

# VIOLENCE PREVENTION BROCHURE: MAINTAINING A SAFE WORKPLACE

---

**IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY DIAL 9-9-1-1  
(You must give the Dispatcher your location)**

## **Preventing and Responding to Disruptive, Threatening, or Violent Behavior**

Workplace safety has become a major concern to managers and employees alike. Media attention has resulted in fear and apprehension, yet violence is less common than popularly believed. Given the many millions of workers in the US, the probability is very low that any single individual will be involved in a violent workplace incident leading to serious injury or death.

Still, prevention is critical because even with a low probability of something happening, the consequences of just one incident can be devastating. Early intervention, awareness, and some knowledge about the topic can help to prevent more serious acts from occurring.

In 1994 the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health issued Guidelines for Workplace Security, which require employers to include, as part of their safety program, measures designed to make the workplace more secure from acts of violence.

The following information is provided to highlight stressors and risks in the work environment to enhance workplace safety, and to reduce and prevent disruption and violence.

We present this information, not with the expectation that an incident will occur, but with the expectation that with sufficient knowledge and preparation, we can minimize and avoid such events.

## **What Is Disruptive, Threatening or Violent Behavior?**

Solano County's policy prohibits the disruption and obstruction of County functions and operations caused by verbal threats and behavior that endangers the health and safety of any individual.

Disruptive behavior also disturbs, interferes with or prevents normal work flow, functions and activities. Examples: yelling, profanity, verbally abusing others, and refusing reasonable requests for identification.

Threatening behavior includes physical actions, short of actual contact/injury (for example, aggressively moving closer into someone else's "space"), yelling or general verbal or written threats ["You better watch your back," or "I'll get you."], as well as implicit threats ["you'll be sorry"; "I know where you live," or "this isn't over"].

Violent behavior includes any physical assault, with or without weapons; behavior that a reasonable person would interpret as being aggressive or potentially violent [e.g., throwing things, pounding one's fists on a desk, or destroying property], or specific threats to inflict physical harm [e.g., a threat to shoot a person].

### Preventive Steps to Maintain a Safe Workplace

Workplaces prone to disruptive incidents are often characterized by high levels of unresolved conflict and poor communication. Conflict at work is normal, but must be addressed promptly and effectively, not avoided or suppressed.

Disruptive behavior can be reduced or prevented by facilitating a workplace environment that promotes healthy, positive means of airing and resolving problems (methods that do not disrupt the workplace or frighten others). It is also essential to improve the conflict management skills of managers and staff, to set and enforce clear standards of conduct, and to provide help (e.g., counseling) to address conflicts early.

### Dealing with Performance Problems or Conflicts

- **Intervene promptly;** don't let the situation fester.
- **Contact Employee and Labor Relations 784.3554** to gather information about your rights and responsibilities as a manager before meeting with those involved.
- **Contact EAP 800-242-6220** regarding coaching and counseling around behaviors in difficult situations
- **Be clear about the facts of the problem** as you perceive them to be.
- **Ask individuals involved to describe their perceptions** of the problem (if it is appropriate).
- **Set clear expectations for improvement** in job performance or in the relationship.
- **Assess additional needed resources** and seek outside help as necessary.
- **Follow up to be sure that your expectations are met** and directed changes are made.

Employee and Labor Relations and Human Resource Analysts can explain policies and procedures for performance problems, including corrective action. EAP can provide referrals for counseling, suggest and facilitate approaches to problems with employees or intra-office conflicts, and provide support to staff that feel endangered or threatened by workplace situations or personal conflicts. These resources can provide "coaching" on how to handle the problem, or if you prefer, intervene directly on your behalf. The key to prevention is creating a work environment that confronts problems BEFORE they escalate. **Ignoring the problem will not make it go away!**

## **Workplace Violence Response Team**

Sometimes problems involve not only employees in your department or division. The County has established a response team to help managers effectively deal with high-level situations that cannot be resolved at the local level. The core team includes representatives from the:

- Sheriff's Office
- EAP
- Mental Health
- Human Resources
- Employment and Labor Relations
- Risk Management
- County Counsel (advisor)

The team can advise supervisors and managers regarding potentially violent or risky situations. To contact the team, telephone any member below and request a consultation.

**Employment and Labor Relations 784.3554**

**Human Resources 784.6180**

**Risk Management 784.2962**

Consultation, intervention, and referral for assistance can diffuse a tense situation and prevent it from becoming disruptive or violent. Compliance with personnel policies and procedures, your specific departmental procedures, and labor/management agreements are essential.

# Indicators of Problem Behavior

---

Below is a list of behaviors and attitudes that may be indicators of disruptive, threatening, or violent behavior. If you observe a pattern of such behaviors and attitudes causing concern, please call a member of the Crisis Response Team for consultation.

## Behaviors

- Upset over recent event(s), whether work or personal crisis
- Recent major change in behavior, demeanor, appearance
- Recently has withdrawn from normal activities, family, friends, co-workers
- Intimidates, is verbally abusive, harasses or mistreats others
- Challenges, resists authority
- Blames others for problems in life or work, suspicious, holds grudges
- Uses and/or abuses drugs and/or alcohol
- Obsesses about a coworker, or makes unwelcome obsessive romantic overtures
- Stalks a coworker
- Makes threats to harm self, others, or property
- Has or is fascinated with weapons
- Has a known history of violence
- Has communicated specific proposed act(s) of disruption or violence

## Attitudes

- Is isolated or a loner
- Feels morally superior, self-righteous
- Feels entitled to special rights and that rules do not apply to him or her
- Feels wronged, humiliated, degraded – wants revenge
- Believes there are no choices or options for action, except violence

# How to Respond to Disruptive, Threatening or Violent Behavior

---

## **STEP 1: General response to disruptive behavior (no threats or weapons)**

1. Respond quietly and calmly. Try to defuse the situation.
2. Do not take the behavior personally. Usually, the behavior has little to do with you, but you are used as a target in the situation.
3. Ask questions. Respectful concern and interest may demonstrate that aggression is not necessary.
4. Consider offering an apology. Even if you've done nothing wrong, an apology may calm the individual and encourage cooperation. "I'm sorry that happened. What can we do now that will solve the problem?"
5. Summarize what you hear the individual saying. Make sure you are communicating clearly. In crisis a person feels humiliated and wants respect and attention. Your summary of the individual's concerns reflects your attention. Focus on areas of agreement to help resolve the concern.
6. If this approach does not stop the disruption, assess whether the individual seems dangerous. If, in your best judgment, he or she is upset, but not a threat, set limits and seek assistance as the situation dictates.

## **STEP 2: If Step 1 response is ineffective, and individual DOES NOT seem dangerous**

1. Calmly and firmly set limits. Such as "Please lower your voice. There will be no disruptions in this office." "Please be patient so that I can understand what you need and try to help you."
2. Ask the individual to stop the behavior and warn that official action may be taken. "Disruption is subject to County action. Stop, or you may be reported."
3. If the disruption continues despite a warning, tell the individual that the discussion is over, and direct them to leave the office. "Please leave now. If you don't leave, we will call the Police."
4. If the individual refuses to leave after being directed to do so, state that this refusal is also a violation. (Subject to discipline, or arrest)

### **STEP 3: If Step 1 response is ineffective, and individual seems dangerous**

1. If possible, find a quiet, safe place for you to talk with them, but do not isolate yourself with an individual you believe may pose a danger. Maintain a safe distance (two arm lengths), do not turn your back, and stay seated, if possible. Leave the door open or open a closed door and sit near the door opening. Be sure a co-worker is near to help, if necessary.
2. Use a calm, non-confrontational approach to defuse the situation. Indicate your desire to listen and understand the problem. Allow the person to describe the problem.
3. NEVER touch the individual yourself to try to remove him or her from the area. Even a gentle push or holding the person's arm may be interpreted as an assault by an agitated individual who may respond with aggression, or file a lawsuit later.
4. Set limits to indicate the behavior needed to deal with the concern. "Please lower your voice." "Please stop shouting or I'll have to ask you to leave." "I want to help you, but I can't concentrate when you're yelling at me."
5. Signal for assistance. The individual may be antagonized if you call for assistance, so use a prearranged "distress" signal or code to have another staff member check on you. If you need help, the co-worker would then know to alert your supervisor and/or the police.
6. Do not mention discipline or the police, if you fear an angry, aggressive, or violent response.
7. If the situation escalates, find a way to excuse yourself and leave the room or area, and get help.

### **IN AN EMERGENCY**

For crimes in progress, violent incidents or specific threats of imminent violence should be reported immediately to 9-911. Use a phone out of sight or hearing of the individual. The police or sheriff will respond and take appropriate action.

Examples include:

- The individual makes threats of physical harm toward you, others, or to him or herself.
- The individual has a weapon.
- The individual behaves in a manner that causes you fear for your own or another's safety.

Do not attempt to intervene physically or deal with the situation yourself. Use the "Run, Hide, Fight" instructions provided by the Department of Homeland Security.

# Post Incident Response

---

When a violent incident occurs, many may be affected: the victim, witnesses, bystanders, as well as friends, relatives, and co-workers of those involved in or witnessing the event.

To avoid long-term emotional difficulties following a violent event, certain follow-up interventions must take place. Please call EAP at 800-242-6220, and also feel free to consult with Risk Management staff at 707-784-2962.

## **Resources:**

Sheriff Dispatch (non-emergency) 421-7090; (emergency) 9-911

Employee Assistance Program 800-242-6220

Risk Management 784-2962

Employee and Labor Relations 784- 2448