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# PREVENTING WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

## MODULE DESCRIPTION

This module provides you with information on how you can prevent or avoid violent incidents both in your personal life and in the workplace.

## OBJECTIVES

After completing this module, students will be able to:

- Describe workplace violence
- Identify who is at risk
- Explain strategies to prevent violence
- Describe how to StartSafe and StaySafe

## MODULE OUTLINE

### 1. What is Workplace Violence?

Most people think of violence as some kind of physical attack, but that ♦s not always the case. Violence can also be a verbal or non-verbal attack.

Any time someone is threatened in any way resulting in physical, emotional, or mental harm, it could be considered violence.

When violence occurs at your place of employment or while working for your employer at any other location, this is considered workplace violence.

Violence in the workplace may come from a stranger, customer, co-worker, acquaintance, or intimate person (such as current or ex-boyfriends, girlfriends, or spouses).

### 2. Who is at risk?

In today ♦s workplaces, violence can affect anyone. ♦ No workplace is immune from the threat of workplace violence.

Certain occupations do place employees at a greater risk of workplace violence.

- Young workers often fill the jobs with a high incident rate of workplace violence. These jobs include:
  - ♦ Making deliveries
  - ♦ Working alone (especially during late-night and early morning hours)
  - ♦ Handling money or other valuables
  - ♦ Having extensive public contact

- ◆ Working in high-crime areas
- ◆ Working in places where alcohol is served.

Workplace violence affects everyone. It◆s not just victims of violence that suffer. Co-workers, employers, families, and friends may also feel the pain caused by violence.

Society must pay a financial price for violence.

- Billions of dollars in lost wages, health care costs, legal damages, and other expenses result from acts of workplace violence.

Each year, more than two million instances of violence in the workplace are reported and as many as 1,000 people lose their lives annually to workplace homicides.◆

### 3. Violence Prevention Strategies

One way to address the problem of workplace violence is to focus on prevention.◆

- Preventing workplace violence is a team effort; it takes involvement from management as well as employees.◆
- Additionally, it is important to be aware of some warning signs that may indicate a person could become violent and to have some skills for dealing with situations that have the potential for violence.

Four prevention strategies are:

- **Employer involvement:** Your employer can help to prevent workplace violence by providing:
  - ◆ A written policy that informs employees about violence, harassment, and other unacceptable behaviors, along with the consequences of those behaviors.
  - ◆ Training on preventing workplace violence.
  - ◆ A safe work environment that is consistently maintained, such as:
    - Providing good outside lighting
    - Keeping only small amounts of cash on hand
    - Installing surveillance cameras
    - Increasing the number of staff on duty
- **Employee involvement:** As an employee, you can help to prevent workplace violence by:
  - ◆ Being familiar with your employer◆s workplace violence policy
  - ◆ Taking responsibility for making sure your work space is secure
  - ◆ Reporting warning signs, threats, or aggressive behaviors so they don◆t persist or escalate to more violent acts
  - ◆ Treating co-workers with respect and being tolerant of different points of view

- **Recognizing warning signs:** Violence rarely ♦ comes out of the blue. ♦ Usually an individual exhibits several warning signs in advance. Learning to recognize the warning signs can help you anticipate and avoid possible violence. Warning signs may include:
  - ♦ Aggressive actions
  - ♦ Swearing or using obscene language
  - ♦ Excessive complaining
  - ♦ Hostility or threats toward customers, co-workers, or supervisors
  - ♦ Frustration or irritability
  - ♦ Using drugs or alcohol, especially on the job
  - ♦ Sabotaging company equipment or property
  - ♦ Ignoring company policies and procedures
- **Developing coping skills:** It is helpful to develop coping skills so that you can effectively deal with any potential or actual violence in the workplace.
  - ♦ If you observe a co-worker, customer, or stranger in your workplace exhibiting any of the warning signs, you should talk to a supervisor about your concerns and ask him or her to intervene.
  - ♦ If a situation were to become violent, you should:
    - First, know that if you are in a violent or potentially violent situation, your primary concern should be for your own safety and the safety of those around you.
    - If possible, you and others should safely leave the situation and get help either by contacting a supervisor or co-worker better trained to handle the situation or by calling 911.
    - If, however, you are in a situation where you must deal with a person who is behaving violently, remembering some simple ♦ Dos ♦ and ♦ Don ♦ ts ♦ may help you and others to Stay Safe. ♦

- ◆ In a violent situation, **DO**:
  - Stay calm. Speak quietly and slowly. Be polite. Show respect.
  - Listen. Let them talk and show interest in what they are saying.
  - Keep in mind potential routes of escape. Don't allow the aggressor to block your escape route.
  - Acknowledge their feelings. (*I can see that you're angry. I can understand how you'd be frustrated.*)
  - Set limits. (*Please don't touch me. Please don't use profanity.*)
  - Calmly describe the consequences of any violent behavior. (*I'll have to call 911, if we can't resolve this peacefully.*)
  - If a weapon is involved, calmly ask the individual to put it in a neutral location while you continue to talk.
- ◆ In a violent situation, **DON'T**:
  - React with hostility, condescension, apathy.
  - Touch them.
  - Assume challenging postures (crossed arms; hands on hips; hostile staring).
  - Immediately reject their demands.
  - Make any sudden moves that might seem threatening.
  - Argue or threaten.
  - Stop the individual from leaving.
  - Try to disarm the individual.