

Workplace Violence

You can decrease the odds that you will be a victim of Workplace Violence. Keep in mind that verbal threats are as much a form of violence as physical attacks. Don't ignore angry outbursts. Know that workplace stress and conflicts can cause a violent incident. Individually you can take action to prevent violence. Knowing the warning signs, reporting any violent or potentially violent behavior, learning to effectively deal with stress and conflicts are all ways you can help prevent violence. Most importantly, report all forms of violence that occur in the workplace. By informing your supervisors and security of potentially dangerous individuals, you could save lives - even your own.

Workplace Violence Comes In Many Forms

- Homicide
- Hitting
- Shoving
- Pushing
- Kicking
- Sexual Assault

And in many cases it includes verbal outbursts such as:

- Threats
- Harassment
- Abuse
- Intimidation

(Verbal forms of violence often signal more serious violence to come)

Anger and violence can occur when either:

- A person is not satisfied with a service
- A person has to wait
- Mistakes are made
- Promises are not kept

Knowing the Warning Signs

Most cases of workplace violence don't just happen. The best way to identify potential violence is to recognize warning signs.

A threat is the clearest indicator that violence will follow. There are three types of threats:

- **Direct threats:** *"I'll get even with him."*
- **Veiled threats:** *"This place would shut down for days if the mainframe crashed and the backup were damaged."*
- **Conditional threats:** *"If I don't get my financial aid, there'll be hell to pay."*

There are other signs that usually accompany a threat. A potentially violent person:

- Is unusually argumentative
- Doesn't cooperate
- Demonstrates extreme or bizarre behavior
- Appears depressed
- Is intoxicated or under the influence of drugs

Reporting Workplace Violence

It is crucial that you report any violence (verbal or physical) to your supervisor and security. Don't ignore it. If the perpetrator actually commits the violence he or she threatened, the consequences can be devastating. The University has an anti-violence policy. Don't fear any repercussions from reporting. You are only doing your job by following it.

Conflict Resolution – Dealing With Angry Student or Guest

It is important to know how to communicate and resolve a hostile or potentially violent situation before it escalates. Deal with someone's anger and frustration the first time and prevent any further escalation of the situation and further confrontations with other personnel. The process of resolving the problem can only begin when hostility is defused. Conflict communication skills are used to help defuse hostility.

Do not counsel someone behind closed doors that has already become hostile, unless you feel confident that the situation can be defused behind closed doors. If caught alone in a potentially dangerous situation, excuse yourself by whatever means possible. It is important that your coworkers are aware of the situation you are in.

Basic Conflict Communication Skills

- **Don't take it personally.** Generally, a hostile person is not angry with you personally. Take a deep breath and focus on the situation not yourself.
- **Let the hostile person vent their feelings.**
- **Listen.** Let them blow off steam. Make sure they know you are listening. A person is usually angry and upset because they feel no one is listening or taking them seriously.
- **Maintain eye contact.** Stay focused and be attentive on the person and situation.
- **Use the person's name.** Show they are important and worthy of your respect.
- **Take notes.** Show you are serious and want to get all of what they are saying. It is important not to have to ask an already angry person to repeat themselves.
- **Ask questions.** Get all of the details.
- **Apologize and mean it.**
- **Take responsibility.** Don't pass the buck and don't ever say, "It's not my job".
- **Do your best to solve the problem.** The person may already have been shifted around from person to person or department to department
- **Keep your promises.** Don't make promises you cannot keep.
- **Confirm the details.** Show you care.

Crossing the Line

- Any act of violence where an individual expresses anger by hitting, pushing, or otherwise physically assaulting any member or guest of the University.
- Any verbal threat of harm that is intended to intimidate or threaten the safety of an individual, whether the threat is made in person, through another employee or student, over the phone, in the mail, or through e-mail.
- Unusual, bizarre or menacing behavior intensely focused on a grudge, grievance or romantic interests in another employee, suggesting that the employee is losing control.
- Acts, words, and gestures adversely affecting the safety and security of another individual (includes stalking behaviors and hate speech).
- Bringing a gun, a dangerous weapon, or exploding device to campus.

When Faced With Someone Who Has Crossed the Line

Contact security immediately. Do not attempt to handle the situation on your own. If you cannot call security and have the opportunity to calm the person down, utilize the basic Conflict Communication Skills and concentrate on:

- Remaining calm. To the extent that you can, try to continue to communicate with the individual calmly and confidently.
- Be polite
- Show respect
- Listen
- Do not physically attempt to get the person to leave. Do not touch the person.
- If violent behavior is occurring, escape, hide if not already seen, or cover up if injury is likely.
- Make every possible effort to get others out of the immediate area.
- Never attempt to disarm the person in question.
- Don't argue, threaten or block their exit.

Police Emergency: (301) 405-3333 or 911

Non-Emergency: (301) 405-3555

UMPD Crime Prevention: (301) 405-7032

www.umpd.umd.edu