat. Under no conditions does management condone inaction to threats to employees.

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Date

SEE COMBATATIVE BEHAVIOR POLICY FOR RESIDENT/PATIENT BEHAVIOR