

Preparing your Workplace for Worker-Centered Responses to Potential Threats

Domestic violence, sexual violence, and stalking – no matter where it occurs – can make workplaces less safe and productive.

Violence in the Workplace

Domestic violence affects workplace safety when a worker, or anyone with a familial or intimate relationship with a worker, uses violent or threatening behavior designed to control or harm the person they're targeting. Domestic violence usually involves people with a pre-existing personal relationship, whether as family members, spouses, dating partners, or persons with a child in common.

Sexual violence becomes a workplace threat when anyone who comes in contact with the workplace engages in sexually harassing or criminal acts. Sexual violence can be committed by someone known or unknown to the person: a family member, dating partner, co-worker, supervisor, security guard, customer/client, member of the public on company property, or a stranger. Crimes of sexual violence are defined differently in every state, but include rape, incest, sexual touching, threats, sexual harassment, assaults, and batteries.

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Stalking often co-occurs with domestic violence or sexual violence. A stalker can be known or unknown to the person, and be a co-worker or client, a family member or intimate partner, an acquaintance or a stranger. The threat posed to the affected worker and the workplace will depend upon the perpetrator and their actions.

Preventing an Incident

Conducting a Threat Assessment

To protect against the harmful workplace impacts of domestic violence, sexual violence, and stalking, workplaces can engage in threat assessments, which are a set of strategies or pathways that provide information about individuals who may pose a risk to the workplace.

Threat assessments can discern the:

- Potential security vulnerabilities (e.g., access points)
- Exact nature and context of a threat and/or threatening behavior;
- Identified target (general or specific);
- Apparent motivation behind the threat, and
- A perpetrator's background, including work history, criminal record, mental health history, and past behavior on the job.

Regular threat assessment is necessary because a threat level is never fixed and can change over time. For this reason, constant threat assessment is critical.

After conducting the threat assessment, be sure to make the policy and organizational changes in your workplace to enhance safety and well-being of all workers.

Worker-Centered Response to a Potential Threat

If a worker knows a potential perpetrator, the worker typically has the greatest insight into the potential perpetrator's behavior and can provide substantial guidance in protecting themselves and the workplace. Upon learning that a worker faces a potential threat, employers should immediately work to develop a partnership with the threatened worker to develop a safe and effective response guided by the worker's needs and circumstances.

If a worker does not know a potential perpetrator, employers should develop a similar partnership with the threatened worker to assess the level of danger and take protective measures, such as escorting the worker to their vehicle until the potential threat subsides.

Workplaces must tailor responses to the unique circumstances of each situation. In some instances, workplaces need to take only a few precautions beyond those already in place. Other cases require a higher level of assessment and planning, including, when applicable, the creation of a response team.

Workplaces should apply the following principles when working with a worker to assess a potential threat:

- Ask about and assess facts relevant to any workplace threat. To preserve privacy, limit personal questions about the history between the affected worker and perpetrator to matters that help reveal the potential risks;
- Keep any information provided by the affected worker confidential whenever possible, only sharing specific facts with those who must receive specific information in order to implement workplace safety measures;

WORKPLACES RESPOND

TO DOMESTIC & SEXUAL VIOLENCE

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- Do not advise the worker about personal safety issues away from work. If the worker has a relationship with the perpetrator; do not tell the worker what to do about the relationship;
- Refer the worker to qualified local services (such as legal, healthcare, etc.) to ensure that the worker receives appropriate information and assistance, including safety planning;
- Print and share resources and referrals with the worker
- Do not blame or hold the worker responsible for a perpetrator's threats or violent actions.

A worker who is faces a potential threat may also need workplace accommodations to address their own particular safety issues, such as a Protective Order, also known as a Restraining Order. Depending on the extent in which a potential threat has been directed towards a workplace, an employer may consider consulting with the affected worker and obtaining the order in the employer's name or a no-trespass order covering the work site (if allowed under state law).

Other accommodations to consider include:

- Obtaining the affected worker's permission to provide relevant details about the potential perpetrator (such as a picture, physical description, license plate number, or vehicle make/model) to security personnel and reception staff;
- Relocating the affected worker to another work area or altering their work schedule until the threat is over; and
- With the affected worker's input and permission, have their calls screened, transferred to security or designated personnel, and remove the affected worker's contact information from directories and website