Workplace Violence Recognition and Prevention

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Introduction

Welcome to CUNA’s “Workplace Violence Recognition and Prevention” Training on Demand course. For most of us, work is a safe place: we have friendly relationships with coworkers, pleasant interactions with members, and constructive discussions with management. Most days pass smoothly, and we go about our business without incident.

Unfortunately, sometimes circumstances lead to violence in our otherwise peaceful work environments. This course teaches you how to recognize those circumstances and how to prepare yourself for them before they occur. It also touches on what to do should violent situations arise in spite of this preparation and offers suggestions for coping with the trauma caused by violent events.

Objectives

Upon completion of this course, you should be able to:

• Identify behaviors that lead to violence and individuals prone to violent acts.
• Apply strategies for preventing violence in a variety of work situations.
• Describe the proper actions to take when violence occurs in the workplace.
• And, understand how to minimize the trauma of violence.

What Is Workplace Violence?

The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health defines workplace violence as “any physical assault, threatening behavior, or verbal abuse occurring in the work setting.” This definition covers both psychological and physical trauma. Psychological trauma includes obscene or threatening phone calls, intimidation, harassment of any sort, and verbal altercations. Physical trauma includes beatings, stabbings, shootings, and rape.

Workplace violence comes from a variety of sources: coworkers, members, and even strangers to the credit union. According to the American Banking Association, roughly half of workplace violence is perpetrated by employees, former employees, or managers. Another 30 percent occurs at the hand of strangers, or people with relationship to a business, and approximately 20 percent comes from clients. These statistics suggest that violence in your credit union may come from within it or from outside of it.
Collaborating Against Violence

Frontline employees play an important role in identifying potentially violent situations and bringing them to the attention of management. Similarly, management is responsible for protecting employees from violence while in the branch. In this way, credit union staff and management form a collaborative anti-violence team.

To ensure that this collaborative effort is effective, all members of the team must understand how to prepare for violence. This includes recognizing individuals and events that may turn violent, enacting violence prevention measures, taking appropriate action when violence occurs, and being proactive about recovery afterwards. Let’s take a look at each of these key areas in turn.

Recognition

You must be able to recognize different types of violence that come from different sources. The first step is being aware of those individuals most prone to violence. Violence in the workplace is usually caused by white males over age 35 who tend to be loners, and hold extreme viewpoints or opinions related to emotionally charged subjects. They are often fascinated by weapons, have a hard time accepting authority, and have a history of frequent job changes.

Individuals prone to violence tend to have messy personal lives filled with many problems. They often hold grudges and typically see themselves as victims. They may keep a “mental tally” of who gets what at work, and sometimes exhibit obsessive, paranoid, or suspicious behavior.

It is important to understand the characteristics of a potentially violent person, but it is equally important to remember that these characteristics are not absolute. Not everyone who meets these criteria becomes violent, and not all people who become violent exhibit these characteristics. As such, memorizing this profile is not a substitute for awareness. Major behavioral changes in coworkers or members you interact with regularly may signal the potential for violence, as may peculiar behavior by strangers in the branch.