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Flash Point

Recognizing and Preventing
Workplace Violence

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Overview

- ➤ Mindset of Awareness
  - ➤ Workplace Violence
    - ◇ Definition
    - ◇ Myths
  - ➤ Workplace Violence Spectrum
  - ➤ Behaviors of Concern
- ➤ Commitment to Action
  - ➤ Formula
  - ➤ Flash Point
  - ➤ Action Point
  - ➤ Common Inhibitors to Reporting
  - ➤ Available Reporting Options

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Workplace Violence

- Behaviors that can cause:
  - Personal injury
  - Damage property
  - Impede the normal course of work
  - Cause workers/managers/ customers to fear for their safety

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Workplace Violence (cont'd)

- Include:
  - Threats
  - Harassment
  - Intimidation
  - Bullying
  - Assaults
  - Stalking
  - Domestic Violence
  - Workplace Homicides
    - Merely represent the "tip of the iceberg"

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Workplace Violence

- Four broad categories:

  TYPE 1: Violent acts by criminals who have no other connection with the work-place, but enter to commit robbery or another crime

  - **TYPE 2**: Violence directed at employees by customers, clients, patients, students, or others to whom service is provided

  - **TYPE 3**: Violence against coworkers, supervisors, or managers by a present or former employee

  - **TYPE 4**: Violence committed in the workplace by someone who doesn't work there, but has a personal relationship with an employee—an abusive spouse or domestic partner

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Myths

Gunman 'just snapped' before heading to Omaha mall

Article Comments (48)

AMY FORLITI
The Associated Press
December 7, 2007 at 6:34 PM EDT

OMAHA, Neb. — The gunman who killed eight people in a mall shooting "just snapped," he said in a hand-scrawled suicide note released Friday that combines love for his friends and family with nothing but contempt for his random victims.

"I know everyone will remember me as some sort of monster but please understand that I just don't want to be a burden on the ones that I care for my entire life," 19-year-old Robert Hawkins wrote. "I just want to take a few pieces of (expletive) with me."

Police released the three-page note Friday.

- "Out of the blue..."
- "Just snapped..."
- "If left alone, events will resolve themselves..."
- "Employees can't do anything to stop it..."
- It couldn't happen here..."

Workplace Violence

The Workplace Violence Spectrum

Behaviors of Concern | Threatening Behaviors | Physical Injury | Death

- Spectrum
  - May not be a linear progression
  - To the right are acts of overt violence causing physical injury and/or death
  - Moving to the left are psychological and emotional violence
  - To the far left are Behaviors of Concern
    - No profile of a workplace violence offender

Behaviors of Concern

- There are behaviors that suggest the potential for future violence
  - If there's a behavior that makes you uncomfortable, it's best to listen to what may be an intuitive warning
    - If you see something or sense something, **say** something
    - May be an innocent explanation for behavior
    - if left unaddressed, could escalate and contribute to a toxic work environment

Behaviors of Concern

- The following may alert supervisors to potential problems

  - Threats, frequent aggressive outbursts, or excessive displays of temper

  - History of threats/violent acts

  - Ominous fascination with weapons and/or references to weapons, violent media content, or violent events

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Behaviors of Concern (cont'd)

- Verbal abuse of co-workers and customers, or harassment through phone calls or emails

- Bizarre comments or behavior, including violent content

- Holding grudges, inability to handle criticism, making excuses, and blaming others

- Chronic, hypersensitive complaints about persecution

- Making jokes or offensive comments about violent acts

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Behaviors of Concern
- Sadness -

- Some Behaviors of Concern, such as sadness, might not look like they could lead to a Flash Point
- What begins as sadness may evolve into a serious depression and the potential for suicide
  - Suicide is aggression turned inward; wherein homicide is aggression turned outward

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Behaviors of Concern

- Do not focus on "snapshots"

  - No <u>one</u> behavior suggests a greater level of threat; significant changes in patterns of behavior are far more telling

- Employee is sending out a personal "SOS" distress signal

- Learn to recognize the signals that could point in the direction of violence and then learn to respond to them

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Behaviors of Concern

- Minor non-violent conflicts that went unresolved built up until they were no longer manageable
  - intervening early in a conflict may result in a resolution before the problem gets out of control

- When people go into a crisis state, it affects the way they think, feel, and behave

- Frequency, duration, and intensity are critical criteria when evaluating Behaviors of Concern

The Workplace Violence Spectrum

Behaviors of Concern — Threatening Behaviors — Physical Injury — Death

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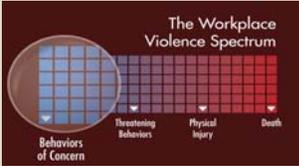
Behaviors of Concern
- Stalking -

- Pattern of harassing behaviors intended to frighten, intimidate, terrorize, or injure another person
  - Primary motives for stalking include power, control, and possession
  - Offenders refuse to accept the end of the former relationship (real or perceived)
  - When the victim spurns their unwelcome advances, the stalker often turns to intimidation

Behaviors of Concern
- Domestic Violence -

- Pattern of behavior in which one intimate partner controls another through the use of:
  - Physical violence
  - Coercion
  - Intimidation
  - Threats
  - Isolation
  - Emotional, sexual, or economic abuse
- Affects nearly one out of four women in today's workplace

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Behaviors of Concern
- Domestic Abuse -

- Employees may observe behaviors which might suggest violence at home

  - Disruptive phone calls and emails at work

  - Discomfort when communicating with others

  - Anxiety and lack of concentration on the job

- Unexplained bruises or injuries

- Inappropriate clothing for the time of year

- Frequent work absences

- Unplanned use of personal time

- Disruptive visits to the workplace by a current or former intimate partner

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Behaviors of Concern
- Domestic Violence -

- Some employers have a prevention program that includes a ''No Threats, No Violence'' policy

  - Disseminated to all employees

  - Outlines guidelines for employees to report

    - Threats or behavior that may foreshadow a violent act

    - Workplace circumstances that may heighten the risk of an incident

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Triggering Event

- A reprimand, termination, or layoff
- Financial troubles, a separation, a divorce, or a death
- A loss, whether real or perceived, in someone's personal or professional life
- "Injustice collectors"
  - Will not forget or forgive those wrongs or the people he believes are responsible

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Flash Point

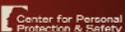Commitment to Action

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Workplace Violence Formula

Awareness + Action = Prevention

- You <u>can</u> do something about many situations

- Action has to be appropriate

- Without awareness and willingness to act, you truly become vulnerable

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Flash Point

- The point on the Workplace Violence Spectrum where actual violence occurs
  - Exact location can vary from one situation and individual to another
- Different actions in the work environment can trigger or cause a Flash Point
  - May be the result of non-work related situations
    - ◇ Domestic Violence
    - ◇ Other Personal Issues

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Action Point

- Recognition that violence may be an outcome; respond with an appropriate action
- Important to exercise caution when setting an early Action Point
  - Important not to delay reporting a threat
    - ◇ Better chance of containing a potentially violent event
    - ◇ Minimize harmful consequences and prevent a recurrence
  - Stress tolerance and coping skills are highly subjective

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Common Inhibitors

- Lack of awareness
  - Not trained to recognize Behaviors of Concern
- Psychological barriers
  - Busybody or snitch
- Fear of retaliation
- Believe it is someone else's responsibility
  - If a flash point is triggered, it will affect you

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Reporting Options

- For lower level behaviors, might feel comfortable giving person a chance to talk or vent
- Report behavior to person in authority
  - Supervisor, Human Resources, Security, Employee Assistance
  - 24/7 Tip Lines
  - Suggestion Box, Emails, Texting
  - Ombudsman
  - Ethics Hotline
  - Strength in numbers; team up

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Workplace Violence

- Very few organizations will ever experience disturbed employees engaging in shooting sprees that wound and kill multiple victims

- A far greater number will face other forms of workplace violence
  - Threatening behavior and violent events that are less spectacular and less deadly
  - Nonetheless, significantly damage the well-being of an organization and place employees in harm's way

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Summary

- Work from a mindset of awareness
  - Don't ignore Behaviors of Concern
    - ◊ Will not go away and can escalate
  - Learn how to recognize and diffuse potentially violent situations
  - Alert supervisors to concerns
  - Report all incidents

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"All that is necessary for the triumph

of evil is that good men do nothing."

- Edmund Burke

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Comments or Questions?

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