

About Work Place Violence

Many work places are at risk for workplace violence and, unfortunately, a University environment is not immune. CSU Channel Islands is committed to preventing workplace violence, and ensuring a safe and healthful work environment for all members of the University community.

Certain campus workplace situations are recognized as presenting significantly greater risks than others. Therefore, every campus office or department should perform an initial assessment to identify its particular workplace security issues. If that assessment determines the University employees are at significant risk, the responsible manager or supervisor should contact the University Police Department.

Is your workplace at risk?

There are a number of factors that have been shown to contribute to the risk of violence in a University workplace. If one or more of the following situations or activities is present in your workplace, then consider your workplace to be at potential risk of violence:

- ✓ Exchange of money
- ✓ Working alone at night and during early morning hours
- ✓ Availability of valued items, e.g., money and jewelry
- ✓ Availability of prescription drugs
- ✓ Working with patients, clients, customers or students known or suspected to have a history of violence
- ✓ Employees or former employees, with a history of assaults or who exhibit belligerent, intimidating or threatening behavior
- ✓ Employees who have been the object of belligerent, intimidating or threatening behavior from family members or significant others

Recognizing Inappropriate Employee Behavior

Inappropriate behavior is often a warning sign of potential hostility or violence. When left unchecked it can escalate to higher levels. Employees who exhibit the following behaviors should be reported to a supervisor for possible disciplinary action in accordance University policy:

- ✓ Unwelcome name-calling, obscene language, and other abusive behavior intimidation through direct or veiled verbal threats.
- ✓ Throwing objects in the workplace regardless of the size or type of object being thrown or whether a person is the target of a thrown object.
- ✓ Physically touching another employee in an intimidating, malicious, or sexually harassing manner. That includes such acts as hitting, slapping, poking, kicking, pinching, grabbing, and pushing.
- ✓ Physically intimidating others including such acts as obscene gestures, "getting in your face" and fist-shaking.

Warning Signs of Potentially Violent Individuals

There are a number of factors that have been shown to contribute to the risk of There is no exact method to predict when a person will become violent. One or more of these warning signs may be displayed before a person becomes violent but does not necessarily indicate that an individual will become violent. A display of these signs should trigger concern as they're usually exhibited by people experiencing problems.

- ✓ Irrational beliefs and ideas.
- ✓ Verbal, nonverbal or written threats or intimidation.
- ✓ Fascination with weaponry and/or acts of violence.
- ✓ Expressions of a plan to hurt himself or others.
- ✓ Externalization of blame.
- ✓ Unreciprocated romantic obsession.
- ✓ Taking up much of supervisor's time with behavior or performance problems.
- ✓ Fear reaction among coworkers/clients.
- ✓ Drastic change in belief systems.
- ✓ Displays of unwarranted anger.

- ✓ New or increased source of stress at home or work.
- ✓ Inability to take criticism.
- ✓ Feelings of being victimized.
- ✓ Intoxication from alcohol or other substances.
- ✓ Expressions of hopelessness or heightened anxiety.
- ✓ Productivity and/or attendance problems.
- ✓ Violence towards inanimate objects.
- ✓ Steals or sabotages projects or equipment.
- ✓ Lack of concern for the safety of others.

Personal Conduct to Minimize Violence

Follow these suggestions in your daily interactions with people to de-escalate potentially violent situations. If at any time a person's behavior starts to escalate beyond your comfort zone, disengage.

DO

- ✓ Project calmness: move and speak slowly, quietly and confidently.
- ✓ Be an empathetic listener: encourage the person to talk and listen patiently.
- ✓ Focus your attention on the other person to let them know you are interested in what they have to say.
- ✓ Maintain a relaxed yet attentive posture and position yourself at a right angle rather than directly in front of the other person.
- ✓ Acknowledge the person's feelings. Indicate that you can see he or she is upset.
- ✓ Ask for small, specific favors such as asking the person to move to a quieter area.

- ✓ Establish ground rules if unreasonable behavior persists. Calmly describe the consequences of any violent behavior.
- ✓ Use delaying tactics which will give the person time to calm down. For example, offer a drink of water (in a disposable cup).
- ✓ Ask uninvolved parties to leave the area to summon help if this can be done safely. Use a prearranged code word to alert your supervisor or co-worker to call the University Police.
- ✓ Be reassuring and point out choices. Break big problems into smaller more manageable problems.
- ✓ Accept criticism in a positive way. When a complaint might be true, use statements like "You're probably right" or "It was my fault." If the criticism seems unwarranted, ask clarifying questions.
- ✓ Ask for his recommendations. Repeat back to him what you feel he is requesting of you.
- ✓ Arrange yourself so that a visitor cannot block your access to an exit.
- ✓ Above all, trust your instincts. If the situation deteriorates to a level where your safety is in jeopardy, escape at the first opportunity and notify the University Police.

DO NOT

- ✓ Use styles of communication which generate hostility such as apathy, brush off, coldness, condescension, robotism, going strictly by the rules or giving the run-around.
- ✓ Reject all of a client's demands from the start.
- ✓ Pose in challenging stances such as standing directly opposite someone, hands on hips or crossing your arms.
- ✓ Avoid any physical contact, finger-pointing or long periods of fixed eye contact.
- ✓ Make sudden movements which can be seen as threatening. Notice the tone, volume and rate of your speech.

- ✓ Challenge, threaten, or dare the individual. Never belittle the person make him/her feel foolish.
- ✓ Criticize or act impatiently toward the agitated individual.
- ✓ Attempt to bargain with a threatening individual.
- ✓ 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 the individual's personal space. Make sure there is a space of 3' to 6' between you and the person.