

## **WORKPLACE VIOLENCE:** *Recognizing The Threat*

### **PROGRAM SYNOPSIS:**

Whether it's bullying, harassment or actual physical violence, workplace violence is something that must be taken seriously. The first step in preventing workplace violence is recognizing the potential for violent behavior in an individual before it escalates to a violent action.

This program helps us understand what signs to notice in a potentially violent person and what actions we should take if and when we feel the threat of violent behavior.

### **PROGRAM OUTLINE:**

#### **OPENING SEQUENCE**

- The program opens with a potentially violent employee, Dan, complaining about his computer. "This thing won't even turn on now! Are you kidding me?" he asks a co-worker. "You get a brand new computer, and I got to work with this? I swear to God, if they keep treating me like this, they're going to be sorry."
- "So when Angie came home late last night, I swear to God, she's cheating on me. If I find out, I'm going to kill her!" Dan exclaims to the same co-worker.
- "What did you say?" asks another co-worker who overheard the conversation.
- "Nobody's talking to you," Dan responds. "She's dead."
- "Dude, what are you doing?" asks another co-worker. "I asked for help like a half hour ago."
- "Yeah, get out of my face! You're not my boss, okay? Get the [expletive] out of here!" yells Dan.
- Their boss, Bo, overhears this interaction and intervenes. "Hey, hey, hey, you guys, take it easy! Cool off; you're getting a little hot here!"
- "Yeah, because he's trying to tell me what to do! Yeah, yeah, I quit!" shouts Dan.
- We then see Dan's girlfriend Angie responding to his cheating accusations. "I swear, I was out with my friends," she says.
- Dan then calls her at work. Angie answers the phone and says, "Hello? Hello? You have to stop calling me! I'm calling the police."

#### **WORKING TOGETHER TO PREVENT WORKPLACE VIOLENCE**

- Violence, or the potential for violence in the workplace, is something that needs to be taken seriously. Whether it is emotional or physical bullying, intimidation or physical violence, employers and employees must be alert and work together to prevent violence in the workplace.
- Disagreements and misunderstandings will always happen, but the goal of your workplace is to foster a respectful environment where differences are resolved peacefully.
- Good communication can help resolve misunderstandings and differences of opinion, but, at times, there are signs and signals that an individual's statements or behaviors indicate the potential for actual violence.

#### **THE IMPORTANCE OF SPEAKING UP**

- Generally, individuals do not become violent unexpectedly. They usually show signs of potentially violent behavior over time. The most important thing we can do to prevent a possibly violent situation is to speak up when we see something that makes us uncomfortable.
- "I swear, if they keep treating me like this, somebody's going to be real sorry!" yells Dan about his computer.

- “I swear to God she's cheating on me. If I find out, I'm going to kill her!” he shouts about Angie.
- If a co-worker begins exhibiting signs of potentially aggressive or violent behavior, it's important that you bring it to the attention of a supervisor, before it escalates into violence!
- “Hey, what's up, Rick?” asks Bo when Rick voices his concerns about Dan.
- “Well, I'm a little concerned about Dan,” replies Rick.
- “Yeah?” says Bo.
- “I know he likes to kid around, but...” Rick responds.

### **COMMON SIGNS OF A TROUBLED INDIVIDUAL**

- Some of the more common signs to look for in a troubled individual are fairly noticeable and include erratic mood swings or paranoid behavior, talk of dire financial, domestic, or health problems, talk of previous violence against a person or empathy with individuals committing violence, even worse, talk of harming someone or excessive talk about firearms, weapons, or crimes; noticeable decline in appearance or hygiene, increased use of alcohol and/or illegal drugs; continuous or repeated violations of company policies.
- “Hey, hey, Dan, we got to talk. You've been showing up lately, the last week and a half late for work,” says Rick. “And that's causing some problems, and, you know, Colleen mentioned the other morning that she thought she smelled alcohol on your breath when you showed up, so, we got to talk.”
- “Hi, Dan! Come on in. Let's talk about what's been going on here,” says the human resources manager when Rick and Dan meet her in her office.
- Realize that if these behaviors are recognized, they can often be managed and treated before violence erupts. It's important to be aware that violence can be committed in your workplace, not just by a current or former employee, but also by a friend, relative or someone who knows a current employee.

### **NOTIFYING MANAGEMENT OF POTENTIAL THREATS**

- “Hello? Hello? You have to stop calling me! I'm calling the police,” says Angie in response to Dan’s phone call.
- “Angie, Angie, who was that?” asks a co-worker.
- “I swear, I was out with my friends. I'm not lying!” remembers Angie during an argument with Dan.
- “Angie, Angie, I said, who was that?” asks another co-worker.
- Angie was reluctant to respond her co-worker, but decided to speak with her supervisor Kristen about Dan’s behavior.
- Although it may be difficult to discuss, if you feel threatened or have a restraining order against someone, please notify your supervisor or human resource department, so they can be aware of potential threats against you or the company.

### **ESCALATION OF TENSION**

- Violent situations may erupt suddenly, but often they are the result of an escalation of tension. An early sign of this tension can be frustration and impatience.
- “Hey, Dan, did you know the welder's broken?” Dan’s co-worker asks.
- “I didn't break it!” exclaims Dan.

- “I didn't say you did; I just saw you working on it yesterday. I thought maybe you'd know what happened,” responds his co-worker.
- “Well, I don't. It wasn't broken yesterday,” Dan says. “Maybe you did something wrong?”
- “Dude, what's your problem?” asks his co-worker.
- “You are!” yells Dan.

### **PROPER RESPONSE TO POTENTIALLY VIOLENT BEHAVIOR**

- If you are confronted by a person who is upset, it is important to not escalate the situation. Listen attentively to the person, ask simple questions to clarify your understanding of their concerns, if necessary.
- “I didn't break it!” shouts Dan.
- “Sorry, I didn't mean to sound like I'm accusing you; I thought maybe you'd know what happened” responds his co-worker.
- “Welding's not rocket science!” counters Dan.
- “You're right; you just know more about it than I do. Can you help me troubleshoot?” his co-worker asks.
- “I'm busy. Maybe if you hadn't spent so much time flirting with Anna, you could have figured it out yourself,” Dan replies.
- If necessary, bring a second party into the discussion to reason with the person.
- “Nancy Drew over here's trying to figure out the case of the broken welder!” yells Dan. “Well, if she doesn't leave me alone, I'm going to break something else.”
- If the person shows signs of aggression, you need to adjust your response immediately. Don't offer solutions at this point. Maintain a safe, reasonable distance, keep arms lowered and non-threatening. Disengage from the person and leave the area, if possible.
- “Why don't you just take a minute and head over there and cool down for a second,” Bo says to Dan. “You and I, let's take a look at that welder, okay?” says Bo to the co-worker.
- Don't wait for an uncomfortable situation to escalate into an act of violence. If you see something or experience something that makes you uncomfortable, talk to your supervisor, and, if necessary, your HR department.
- Remember, the first step in preventing a violent incident is to recognize the threat.

## **PREPARE FOR THE SAFETY MEETING**

Review each section of this Leader's Guide as well as the program. Here are a few suggestions for using the program:

Make everyone aware of the importance the company places on health and safety and how each person must be an active member of the safety team.

Introduce the program. Play it without interruption. Review the program content by presenting the information in the program outline.

Copy the review questions included in this Leader's Guide and ask each participant to complete them.

Make an attendance record and have each participant sign the form. Maintain the attendance record and each participant's test paper as written documentation of the training performed.

Here are some suggestions for preparing your video equipment and the room or area you use:

Check the room or area for quietness, adequate ventilation and temperature, lighting and unobstructed access.

Check the seating arrangement and the audiovisual equipment to ensure that all participants will be able to see and hear the program.

## **CONDUCTING THE PRESENTATION**

Begin the meeting by welcoming the participants. Introduce yourself and give each person the opportunity to become acquainted if there are new people joining the training session.

Explain that the primary purpose of the program is to help viewers understand what signs to notice in a potentially violent person and what actions they should take if and when they feel the threat of violent behavior.

Introduce the program. Play it without interruption. Review the program content by presenting the information in the program outline.

Lead discussions about your organization's specific policies and procedures for handling threats of workplace violence.

After watching the program, the viewer should be able to explain the following:

- Why employees and management must work together to prevent workplace violence;
- Why it is important to speak up when noticing signs of threatening behavior;
- What the common signs of a troubled individual are;
- How to properly respond to aggressive and threatening conduct.

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**REVIEW QUIZ**

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

*The following questions are provided to check how well you understand the information presented during this program.*

1. Good communication can help with disagreements.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
2. The goal of your workplace is to have a safe, productive atmosphere.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
3. Potentially violent individuals rarely show signs of danger.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
4. What are some potential signs that a person may become violent?
  - a. Talk of past violence.
  - b. Threats of violence against another person.
  - c. Use of illegal drugs or alcohol at work.
  - d. All of the above.
  
5. If you have a restraining order against someone or feel threatened by someone outside of work, you should bring it to the attention of your supervisor.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
6. Use of illegal drugs or alcohol in the workplace can be sign of a potentially troubled individual.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
7. If a coworker begins to show signs of physical aggression towards you, it's best to respond forcefully to show them you're not intimidated.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
8. What should you do if a coworker shows signs of potential violence?
  - a. Ignore it.
  - b. Ask them what their problem is.
  - c. Report it to a supervisor or HR.

***ANSWERS TO THE REVIEW QUESTIONS***

1. a

2. a

3. b

4. d

5. a

6. a

7. b

8. c