


# Preventing Violence in the Workplace



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## Introduction and Disclaimer

### CEA – California Employers Association

- Over 75 years of HR support for employers
- On-site, training, compliance, HR Hotline
- Subject Matter Experts

Consult an attorney about any issues of legal significance to you.

**This presentation should not be relied upon as legal advice.**



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## What We'll Cover Today

- Different Types of Violence
- Best Practices for Prevention
- What Your Policy Should Contain
- Deescalating Potential Issues



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## Workplace Violence



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## Types of Workplace Violence

- Criminal intent
- Customer or client
- Worker-on-worker
- Personal Relationship

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## Criminal Intent

Person has no personal or professional relationship to the business or its employees and is usually committing a crime in conjunction with the violence. This can include shoplifting, theft/robbery, trespassing and even terrorism.

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## Customer or Client

- Person has a relationship with the business and becomes violent while doing business – either at the workplace or the person’s own business or residence.
- This can include patients, customers, students or any business that provides service to others.
- This can include police officers, fire fighters, nurses, caregivers, childcare centers/teachers, flight attendants.



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## Worker on Worker

May be a current or former employee who attacks or threatens another employee or former employees in the workplace.



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## Personal Relationship

The person does not have a relationship with the business but has a personal relationship with the victim. This is often based on an issue of domestic violence and/or family disagreements



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## What Would You Do?

- All threats are serious and require some kind of action by the manager
- Actual case: Employee threatens to “turn this place into a Columbine.”
- He’s fired after an investigation
- He sues, arguing he hadn’t made specific threats and was “kidding.” Who wins?



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## The “Just Kidding” Issue

- Employee argues they were ‘just joking’
- Opinions of witnesses matter
- Courts will look out how the threat was perceived



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## Different Employees, Same Threats

- Other employees have made threats
- One employee files a complaint and also makes a threat
- Termination – and then Company is sued
- Consistency is key



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## Coaching Options



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## Discipline: What's Appropriate

- Progressive Discipline
- Repeat offenses warrant tougher discipline
- Document, document
- Not your only option

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## The Counseling Option

- Not just discipline
- Why use counseling?
  - Helps out of control employees
  - Shows Company is interested in improvement
  - Puts responsibility on employee

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## Progressive Discipline - Maybe

- You don't have to take every step
- Talk to HR
- If you "jump over" the system:
  - Be consistent
  - Don't mix in unrelated events
  - Talk to HR again




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## A Real Life Case – “Revenge”

- Angry employee talks about 'guns' and 'revenge'
- Police brought in
- Employee sues
- Who won? Why?




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## Can A Threat Be Justified?

- Take action before threat
- Danger: Ignoring complaints
- Consult with HR when investigations are warranted




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## I'll Stick a Screwdriver in Him!

- Supervisor punishes employee over threat
- Employee sues, argues he was responding to an ignored problem
- Employee wins – because of justified threat



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## Increased Risk Considerations

- Increasing number of mental health issues
- Availability of drugs or money
- Prevalence of handguns and other weapons
- Opioid abuse
- Low staffing levels/healthcare challenges



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## Policies & Procedures



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## Your Violence Prevention Policy

- People look to Management for guidance and support
- Let them know
  - They should report all concerns
  - Take all complaints/reports seriously
  - Discipline appropriately
  - No retaliation




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## Injury Illness Prevention Program




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## OSHA Recommendations

### Violence Prevention Programs

- Management commitment and employee involvement
- Worksite analysis
- Hazard prevention and control
- Safety and health training




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## Management Commitment

- Endorsement & visible involvement of top management
- Organizational concern for emotional and physical safety and health
- Equal commitment to worker safety and health and client safety
- Assigned responsibility for aspects of workplace violence prevention program to ensure all know their obligations



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## Employee Involvement

- Appropriate allocation of authority and resources
- System of accountability for managers, supervisors and employees
- Comprehensive program of medical and psychological counseling and debriefing for employees experiencing and witnessing assaults and other violent acts
- Commitment to support and implement safety and health recommendations



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## Safety Ideas

- Install & maintain alarm systems such as panic buttons, hand-held alarms, noise devices, etc.
- Use closed-circuit video on 24-hour basis
- Place curved mirrors at hallway intersections or concealed areas
- Arrange furniture to prevent entrapment of staff;
- Lock all unused doors to limit access (but be sure to comply with local fire codes); and
- Install bright effective lighting indoors and outdoors.



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## Best Practices

- Tell employees, clients, vendors, etc. that violence is not permitted or tolerated
- Establish liaison with local police. Report all incidents of violence and provide police with physical layouts of facilities to expedite investigation
- Establish a trained response team to respond to emergencies




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## Best Practices

- Institute sign-in procedure with passes for visitors
- Control access to sensitive areas – break areas, tool/equipment, medicine, etc. areas
- Establish policies and procedures for secured areas and emergency evacuations
- Treat or interview aggressive people in relatively open areas that still maintain privacy and confidentiality
- Discuss with employees and supervisors ways to effectively treat potentially violent individuals




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## Safety Ideas

- Discourage wearing jewelry to help prevent strangulation
- Survey facility and remove tools or possessions left by visitors or others that could be used inappropriately
- Provide staff with ID badges, to readily verify employment
- Use the buddy system when personal safety may be threatened




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## Best Practices

- Provide staff with escorts to parking areas in evenings or late hours.
- Conduct comprehensive post-incident evaluation, including psychological and medical treatment, for employees subjected to abusive behavior.




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## Early Warning Signals

- **OMINOUS THREATS**  
Such as *"bad things are going to happen to so and so"* or *"that propane tank in the back could blow up easily."*
- **THREATENING ACTIONS**  
Such as intimidation of others or attempts to instill fear. Menacing gestures and flashing of concealed weapons in the workplace could be ways of testing reactions to their conduct.




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## Early Warning Signals

- **BIZARRE THOUGHTS**  
Such as perceiving that the world is falling apart or expressing a highly overstated sense of entitlement to a promotion that was denied.
- **OBSESSION**  
Which is likely to be expressed by holding a grudge against a coworker or supervisor or, in some cases a fascination with an unrequited romantic interest.




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## Warning Signs To Look For....

- They say they've been treated unfairly
- They say they're being forced to wait for something
- They show signs of mental instability
- They begin to isolate themselves, are thought of as a "loner."
- They have recently been disciplined for something




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## Common Traits of Violent Employees

- History of violent behavior – may include involvement with the criminal justice system
- Upset with only having low-level tasks to do
- Bitter and unhappy
- Sense of no job security
- Substance abuse, including taking heavy medication




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## What Should Management Do?

- Sit down and talk
- Ask other employees how they're doing as well
- Ask employee's manager for suggestions
- Don't try to counsel – refer to professional if needed
- Report




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## Deescalating Potentially Violent Situations



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## Deescalating Potentially Violent Situations – The Do's

- Project calmness: move and speak slowly, quietly and confidently
- Be empathetic listener: encourage to talk and listen patiently
- Maintain relaxed yet attentive posture – position yourself at right angle vs. directly in front
- Acknowledge other person's feelings. Indicate you can see he/she is upset.



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## Deescalating Potentially Violent Situations

- Ask for small, specific favors such as asking person to move to quieter area.
- Establish ground rules if unreasonable behavior persists. Calmly describe consequences of any violent behavior.
- Use delaying tactics which give person time to calm down – offer a drink of water (in disposable cup)



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## Avoiding Violence

- Be reassuring and point out choices. Break big problems into smaller, more manageable problems.
- Accept criticism in a positive way. If criticism seems unwarranted, ask clarifying questions.
- Ask for his/her recommendations. Repeat back to him/her what you feel he/she is requesting of you.
- Arrange yourself so that the person cannot block your access to an exit!!



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## Do Not.....

- Use styles of communication which generate hostility such as apathy, brush off, coldness, robotism, going strictly by the rules, or giving the run-around
- Reject all of a person's demands from the start
- Pose in challenging stances such as directly opposite, hands on hips, crossing arms. Avoid physical contact, finger-pointing, fixed eye contact for long periods.
- Criticize or act impatiently toward the agitated person
- Attempt to bargain with a threatening person



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## Do Not.....

- Try to make the situation seem less serious than it is
- Make false statements or promises you cannot keep
- Try to impart a lot of technical or complicated information when emotions are high
- Take sides or agree with distortions
- Invade personal space. Keep at least 3 to 6 feet between you and the person



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## When Actual Violence Breaks Out: What To Do

When it happens:

- Make sure everyone is OK
- Involve the appropriate authorities
- Documentation - "The 5W's"
- Texts, emails, search options



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## Wrapping Up

- Be aware of different types of violence
- Prevention Do's and Don'ts
- Policy best practices
- IIPP
- Dealing with



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## Questions

This concludes today's sessions



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**Please complete your surveys!**

***Have a Wonderful Day!***



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