



CIVIL CONVERSATIONS #3

Supervisors: Your Role in Preventing Workplace Violence

Your Behavior and Management Style Can Affect the Office

By exhibiting certain behaviors, or allowing certain behaviors to be exhibited by your employees, you may contribute to a hostile or “unhealthy” work environment. Remember:

1. allowing aggressive or inappropriate conduct without taking action can foster a hostile or threatening work environment, in which employees feel harassed or intimidated.
2. decision-making without employee input or participation can lead to frustrated employees who don’t feel valued as anything but “worker bees.”
3. your staff looks to you to assist in resolving conflicts. You are better equipped to resolve workplace conflicts if both you and your staff have had conflict resolution training.
4. if you are inconsistent or unpredictable, your employees will be unsure of your expectations and become frustrated.
5. engaging in relationships with your employees that are personal or too informal may lead to misunderstandings, as well as other employees feeling alienated.

Be a Good Leader

You can set the direction for establishing a harmonious, productive workplace, which can prevent the potential for workplace violence. Good leadership includes:

- setting a good example for your employees;
- communicating clear standards;
- providing clear rationale underlying your decisions;
- ensuring your employees have the resources and training to do their job;
- getting to know your employees;
- conducting performance counseling
- assisting employees who are having performance problems;
- addressing misconduct promptly;
- availing yourself of advice from Human Resources when you have any questions or concerns, even prior to the need to pursue disciplinary and performance-based actions;
- treating employees fairly and equitably, and applying rules consistently.



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Be on the Lookout for Signs that Can Lead to Workplace Violence:

- a usually outgoing, communicative employee becomes withdrawn and quiet.
- an employee frequently comes in late for work, then is argumentative with coworkers and behaves erratically.
- an employee voices a keen interest in weapons or explosives.
- an employee persists in expressing romantic interest towards a coworker who is obviously not interested.
- an employee suddenly takes no interest in maintaining his or her personal appearance or hygiene.
- an employee makes comments about violent means of dealing with, or coping with, a particular situation.
- an employee talks about “having nothing to lose” or not caring about anything anymore.

In addition to recognizing and responding to potential signs of workplace violence from your employees, remember that customers, patients, relatives or acquaintances of employees or patients, and outsiders can be perpetrators of violent acts or threats.

Be Ready to Act

In emergency situations, dial 911. If located off-campus, you may need to dial 9-911.

When inappropriate behavior occurs, you need to deal with the situation. You need to: gather all of the facts, analyze the immediate situation, involve whatever parties are appropriate to assist you, formulate a plan, and intervene. If you know that someone is in danger, you need to act quickly, but remember that acting too quickly without having the necessary facts can fuel the situation. Call CIVIL (2-4845) for advice and assistance. In any case involving real (immediate) or potential (immediate OR developing) violence, call CIVIL to report the situation after you have called 911. CIVIL will involve the parties appropriate to assist from an NIH team of resources including campus police, the Employee Assistance Program, the Center for Conflict Resolution, and IC representatives.