

Diagnosing your workplace for symptoms of violence

The US Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OHSA) defines workplace violence as any act or threat of physical violence, harassment, intimidation or other threatening disruptive behaviour that occurs at the worksite.



The modern world can be a stressful place.

A variety of situations and incidents (some long-standing, some new) can either cause or exacerbate that stress.

Relationship problems... mounting debt... reduced work hours... ill health... trauma caused by loss...

For some, those stresses can lead to a breaking point and, unfortunately, sometimes that breaking point occurs in the workplace.

Different organisations may have different definitions, but the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OHSA) defines workplace violence as any act or threat of physical violence, harassment, intimidation or other threatening disruptive behaviour that occurs at the worksite.



Broadly speaking, the scope of workplace violence tends to encompass the following actions:

- Homicide
- Use of a weapon or a threat to do so
- Assault
- Displays of violence, either physical (throwing furniture, punching a wall) or vocal (screaming, shouting, profanity, vulgarity)
- Threats of any kind, whether in person, via phone, post, email or social media
- Damage to property
- Intimidation and scare tactics
- Harassment



These are the ways that workplace violence often manifests itself, and they tend to occur within one of 4 scenarios:

- A customer is violent towards an employee
- An employee is violent towards a fellow employee
- A friend or partner is violent towards an employee (they confront them in the workplace)
- A stranger is violent towards an employee

Not all acts of workplace violence occur in plain sight, so how can you check for symptoms of someone being a victim?



Beyond the obvious physical signs (bruising, cuts, bumps etc.) that are often put down to “accidents” or “falls”, there are other signs to look for:

- Drop in quality of work
- Clearly upset after personal phone calls
- Extremes of emotions and mood swings
- Isolation and withdrawal
- Depression
- Lack of focus
- Leaving early, arriving late, absenteeism

How can you check for symptoms of someone being a potential perpetrator of violence in your workplace?



Warning signs that a violent outburst may be imminent can sometimes be foreshadowed by:

- Veiled or open threats
- Quick to offer criticism; overly sensitive about receiving it
- Mood swings
- Lack of focus
- Absenteeism
- Drop in work quality and productivity
- Boasting that they own various weapons
- Depression
- Drop in standards of personal hygiene and appearance



In some cases, it's actually possible to have a worksite safety analysis done by the police or fire department, and even a health and safety department. This may not prevent incidents of violence, but it can identify ways to react and respond if an incident does occur.

Wherever you work and whatever your role (manager, supervisor etc.), it is generally possible to be aware of the symptoms, assess the risk of violence in your workplace and take steps to avoid or reduce it.



Critical support when you need it

Visit optumwellbeing.com/criticalsupportcenter for additional critical support resources and information.



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