



EAP SUPERVISOR ENHANCEMENT NEWSLETTER

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DEER OAKS PRESENTS

Supervisor Excellence Webinar Series

Presentation Skills for Supervisors

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DOS AND DON'TS TO MINIMIZE VIOLENCE

Violence can erupt unexpectedly, even at work. But sometimes, your personal behavior can help to minimize or de-escalate potentially violent situations. Here are a few suggestions of ways you can decrease the likelihood of a coworker, customer, or partner of an employee becoming violent. Remember—if at any time a person's behavior starts to escalate beyond your comfort zone, disengage.

What You Should Do

- *Project calmness.* Move and speak slowly, quietly, and confidently.
- *Be an empathetic listener.* Encourage the person to talk and listen patiently.
- *Focus your attention on the other person* to let him or her know you are interested in what he or she has to say.
- *Maintain a relaxed yet attentive posture,* and position yourself at a right angle rather than directly in front of the other person.
- *Acknowledge the person's feelings.* Indicate that you see he or she is quite upset.
- *Ask for small, specific favors,* such as asking the person to move to a quieter area.
- *Establish ground rules* if unreasonable behavior persists. Calmly describe the consequences of any violent behavior.
- *Use delay tactics,* which will give the person time to calm down. For example, offer a drink of water in a disposable cup; a glass could be used as a weapon.
- *Be reassuring and point out choices.* Break big problems into smaller, more manageable problems.
- *Accept criticism in a positive way.* When complaints might be true, use statements like, "You're probably right," or "That was my fault." If the criticism seems unwarranted, ask clarifying questions.
- *Ask for his or her recommendations.* Repeat back to him or her what you think he or she is requesting of you.
- *Arrange yourself so a visitor cannot block your access to an exit.* If possible, also try to arrange yourself so that the agitated person has an "out" as well.
- *Arrange your desk and work area so that objects* such as pens, staplers, paperweights, envelope openers, and so on, cannot be used as weapons against you.

What You Should Not Do

- *Use styles of communication that generate hostility,* such as apathy, a brush-off, coldness, condescension, strictly going by the rules, or giving someone the runaround.
- *Reject all of the complainant's demands* from the start.
- *Pose in challenging stances* such as standing directly opposite someone, hands on your hips, or crossing your arms.
- *Make any physical contact* with the complainant or engage in activities such as finger pointing or long periods of fixed eye contact.
- *Make sudden movements* that can be seen as threatening—Notice the tone, volume, and rate of your speech.
- *Challenge, threaten, or dare the individual,* belittle the person, or attempt to make him or her look foolish.
- *Criticize or act impatiently* toward the agitated individual.
- *Attempt to bargain* with a threatening individual.
- *Try to make the situation seem less serious than it is* (e.g., "Hey Joe, nothing's really that bad—why are you so upset about such a small thing?").
- *Make false statements* or promises you cannot keep.
- *Try to impart a lot of technical or complicated information* when emotions are high.
- *Take sides* or agree with distortions.
- *Invade the individual's personal space—* Make sure there is a space of 3 to 6 feet between you and the other person.

Source: Corporate Alliance to End Partner Violence. (n.d.). *Dos & don'ts to minimize violence.* Retrieved August 17, 2016, from <http://www.caepv.org/>

CULTIVATING A HARASSMENT-FREE WORKPLACE

In a "safe and civil" work culture, employees are respected, valued, and treated fairly. (This article references the U.S. National Institutes of Health [NIH] "Workplace Bystander Training" and NIH statistics as an example, but the information is a good representative of workplaces in general.1)

Step I: Become aware of the impact.

Who experiences harassment?

- Women: 27 percent
- Men: 13 percent
- Trainees: 35 percent
- Sexual and gender minorities: 45 percent

"All employees have a shared responsibility to help ensure ... an environment that is civil and respectful of all individuals."— Dr. Francis S. Collins, Director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH)

Where is harassment occurring?

- At a work site: 88 percent
- At a social event with employees: 12.5 percent
- At a conference: 5.5 percent

Who commits harassment?

- A male: 72 percent
- An employee: 78 percent
- Coworker from same group as target: 60 percent
- Supervisor or manager of target: 35 percent
- Person who influences target's work: 25 percent

What kind of sexual harassment is commonly experienced?

- Gender harassment: 18 percent
- Unwanted sexual attention: 10 percent
- Sexual coercion: 0.3 percent



Step II: Assess the conduct.

Ask questions before intervening:

- Can you intervene safely?
- Does the conduct violate a policy or the law?
- Does the conduct put anyone at risk of harm?

Is it unlawful harassment?

- Is the conduct unwelcome?
- Does it result from a protected trait?
- Is it severe or pervasive?
- Does it change the terms or conditions of the job?

The "Reasonable Person" Standard

Under the policy on harassment, the "reasonable person" standard considers the employee's perspective and assesses if a reasonable person exposed to the same or similar circumstances would find the environment hostile, intimidating, or offensive.

Glossary of Terms²

- **Good-faith belief**—A belief held for a specific reason and without malicious intent.
- **Reasonable person standard**—A legal doctrine that asks whether a person similarly situated to the target would find the conduct harassing.
- **Benefit of the doubt**—Accepting someone or something as honest or genuine when questions or concerns exist.
- **Flip it & reset**—Turn an offensive statement into a question, and reset the situation to assume no offense was intended (e.g. "Did you mean to ask me...?").

Step III: Take appropriate action.

The Four Ds are:

- **Direct** (intervene in the moment)
- **Disrupt** (draw attention away from target)
- **Delegate** (identify best person to intervene)
- **Delay** (postpone intervention to a better time)

Step IV: Follow up afterwards.

Check in with the target. Ensure safety with regular check-ins:

- Affirm sentiments, and address stories.
- Support processes for healing and reporting.

References

(Except otherwise noted, Reference #1 is for all statistics in this document.)

1. U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH). (2019). 2019 workplace climate and harassment survey final report - Including civil program data update. Retrieved May 3, 2023, from <https://hr.nih.gov/working-nih/civil/2019-workplace-climate-and-harassment-survey-final-report-including-civil-program>
2. NIH. (2018, September). NIH Policy Manual 1311 - Preventing and addressing harassment and inappropriate conduct. Retrieved May 3, 2023, from <https://policymanual.nih.gov/1311>

Source: U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH), Office of Human Resources. (2020, August). *Cultivating a harassment-free workplace: Workplace bystander training for the National Institutes of Health* (B. Schuette, Ed.). Retrieved May 3, 2023, from <https://intrahr.od.nih.gov>



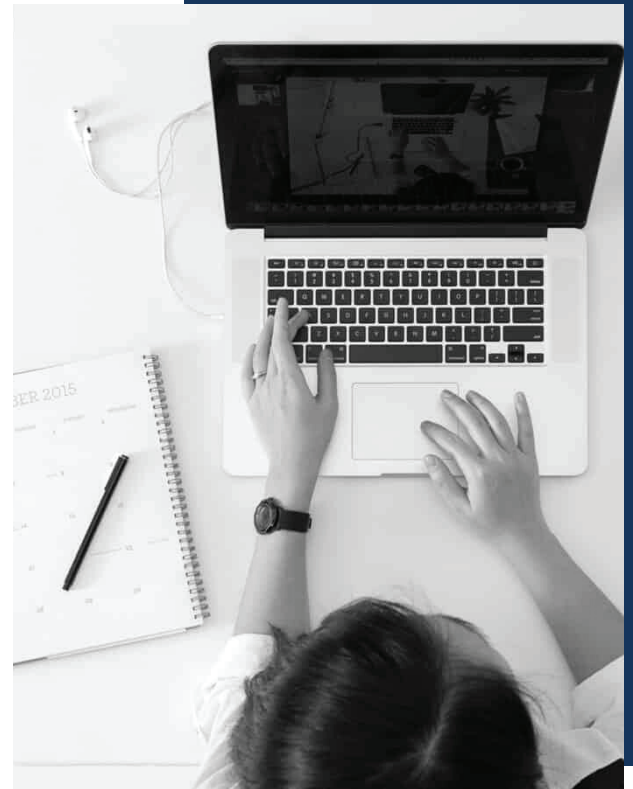
ASK YOUR EAP!

Q. My employee has been found sleeping at his desk several times. I am going to arrange a formal confrontation with him today. My question is, should I ask him to see his doctor, or refer him to the EAP? This must be some sort of medical or sleep disorder sort of problem.

A. You should refer your employee to the EAP. It's the approved resource recognized by your organization, and any other recommendation or referral by you to another source of help would be fraught with potential problems. Notice how mulling over the proper resource for your employee entails some diagnostic thinking. This is what supervisors are asked to avoid as they consider what's best in helping employees resolve performance or conduct problems. Sleeping at one's desk could be explained by a medical problem but also by a dozen other issues. Even if this problem is directly caused by a medical condition, referral to the EAP offers the employee and the organization significant advantages. For example, the EAP role will improve communication with the medical provider, perform follow-up, and help address any problems in the employee's life secondary to the sleep disorder. This makes it more likely the primary condition would be successfully treated and the employee will return to satisfactory performance.

Q. I have noticed over the years that employees almost universally think that the supervisor is "out to get them" or is "targeting them" when disciplinary actions are implemented. Hardly ever do they admit that their performance or conduct warranted actions taken. What explains this?

A. When employees face disciplinary actions, they naturally feel defensive. Feeling targeted or unfairly pursued by the supervisor helps protect the employee's ego and deflects responsibility and ownership for the behavior. It would be rare indeed for an employee to purposely do a poor job and then expect adverse consequences for it. Disciplinary actions therefore trigger strong emotions, including fear, and the need to search for someone to blame. This is particularly true if the employee knows of others with the same problem but they are not similarly held responsible.



Also, it's possible an employee may lack self-awareness. Without self-awareness, it is tough to accept responsibility for performance issues. Employee defensiveness can make constructive confrontations difficult, but this is a good reason for supervisors to consult with the EAP so they can have assistance in formulating the right approach to confronting employees based on the circumstances.

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