

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE IN OFFICE ENVIRONMENTS

COURSE OUTLINE

- **Some people believe that a "certain amount of conflict" on the job is normal.**
 - Most incidents begin as just a disagreement between coworkers.
- **But too often, the argument can escalate into insults, challenges, or even threats.**
 - Bystanders often ignore these confrontations, dismissing them as "personality conflicts".
- **Eventually, "personality conflicts", can become physical.**
 - Once they become violent, these incidents can result in serious injuries...even death.
- **OSHA requires employers to provide "a place of employment free from recognized hazards that are likely to cause death or serious physical harm to employees".**
 - Any type of "workplace violence" should be considered one of those hazards.
- **Workplace violence is stressful, bad for morale and downright dangerous.**
 - We have to take steps to prevent any violence in the workplace.
- **When it comes to violence, the media always latches onto the headline makers, like murder.**
 - But other kinds of violence happen far more frequently.
- **Usually, physical confrontation is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word "violence".**
- **However, violence also includes verbal as well as emotional attacks.**
 - The psychological harm caused by threats, intimidation and verbal abuse can be as serious as any physical injury.

- **One source of violence in the workplace is "outside threats".**
 - These are individuals who commit acts of violence in your facility, but aren't employed by your company...such as customers, vendors or even terrorists.
 - The workplace isn't immune to "domestic violence" either.
- **An important type of outside threat that you may encounter is "commercial crime".**
 - A robber may enter your business looking for some "quick cash".
 - People can get hurt, even killed, if things don't go as planned.
- **The workers at greatest risk from commercial crime...**
 - Exchange money with the public.
 - Work alone or in small numbers.
 - Work late night or early morning hours.
- **Another source of workplace violence is "inside threats".**
 - All organizations are at risk from aggressive or violent people who are working in their facilities...not just disgruntled employees who may take out their frustrations on their supervisors.
- **Disagreements or personality conflicts between coworkers, people we know and work with, are the most common causes of workplace violence.**
 - Fortunately, violence rarely happens without warning.
- **Although we can't predict when and where workplace violence will strike, there are usually "warning signs" or "red flags" that we notice in our coworkers' behaviors that tell us to proceed with caution, such as...**
 - Becoming suddenly irritable and prone to emotional outbursts or mood swings.
 - Getting defensive and overreacting to comments or criticism.
 - Complaining frequently, or blaming others for their problems.
- **Other warning signs include...**
 - Talking about "getting back" at someone.
 - Being fascinated by other incidents of violence.
 - Being late or absent more often than usual or disappearing during the workday.
 - Becoming careless, reckless or having accidents on the job because they are frustrated or distracted.

- **But these types of warning signs don't always indicate future violence.**
 - Everyone has "bad days", and may blow off a little steam every now and then.
 - What you really need to watch for is when these start to lead to aggressive behavior.
- **"Aggressive behavior" is any attempt to hurt or demean someone.**
 - This doesn't just mean causing physical harm.
- **Aggressive includes threats, sexual harassment and verbal abuse.**
- **There are basically three types of threats..."veiled", "conditional" and "direct".**
 - "Veiled", or "hidden" threats suggest that a person intends to do harm without them actually spelling out what they plan to do.
 - "Conditional threats" are used to intimidate people into making them do something... or preventing them from doing it.
 - "Direct threats" occur when a person says that they intend to commit an act of violence.
- **Even though we don't usually think of it this way, "sexual harassment" is also a form of violence... and women aren't the only victims.**
 - It is defined as repeated, unwanted behavior based on an individual's sex or sexual identity, whether they are male or female.
- **Sexual harassment includes:**
 - "Sexist" as well as sexual remarks.
 - Any unwanted physical contact.
 - Sexual advances.
 - Hazing or practical jokes based on an individual's sex or sexual orientation.
 - Assigning someone demeaning or menial tasks because of their gender.
 - Using sexually explicit language or behavior.
- **"Verbal abuse" is another type of aggressive behavior that can include bullying, mocking, intimidation and insults.**
 - This shouldn't be dismissed as someone "just being mean".
 - There is no excuse for using language or behavior to hurt someone's feelings.

- **It's important that any type of aggressive behavior be "nipped in the bud".**
 - But some people don't want to get anyone "in trouble" by reporting these types of incidents.
 - They don't want to be seen as a "tattle-tale", or would like to think that the problem will go away on its own.
- **Making a report is your best opportunity to solve the problem once and for all.**
 - It's a chance for a troubled person to get the help they need, and can often prevent a more serious incident from occurring.
- **You should report any aggressive behavior that you experience or witness to your supervisor, your company's Human Resources Department, or your company's security personnel.**
 - Your company may also have an independent hotline or Employee Assistance Program that allows you to make confidential reports.
 - Make sure your report gets documented for future reference
- **Local law enforcement agencies should also be notified of incidents involving threats of violence or physical assaults.**
- **Another situation that you should report right away is the presence of a weapon in your facility.**
 - Even a licensed, authorized weapon can be very dangerous.
 - If you see one, tell your supervisor, Security personnel or an HR representative.
- **You should report any unfamiliar or unauthorized people that you see as well.**
 - If it turns out that they have been approved to be in the facility, there's no harm done... it's better to be safe than sorry.
- **Any involvement with violence can have serious consequences.**
 - By definition, an "assault" can be an attempt to cause physical injury...or a physical threat to do bodily harm.
- **Even if you aren't the one who starts a fight, you could get injured, suspended or fired...possibly even sued by your assailant.**
 - So try to avoid arguments...and never get caught up in a shouting match.
 - Attempt to resolve disagreements peacefully.
 - Offer a compromise, or suggest asking another person to step in.

- **If an unreasonable or irrational person confronts you...**
 - Remain calm.
 - Keep your arms low, in a non-threatening position.
 - Try to stay at least five feet away.
 - Avoid physical contact.
 - Maintain a soothing tone of voice.
 - Let them know that you understand their concerns...don't judge, argue or disagree.
 - If they become violent, try to get away... or call out for help.
- **Make sure to report any incident of violent behavior to your employer.**
 - Since assault is a crime, local law enforcement agencies should also be informed.
- **These days, "active shooter" situations can occur almost daily.**
 - They can happen in any type of work environment.
- **Any situation that involves a weapon is extremely dangerous and requires special considerations... whether it's a personal dispute, a robbery or something else.**
- **Never confront an armed assailant if you can avoid it. Instead, you should....**
 - Get as far away as possible.
 - Stay low and out of sight.
 - Help others get to safety if you can.
- **In general, don't sound alarms if it will put anyone in danger.**
 - Contact Security or law enforcement personnel only when you can do it safely.
- **If you come face-to-face with an armed assailant, remember that..."The person with the gun is in charge".**
 - Follow their instructions to the letter.
 - Repeat their commands and do as they ask.
 - Don't make any sudden moves, and keep your hands visible at all times.
- **Never resist an armed assailant unless you feel they are going to kill you.**
 - This is the only time it's worth risking your life to fight back.

- **Teaching employees how to recognize the warning signs of potential violence as well as how to handle aggressive behavior is important.**
 - To be as effective as possible in helping employees deal with workplace violence, companies need to be more proactive in their efforts.
- **In 2016, OSHA published a set of guidelines addressing the workplace violence issue for healthcare and social service workers.**
 - While the guidelines focused mainly on facilities such as hospitals and nursing homes, they provide a good roadmap for any kind of environment.
- **The first thing the guidelines recommend is that a company create a written "Workplace Violence Prevention Program", which is built around five core elements.**
- **The first is "management leadership and employee participation".**
 - Everyone in the facility needs to get behind the program and work together to help it succeed.
- **"Hazard identification and assessment" is the second element, and it is critically important.**
 - This is because the potential situations where violence could occur have to be identified in order for solutions to be developed to address them.
- **Next comes "hazard prevention and control".**
 - Once potential "trouble spots" have been identified, employers need to implement appropriate measures to control or eliminate them.
- **The fourth element, "education and training", is extremely important as well, because all employees need to know...**
 - What types of situations are most likely to give rise to workplace violence.
 - What they can do to help guard against workplace violence.
 - What to do if workplace violence occurs.
- **"Recordkeeping and program evaluation" is the final element of a good Workplace Violence Prevention Program.**
 - This program should be monitored on an ongoing basis to assess its effectiveness, identify any new problems that may have developed and implement improved solutions when needed.

- **Your own knowledge is key to:**
 - Identifying situations in your job and locations in the facility that have the potential for violence.
 - Developing ways to address them.
- **Your contribution can be important both in the initial stages of the program as well as on an ongoing basis.**
 - If new tasks or changes in your workplace create additional sources of potential violence, you need to share this information with the people who manage your Violence Prevention Program.

*** * * SUMMARY * * ***

- **The consequences of workplace violence can be serious...and no organization is immune.**
- **Watch for the warning signs of violence, such as mood swings, defensiveness and acting recklessly.**
- **Report incidents of threats, intimidation and sexual or verbal harassment, as well as aggressive and violent behavior.**
- **Try to resolve conflicts peacefully. Remember that fighting causes more problems than it solves.**
- **If you're confronted with violence, escape from your attacker if you can, or try to get help.**
- **Never "fight back" unless you feel that your life is in danger.**
- **Be familiar with your company's "Workplace Violence Prevention Program". If there isn't a program in place, see what you can do to help create one.**
- **Remember, no amount of aggressive or violent behavior is acceptable on the job.**
- **If we all work on it together we can help to prevent workplace violence, and keep ourselves and our coworkers safe...every day!**