

Workplace Violence

(Considerations)

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.

If this approach does not stop the disruption, assess whether the individual seems dangerous. If in your best judgment he/she is upset but not a threat, set limits and seek assistance as necessary.

STEP 2: Step 1 response ineffective, individual DOES NOT seem dangerous

1. **Calmly and firmly set limits.** *"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 security action. Stop or you may be reported."*
3. **If the disruption continues despite a warning,** tell the individual that he/she may be disciplined or prosecuted, state that the discussion is over, and direct them to leave the office. *"Please leave now. If you do not 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, exclusion from work, or arrest.

STEP 3: Step 1 response ineffective and the individual SEEMS DANGEROUS

1. **If possible, find a quiet, safe place to talk, but do not isolate yourself** with an individual you believe may be dangerous. Maintain a safe distance, do not turn your back, and stay seated if possible. Leave the door open or open a closed door, and sit near the door. Be sure a co-worker is near to help if needed.
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/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 violence towards you 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 using profanity) or I'll have to ask you to leave."*
5. **Signal for assistance.** The individual may be antagonized if you call for assistance so use a prearranged 'distress' signal to have another staff member check on you to determine how you are. If you need help, the co-worker should alert your supervisor and/or the police.
6. **Do not mention discipline or the police if you fear an angry or violent response.**
7. **If the situation escalates, find a way to excuse yourself, leave the room/area and get help.** *"You've raised some tough questions. I'll consult my supervisor to see what we can do."*

IN AN EMERGENCY

For crimes in progress, violent incidents or specific threats of imminent violence, call 9-1-1.

Immediately contact the Police/Security or have someone call for you if an individual

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

Use a phone out of sight/hearing of the individual. The police/security will respond and take appropriate action. (consider "code words")

1. **Do not attempt to intervene physically** or deal with the situation yourself. It is critical that the police take charge of any incident that can or does involve physical harm.
2. **Get yourself and others to safety** as quickly as possible.
3. **If possible, keep a line open to police until they arrive.** If you cannot stay on the line, call 911 and the dispatcher will direct the police to you. The more information the police receive, the more likely they can bring a potentially violent situation to a safe conclusion.

Website: <http://www.hr.ucdavis.edu/Elr/Er/Violence/Brochure>