

Preventing workplace violence— Information for personnel

The key definitions

Workplace violence is a broad term that includes any act where a person is abused, threatened, intimidated or assaulted in his or her employment by an individual or individuals, inside or outside the organization.ⁱ

Types of workplace violence are:

- **Threatening behaviour** - shaking fists, damaging or destroying property, throwing objects, stalking, pranks, anger-related incidences.
- **Verbal or written threats** – expressing an intent to inflict physical harm or threatening a person’s position, job, promotion or property.
- **Harassment** – discrimination-based behaviour that demeans, embarrasses, humiliates, annoys, alarms or verbally abuses a person and that is known to be, or would be expected to be, unwelcome. Find out what characteristics are protected from discrimination by human rights legislation in your area at www.redcross.ca/protectionlegislation.
- **Sexual harassment** – words or actions that cross another person’s sexual boundaries.
- **Verbal abuse** - swearing, rumours, insults and condescending language.
- **Physical assault** – hitting, shoving, pushing, punching, kicking, attempted murder.

Preventing workplace violenceⁱⁱ

1. **Assess your work environment:** Critically examine all areas of your work environment, including parking lots, entryways, reception areas, work areas, and offices. Is the lighting adequate? Are there convenient escape routes? Do you have a method to summon assistance?
2. **Pay attention to the warning signs:** Many people who become violent communicate their intentions in advance. Threats from customers, current or former co-workers, or third parties should be reported immediately.
3. **Promote respect:** The best way to prevent violence in the workplace is to foster a day-to-day attitude of respect and consideration in your work environment for co-workers and clients.
4. **Eliminate potential weapons:** Take a mental inventory of objects in your work area that could potentially be used as weapons. Remove or secure objects that could be thrown.
5. **Know your violence response procedures:** Violence Response Procedures are simple plans designed to minimize injury during a violent incident. These procedures should include a plan to summon assistance and move people to a safe area.

6. **Trust your instincts:** Don't ignore your internal warning system. If you sense impending danger, react accordingly.
7. **Use a team approach:** If you are in a situation where hostility could occur, use the "buddy system."
8. **Educate personnel—all staff, managers, senior leadership, volunteers, board and governance members, interns, and contract staff:** All personnel should receive education on the organization's code of conduct; what violence, abuse, harassment and bullying are; how to prevent violence; to whom to report concerns; and the organization's abuse, violence, bullying and harassment policies.

Workplace violence prevention legislation

Most Canadian jurisdictions have a "general duty provision" in their Occupational Health & Safety (OHS) legislation. The general duty provision requires all employers to take all reasonable precautions to protect the health and safety of employees, including protecting employees from a known risk of workplace violence.ⁱⁱⁱ

Jurisdictions in Canada with specific workplace violence prevention regulations include: Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Quebec (under psychological harassment) and Canadian federally regulated workplaces (organizations that fall under the Canada Labour Code, Part II). Read the workplace violence prevention regulations in your area at www.redcross.ca/protectionlegislation.

Contact local authorities to find out more about the specific laws applicable to violence in your jurisdiction.

Responding to workplace violence

Some workplace violence may involve criminal acts and therefore must be reported to the legal authorities. Harassment is a human rights issue while bullying is a relationship issue—but each may constitute criminal behaviour in some circumstances.

However, many forms of harassment and bullying can be handled within an organization using policies and procedures.

Guidelines for response to workplace violence are:

1. Know the laws and your workplace's policies
2. Follow the reporting guidelines established by your workplace

3. IF YOU ARE A TARGET OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE:
 - First, ensure your safety
 - Tell someone you trust
 - Report according to workplace policies
 - Document what happened—facts, locations, dates
 - Adhere to confidentiality guidelines.

4. IF YOU SEE OR HEAR AN INCIDENT OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE happening to someone else:
 - Make sure the person targeted is safe
 - Report according to workplace policies
 - Document what happened—facts, locations, dates
 - Adhere to confidentiality guidelines.

RespectED: Violence & Abuse Prevention can help

RespectED: Violence & Abuse Prevention at <http://www.redcross.ca/RespectED> offers Respect in the Workplace and Ten Steps to Creating Safe Environments, online courses to help individuals and organizations eliminate workplace violence and build a safe, respectful workplace environment.

For more information

- Violence Prevention in the Work Place (from Human Resources and Skills Development Canada/Labour),
http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/labour/publications/health_safety/violence.shtml
- Violence in the Workplace (from Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety),
<http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/violence.html>

ⁱ Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, 2012.

ⁱⁱ Adapted from Crisis Prevention Institute, Inc., http://educate.crisisprevention.com/Workplace-Violence.html?code=ITG006SCWE&src=Pay-Per-Click&qclid=CJyYg_P127MCFQVgMgodUVoABg

ⁱⁱⁱ Canadian enviroOHS,
http://legislation.ccohs.ca/legislation/documents/notes/oshleg/leg_viol.htm#PartTitle:Saskatchewan