Establishing a Workplace Violence Prevention Program: The NIH Civil Program

Presented by
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Topics Covered

- Definitions
- Policy and Program Development
- Prevention Strategies
- Training and Outreach
- Additional resources
Workplace Violence

An action that constitutes a threat of harm

Harm to a person or property

Intimidating, bullying, or other disruptive behavior impairs agency operations
Impact on the Individual(s) Involved

- Negative feelings (anxiety, insecurity, fear, etc.)
- Increase in stress level
- Loss of concentration/focus
- Sleep disturbances
- Mental illnesses – onset or flare-ups of existing conditions
- Violent thoughts
Impact on the Organization

- Negatively impacts overall morale
- Decreases productivity
- Increases in the amount of time off due to stress or illness
- Damages the organization’s reputation and/or brand
- Increases legal costs
- Increases resources/time spent by agency staff
- Increases turnover
Develop/Update Related Agency Policy

- Agencies have an inherent right to take action against employees who engage in disruptive or threatening behavior *whether or not* they have issued a written policy statement.
Maintaining a Safe Working Environment

MEMO
September 23, 2015
Francis S. Collins, M.D., Ph.D.
Director, National Institutes of Health

The NIH prioritizes fostering a safe work environment for all employees that is free from violence, threats of violence, bullying, intimidation, or other disruptive behavior. While we have been fortunate that this kind of behavior is uncommon at NIH, no organization remains immune. An effective workplace violence prevention and emergency response plan ensures security for all employees and visitors to all of our facilities.

Workplace violence can include:

- Open verbal abuse (including offensive language)
- Hidden verbal abuse (intended to harm your reputation)
- Acts or deliberate inactions which demean or isolate you, or undermine you and your work (e.g. refusal to include or meet with you or to provide needed information, etc.)
- Threats or intimidations
- Physical assault
- Shaking fists, kicking, pounding on desks, etc.
- Throwing or striking objects
- Damaging or destroying property
- Harassing or stalking
- Concealing or using a weapon

All of these behaviors are unacceptable in the workplace. Violence against employees can occur in a variety of circumstances and can be perpetrated by disgruntled current or former co-workers, domestic partners or spouses, agitated and confused patients or visitors, or members of the public. Workplace violence prevention is everyone's responsibility.

Employees should:

- Contribute to a civil work environment and respect the dignity of every person
- Learn how and encourage others to effectively identify and handle stress and conflict
- Remember that factual, civil, professional criticism of your work is not bullying
- Maintain awareness of security procedures including safeguarding identification badges and taking building access control seriously
- Promptly report malfunctioning doors, locks, or any suspicious incidents
- Promptly report concerning behavior
- Promptly report any domestic violence concerns that may affect the workplace and/or your safety and welfare, so that precautions may be taken and support and resources may be offered

Inappropriate responses to stressful situations by employees and/or supervisors may lead to mounting tension. Timely access to wellness services can help prevent situations from escalating and allow distressed individuals to receive swift and confidential support. Please become familiar with all of the employee resources the NIH offers.
Other Policy Considerations

Keep definitions broad

Avoid the term “Zero Tolerance”, as it may appear to eliminate any flexibility an agency has in dealing with difficult situations

Listen, empathize, and refer to the appropriate resources even if an employee’s concerns do not meet one of the definitions
Workplace Violence Prevention Program

Coordinator(s)
- Conducts in-take interview
- Assesses situation
- Provides advice to employees and management
- Convenes appropriate team members

Response Team
- Develops and carries out agency response to behaviors of concern that may lead to acts of violence, such as bullying, intimidating behavior, threats, suicidal ideation, and domestic violence

Advisory Committee
- Highly specialized staff members
- Advise on policy development, education, and outreach
- Maintain an infrastructure to effectively respond to critical incidents and manage the aftermath to restore the workplace to a productive state
Program Coordinator Role

Utilize available resources using a coordinated response

- Even if your agency does not have a formal interdisciplinary workplace violence program in place, communication between related resources is key
Interdisciplinary Response Team

- Coordinator
- Employee & Labor Relations
- Security, Police, & Emergency Mgmt
- Leadership
- EEO and/or Legal Counsel
- Employee Assistance Program
- Conflict Resolution/Mediation
Additional Response Team Considerations

External Agency Contacts
- Develop and maintain relationships with peers in other agencies to share best practices

Local Police
For locations without an internal Police Department or not covered by the Federal Protective Service
- Develop and maintain contacts within the local Police Department to be part of the team to recommend security measures and participate in information sharing

Community Resources
- Develop and maintain a list of community resources including mental health crisis centers, crisis hotlines, shelters, and other applicable resources
Prevention Strategies

Alternative Discipline
• Rehabilitation vs. penalty

Alternative Dispute Resolution
• Effective communication

Soft Landings
• Manage removals in a manner that minimizes the ability to use revenge as a reason to do harm

Training and Outreach
• Ensure staff have the tools and information available to them to effectively respond to conflict
Prevention Strategy: Alternative Discipline

Benefits

- Rehabilitation vs. penalty
- Ensures utilization of EAP services and other resources
- Encourages communication
- Benefits long term relationship of employee and supervisor
- Prevents loss of productivity and reduction of pay
- Does not go on employee’s official personnel record
Prevention Strategy: Alternative Dispute Resolution

Most agencies have an office that deals with conflict resolution, communication facilitation, and mediation.

- Excellent partner in preventing and managing conflict
- Provides a neutral, confidential third party who can assist in improving communication and resolving conflict
- Provides training on communication strategies, conflict resolution techniques, and collaboration
Prevention Strategy: Soft Landings

Options may include:

• Option to resign or retire
• Time to find new position (i.e., allow them to deplete leave balances, etc.)
• Extended access to Employee Assistance Program or other resources
• Career counseling
• Neutral reference
• A single point of contact in the HR office to coordinate
• Other creative options to preserve dignity and their ability to move on
Prevention Strategy: Training and Outreach for Staff

Ensure your agency provides training to all staff on the following topics:

- Agency’s workplace violence policy and procedures
- Where and how to report incidents of disruptive behavior
- Available internal and external resources
- Preventing or diffusing volatile situations or aggressive behavior
- Conflict resolution
- Stress management, relaxation techniques, and wellness
- How to effectively respond to an Active Shooter scenario
- Security procedures including shelter-in-place, evacuation, etc.
Understanding Bullying

- Repeated aggressive behavior
- Intent to harm
- Power Imbalance

Bullying

- Open or hidden verbal abuse
- Actions or inactions meant to demean, isolate, or undermine
What is NOT Bullying?

**Supervisory Duties**
- Managers communicating expectations, assigning work, providing feedback, or taking administrative action

**Rude or Inconsiderate**
- Inadvertently saying or doing something that hurts someone else

**Mean**
- Purposefully saying or doing something to hurt someone once or twice

**Individual Differences**
- Different communication styles or different values

Office of Human Resources
National Institutes of Health
Office of Management
No single behavior in and of itself suggests greater potential for violence

| Direct or veiled threats of harm to self or others | Intimidating, belligerent, bullying, or other inappropriate or aggressive behavior | Refusing to cooperate with or consistently arguing with supervisors, peers, or customers | Fascination with incidents of workplace violence | Extreme changes in behavior |
Training and Outreach for Supervisors

Strong leadership training that promotes creating a healthy, productive workplace can also help prevent potentially violent situations.

Basic Employee and Labor Relations training and procedures often include interventions that defuse difficult situations.
Training and Outreach for Supervisors

As with Employee Relations, supervisors don’t need to be experts in preventing workplace violence, but they must have:

- A willingness to seek advice from the appropriate agency resources

An understanding and appreciation for the value of that guidance
Training and Outreach for Supervisors

- Address behavioral or safety concerns as soon as possible with support from the most appropriate NIH resources
- Do not diagnose or provide medical advice regardless of health care credentials or other expertise
- Maintain clear professional boundaries to reduce potential liability
Emergency Response – When to Call 911

- Recurrent verbal altercations and/or physical fights
- Destruction of property
- Threatens or attempts harm to self or others
- Commits assault, arson, or other serious illegal act
Supervisors’ and Employees’ Responsibilities

See Something
Say Something

- Trusted friend
- Supervisory chain
- Administrative Officer or HR Liaison
- Agency Resources/Response Team
Resources

Office of Intramural Training & Education
301-496-2427
https://www.training.nih.gov/home

Occupational Medical Service
301-496-4411
www.ors.od.nih.gov/sr/dohs/OccupationalMedical/

Employee Assistance Program
301-496-3164
www.ors.od.nih.gov/sr/dohs/EAP/Pages/index.aspx

Office of the Ombudsman
301-594-7231
http://ombudsman.nih.gov/

NIH Civil Program
301-402-4845
http://hr.od.nih.gov/hrguidance/civil/

Division of Police
301-496-5685
Emergency - 911
www.ors.od.nih.gov/ser/dp
What Else Can You Do?

Control your interactions with others

Treat others with dignity and respect

Build awareness of available resources

Speak up when you see something that is concerning
Best Practices - Guidance

OPM’s Guide on Workplace Violence Prevention


OPM’s Guidance on Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, and Stalking


Responding to Domestic Violence: Where Federal Employees Can Find Help

Best Practices - Reading

- The Gift of Fear and Other Survival Signals that Protect Us From Violence by Gavin De Becker

- Choosing Civility: The Twenty-Five Rules of Considerate Conduct by P.M. Forni
  - [http://krieger.jhu.edu/civility/choosingcivility.html](http://krieger.jhu.edu/civility/choosingcivility.html)

- Mental Health First Aid® USA Manual & Training
Contact Information

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For more information, please visit
http://hr.od.nih.gov/hrguidance/civil