

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FRESNO

Workplace
Violence



A Guide
for
Employees

California State University, Fresno is concerned about the personal safety and security of its students, employees and guests. University policy does not tolerate violence, threats of violence and acts of aggression against members of the university community or visitors. It is the responsibility of our faculty, staff and students to report acts or threats of violence to the university police department and/or to appropriate supervisory personnel. Any student, faculty or staff who engages in behavior which violates this policy will be subject to appropriate university disciplinary actions, and may be subject to applicable civil or criminal legal action as well.

Recognizing the warning signs

The most important line of defense is to combine preventive human resource practices with close attention to the warning signs for the prediction of violent behavior. Faculty, staff and supervisors or managers must take a proactive approach that includes understanding:

- What behaviors are involved.
- Current university practice.
- Each person's role in responding promptly and tactfully.
- How to maintain smooth department operations while ensuring everyone's safety.

Acts of aggression include verbal or physical action intended to intimidate, create fear or apprehension of bodily harm or threaten the safety of an administrator, faculty or staff, student, or the public.

Acts of violence include any intentional or reckless act that causes injury to an administrator, faculty or staff members, student, or the public.

Examples of behaviors that require intervention are:

- Any verbal or physical action intended to create fear or apprehension of bodily harm.
- Behavior or actions interpreted by a reasonable person as carrying potential for violence and/or acts of aggression (throwing objects, waving fists, destroying property, etc.).
- Any threat to harm another individual or to in anyway endanger the safety of others.
- Any threat to destroy property.
- Behavior that might signal emotional distress.
- Evidence of alcohol or other drug abuse.
- Harassing or demeaning comments or jokes or sexual or ethnic slurs intended to provoke another person.

The causes of aggression and violence are complex and beyond these guidelines. Individuals who are at a higher risk may have a history of violence, a current mental illness, a substance abuse problem, or are responding to accumulation or life and workplace stresses. Mental health, police, and human resource professionals are available on campus and able to provide “profiles” of potentially dangerous individuals. They can assist you in assessing potential risk and advise you on appropriate steps to take.

What to do in an emergency

All threats and acts of aggression or violence **must be taken seriously and addressed immediately**. Each incident is different and requires a response based on the actual situation and facts. However, the following general recommendations can be used by anyone who may encounter an actual or potential situation:

Remain calm. If someone is edging out of control, voice is rising, tone is becoming threatening, or nonverbal cues suggest imminent physical violence, above all remain calm. Assure the person that everything possible will be done to meet his/her needs, and offer to let him/her speak to your supervisor. Summon your supervisor for assistance; often just talking to someone else tends to defuse volatile situations.

Direct the involved parties to leave the scene of a confrontation, if this can be done safely. If the threatening or aggressive person does not agree to leave, do not try to physically force the person to leave. Do not touch the person or invade his/her personal space, Keep a safe distance of three to six feet.

Never challenge, try to bargain, or make promises you cannot keep with a threatening individual. Avoid any type of challenging stance (hands on hips, face-to-face, eye-to-eye, toe-to-toe).

Moderate the tone, volume, and rate of your verbal communication. Try to listen empathetically to what the person is really saying. Respect his/her perceptions and concerns.

Contact the University Police (**Call 911**) for assistance at the first opportunity

Make every effort to get others out of the immediate area until the involved parties leave the scene. Position yourself, if possible, so that an exit route is readily accessible to you.

If a weapon is involved, calmly ask the person to put it in a neutral location while you continue to talk with him/her. Never attempt to disarm or restrain an armed person. **Call 911 immediately**.

Contact Human Resources, Academic Personnel, or Dean of Students as appropriate, for advice on policies, procedures and any disciplinary action to be taken.

What to expect when it's over

When aggressive acts or violence occurs, the management of the situation will affect department operations, morale, and the response of those involved. As an employee, you can support your manager in carrying out several responsibilities:

Consulting

- After the safety of the workplace has been restored, the facts, details, and the names of witnesses need to be provided to the appropriate parties (University Police, Human Resources, Employee Assistance Program, Deans, and Department Heads). These offices will help in determining what is needed to return your workplace to normal operations.

Providing emotional support

- Managers need to provide reassurance to those affected that the problem is being addressed. Help your manager control rumors and calm the environment. Remember that coworkers and others can benefit from crisis intervention and debriefing services through the Employee Assistance Program.

Arranging for security

- Your manager will arrange to secure the building, retrieve an employee's keys and contact University Police when an employee is not authorized to return to work. Support your manager in these measures.

References

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- "Managing a Violent Person," J. Kettlely, L. Rizo, UNNC Training Program, 1993.
- "Non-violent Crisis Intervention," National Crisis Prevention Institute, Inc. 3315-K North 124th Street, Brookfield, Wisconsin 53005.
- "Prevention and/or Coping with Violence in the Workplace," The Wellness Group. Inc. and The Public Safety Committee of the Greater Detroit Chamber of Commerce, 1993.
- "Supervisory Guidelines for Threat and Violence Management" University of Michigan, Faculty and Staff Assistance Program.
- "Trauma in the Workplace: Risks, Cost, Solutions" D. Chadwick, M. Braverman, S. Braverman, Betterley Risk Management Commentary, Vol 13, No 3, 4th Quarter, 1992
- "Violence in the Workplace / Threat Management, W. Durkin, Ph.D., EAP Manager. ARCO, Los Angeles, CA., 1993.
- "When Employees Make Good on Bad Intentions," R. Yandrick, EAPA Exchange, September 1993.

Violence in the workplace

Nationally, threats and acts of violence in the workplace are increasing both in frequency and severity. Homicides, like the recent post office shootings, are the extremes, although all threats and acts of aggression or violence must be taken seriously and given high priority due to the unknown risk.

Our university cannot be removed from the social tensions identified as precipitating factors in some of these incidents of workplace violence. Administrators, faculty or staff members, and students often experience anxiety and confusion over what to do when they encounter potential or actual violence at the university. These guidelines will introduce you to methods and basic information on workplace violence and threats.

We cannot predict violence with absolute certainty, but we can evaluate the risk potential, reduce that risk, and affect the outcome. Risk is increased when behavioral indicators are ignored. Job loss, disciplinary matters, grievances, and the way in which they are handled can be major stresses in some cases of workplace violence.

The circumstances associated with workplace violence can be divided into three major types:

- When an outside person has no legitimate relationship to the workplace and enters the workplace to commit a robbery, assault or other criminal act.
- When the verbally aggressive or assaultive person is a recipient or the object of service by the affected workplace victim (e.g., the assailant is a current or former student, customer, client, criminal suspect, etc.)
- When the person has an employment-related involvement with the workplace (usually involves an assault by a current or former employee, supervisor or manager; a current/former spouse or lover; a relative or friend; or some other person who has a dispute with an employee of the workplace).

Who can help you?

In addition to reporting acts of workplace violence or aggression immediately to your supervisor, you may contact other members of the campus community who can assist your assessment and successful resolution of the potential threat. If appropriate, these individuals may activate the university's Violence Response Team.

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