Verbal De-escalation and Workplace Violence Reduction

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Workplace Violence

“Any act which is assaultive…”

- Homicide is the leading cause of death for women in the workplace.
- Homicide is the 3rd leading cause of all deaths in the workplace.
- There are 40,000 violent incidents in the workplace each year that DO NOT RESULT IN DEATH.

HOMICIDE in the Workplace

- 44% committed by customers & clients
- 24% committed by strangers
- 20% committed by co-workers
- 7% committed by bosses
- 3% committed by former employees
Motivation for Violent Acts

- To Get Revenge
- To Show Power
- To Harass
- To Become 'Famous'
- To Embarrass
- To Reduce Boredom

The Most Common Mistake

IGNORING THE SIGNS!!

Therefore, trust your instincts and pay attention to what is happening around you...

Critical Signs

- Loss of Significant other
- Loner
- Collects weapons
- Has no empathy
- Makes threats
- Jealousy
- Describes explicit plan

- Availability of means
- Depressed/suicidal
- Sees violence as a solution
- Considers self a victim
- Files grievances/lawsuits
- Collects injustices
Appropriate Response to Threats

- It is illegal to make threats if the person threatened is put in a reasonable fear that the threat will be carried out.
  - RCW 9A.46.020 Harassment defined — Penalties.
- Document it.
- Report it:
  - Office of the Dean of Students
  - Your Supervisor/Department Head
  - WSU Police

Documenting a Threat

*"The faintest ink is more powerful than the best memory."* Chinese proverb

- Who said it, who else heard it, who else was present? (Witnesses)
- What was said? Exact wording. Spell out profanity precisely. Don’t sanitize.
- Was there a mention or display of weapons? Were they implied?
- When date and time it occurred
- Where did the incident occur?
- How was the message delivered? How did it make you feel? Fearful? Worried? Unsafe?
- Did it prompt you to make any changes to your routine?
Non-verbal Warning Signs of Violence

- Personal space violation
- Concealed hands
- Clenched hands
- Clenched jaw
- Hostile staring
- Looking around (for exit, or witnesses)
- Blocking egress

Fighting stance
- Slanting (normal eye contact – 45°)
- Don’t stare BACK!
- Adjusting clothing (glasses, tie, jacket)
- Rapid, shallow breathing
- Baring teeth
- Finger pointing/jobbing

Look for clusters of behavior (3-4 items)

Verbal Warning Signs of Violence

- Direct threat: Call the police
- Vailed threat: Probe it—find out what’s going on.
- Conditional threat: Be aware.
- bragging/boasting at prior violence “You don’t want to see me angry.”
- Incessant talk about guns, firepower, shopping power
- Animal cruelty

Look for clusters of behavior (3-4 items)

Warning Signs of Crisis

- Significant change in behaviors
  - Hygiene
  - Course work
  - Attitude/Affect
  - Unusual emotional response to event

- Talk of self harm
- Giving away possessions
- Describe a plan to do harm
DE-ESCALATION

People in Crisis

Anger is one letter short of “danger”

- Alcohol and violence are closely linked.
- A suicidal person can very easily become homicidal.
- Over 33% of homicides involve domestic violence.
- Muttering, confused sentences/ideations.
- Ineffective word use.
- Behavioral anxiety.
- Aggressive or threatening statements or behavior

Talking with a Person in Crisis

- Lower your voice, speak slowly
- Only 1 person speak to them at a time
- Use their name
- Ask open-ended questions, get them talking
- Offer them a seat, (they sit first!)
- Offer a drink, (cold, not hot. In a cup, not a can)
- Don’t be judgmental
Talking with a Person in Crisis

- Don’t tell them to ‘calm down’
- Give options, not ultimatums
- Don’t make false promises
- No sarcasm
- Don’t cut them off*
- Offer solutions, not blame
- Use reflective listening. State back what you’ve heard

Body Language to Avoid

- Avoid rolling eyes
- Avoid crossing arms
- Don’t put hands behind you or in pockets
- Don’t look at your watch or cell phone
- Don’t stand too close
- Never stand toe-to-toe
- Don’t stare
- No pointing at them

How to Stand with an Angry Person

- 5-7 feet away, more if possible
- Feet offset, or body at an angle
- Hands open, down and outward
- Place obstacles between you (counter, desk, chair, furniture)
- Open expression on your face
- Confident demeanor
Classroom Disruptions

DEFINITIONS

- Classroom disruption is behavior that a reasonable person would view as substantially or repeatedly interfering with faculty’s ability to teach or student’s right to learn.
- Disruptive behavior may sometimes threaten or endanger your physical or psychological well-being or safety, or that of others.
- May include:
  - Persistent tardiness that disrupts flow of class
  - Repeated cell phone use
  - Taking out of place during class
  - Loud and/or frequent interruptions of class flow with inappropriate questions or remarks.

DEFINITIONS continued

- Disruptive behavior may also include:
  - Inappropriate contact at your home
  - Any behavior indicating romantic or obsessive interest
  - Persistent contact outside of class that hampers your ability to do normal work or as well other students
  - THREATS: verbal, physical, emails, letters, voicemail
  - Belligerent behavior once confronted.
LEVELS OF DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

LEVEL 1
- Can be handled informally, achieving a prompt resolution
- Vast majority of cases fall in this realm

LEVEL 2
- Can be a serious incident in the classroom
- Can be an ongoing problem
- You're encouraged to consult with the Dean of Students or Student Conduct

LEVEL 3
- Involves immediate danger
- Call 911 immediately

LEVEL 1 RESPONSE

Informal Resolution
Classroom Management 101

Set clear behavioral expectations at the beginning of the semester. Reach an agreement with students on standards for classroom conduct.

Describe basic behavioral standards in the syllabus.

Respond promptly to disruptive behavior. Some options include
- Stand next to students who are talking, maybe glance at them
- Remind students of behavioral standards already agreed upon
- Direct a word of warning to disruptive students, remain professional when doing so in front of other students.
Informal Resolution
Classroom Management 101

If behavior continues, notify student they will have to leave if the behavior does not cease and disciplinary action may result.

Be clear and unambiguous.

I tend to be low-key about this sort of thing. Put the onus on them, "Please don’t put me in a position to dismiss you from the classroom. We all agreed these rules are fair and reasonable..."

LEVEL 2 RESPONSE

LEVEL 2

There is a serious incident in the classroom

OR

An ongoing problem persists, despite your efforts to correct the issue

The rest of the students are relying on you to keep the environment safe and educational. They need and want you to minimize distractions.
Dismissing a Disruptive Student

- Be professional, never make your comments into a personal attack.
- Once you’ve made the decision, do not waver or renege. Dismiss them.
- Be clear and unambiguous. “Mr. Jones, you are dismissed from class. Please leave now.” or “Please leave immediately.”
- “See me during office hours before you return to class.” This gives you a chance to discuss the disturbance and hopefully prevent another.
- Consider meeting with Office of the Dean of Students about the dismissal.
- You may want to fill out an AWARE form on the incident.

Dismissing a Disruptive Student

- If the student refuses to leave, let them know you will call WSU Police and disciplinary action may result.
- If the student still refuses to leave, call 911.
- You may consider clearing out the room for the protection and safety of other students.
- DO NOT REMAIN ALONE with the disruptive student.
- Whether or not you choose to believe it, this is nearing a LEVEL 3 disruption.

Post-Dismissal Meeting

- Have another person present, (faculty, TA). Or leave office door open. Do not meet during odd hours when no other staff are likely present.
- Be professional and specific about inappropriate behavior that was exhibited.
- Focus on the behavior, not the person.
- Disruption often stems from personal problems. Be prepared to recommend resources.
- Came to an agreement for future success.
LEVEL 3 RESPONSE

IMMEDIATE DANGER/ VIOLENCE

- This will probably NEVER occur in your classroom.
- You must not be caught unprepared!
- Many people freeze and do nothing. They never thought it would happen!
- Include this possibility in your syllabus, and have the discussion with your students.

Get Out of There!!

- Get away! If someone is damaging property, let them!
- Property damage is easily repaired or replaced.
- Direct your students to clear out of the area. Leave the violent/disruptive person alone.
- Call 911 from a safe location.
ACTIVE SHOOTER/ EXTREME VIOLENCE

- You should mentally prepare yourself and your students.
- This can take place anywhere, not just in the classroom. It could be in the grocery store where you shop, at the mall, at church etc.
- Get away (Run)
- Get safe (Hide)
- Get tough (Fight)

THIS IS A SEPARATE TRAINING TOPIC NOT COVERED IN TODAY'S MATERIAL

Campus Resources

- AWARE reporting form: awares.wsu.edu 509-335-4511
- Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) 509-335-2169
- CAPS 24-hour Crisis Line 509-335-5757
- Office of the Dean of Students 509-335-2169
  - Students@wsu.edu
- Employee Assistance Program www.eap.wsu.edu 877-313-4465

Taking Care of Yourself

- Stay Safe
- Take care of your own emotional/spiritual needs
- Use your ombudsmen/ EAP
- Reach out to peers. You're not going through this alone!
- We live in a very safe area, you have a safe job
- Your work is important
- The good days outnumber the bad!