



TENNESSEE OFFICE OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Warning Signs of Workplace Violence

Most people think of violence in terms of a physical attack. However, workplace violence can occur in a much broader scope. It can include direct and implied threats, harassment, intimidation, physical assaults, and even murder. Workplace violence affects and can involve not only employees, but clients, customers, and visitors. Unfortunately, no place is immune to the possibility of workplace violence.

Workplace violence may start as a small incident involving inappropriate remarks and behavior. It may escalate to physical or psychological violence. It is extremely important to understand that the following behaviors do not mean a person will necessarily become violent, but they may indicate that the person is experiencing high levels of stress.

Warning signs may include:

- Openly stating their intention to hurt someone else (these statements can be verbal or written).
- Making inappropriate statements.
- Holding personal grudges against others. Verbalizing their desire that something negative will happen to the person against whom he or she has the grudge.
- Excessive or compulsive behavior (e.g. phone calls, gift giving).
- Showing a lack of concern for the safety or well-being of others.
- Preoccupation or fascination with violence and/or dangerous weapons.
- Disrespect or hostility toward authority.
- Argumentative or uncooperative behavior.
- Outbursts of anger or rage with little or no provocation.
- Impulsive or easily frustrated.
- Handling criticism poorly or they cannot take criticism.



- Suspicious of others, believing that others are *'out to get them'*.
- Blaming others for their problems or mistakes. Insistence that he or she is always right.
- Forgetfulness, confusion and/or distraction.
- Marked decline in work performance. Refusal to acknowledge job performance problems.
- Misinterpretation of communications from supervisors or co-workers.
- Feeling victimized. Complaints of unfair personal treatment.
- Talking about the same problems repeatedly without resolving them.
- Believing that they are entitled to something.

Other warning signs may also include:

- Marked changes in mood or behavior
- Extreme or bizarre behavior. Crying, sulking or even having temper tantrums.
- Swearing or emotional language.
- Irrational beliefs and ideas.
- Appears depressed or expresses hopelessness or heightened anxiety.
- Personal hygiene is poor or ignored.
- Excessive absenteeism or lateness.
- Low self-esteem.
- Demonstrates a drastic change in belief systems.
- Socially isolated.

Sometimes it is not what a person says, but it is their "non-verbal" signs or their body language, that might indicate that a person may become violent. These signs may include:

- Flushed or pale face.
- Sweating.
- Pacing, restless, or repetitive movements.
- Signs of extreme fatigue.
- Trembling or shaking.
- Clenched jaws or fists.



- Exaggerated or violent gestures.
- Change in voice, such as the tone.
- Loud talking or chanting.
- Shallow, rapid breathing.
- Scowling, sneering, or use of abusive language.
- Glaring or avoiding eye contact.
- Violating your personal space (they get too close).

Always take particular attention if:

- The frequency and intensity of the behaviors are increasing and/or becoming disruptive.
- The person is exhibiting many of these behaviors, rather than just a few.

Because each situation is unique - behaviors must be taken in context with the situation. However, if you are concerned about another person's behavior, report those concerns to a supervisor, human resources department, or law enforcement.

Sources:

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety. 2014.

United States Department of Homeland Security. 2014.

United States Department of Labor. 2014.