

Diagnosing your workplace for symptoms of violence

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



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 organizations 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 behavior that occurs at the work site.



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, mail, email or social media
- Damage to property
- Intimidation and scare tactics
- Harassment



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

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

If you have thoughts of hurting yourself or others — or you know someone having those thoughts — seek help right away.

If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, call **911** — or go to the closest emergency room.

To reach a trained crisis counselor, call the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (previously known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) at **988** or **1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)**.

You may also text **988** or chat at 988lifeline.org. The lifeline provides 24/7 free and confidential support.*



Critical support when you need it

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



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*The Lifeline provides live crisis center phone services in English and Spanish and uses Language Line Solutions to provide translation services in over 250 additional languages for people who call 988.

This program should not be used for emergency or urgent care needs. In an emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room. This program is not a substitute for a doctor's or professional's care. Consult with your clinician for specific health care needs, treatment or medication. Due to the potential for a conflict of interest, legal consultation will not be provided on issues that may involve legal action against Optum or its affiliates, or any entity through which the caller is receiving these services directly or indirectly (e.g., employer or health plan). This program and its components may not be available in all states or for all group sizes and is subject to change. Coverage exclusions and limitations may apply.