

Violence in the Transit Workplace: Prevention, Response, and Recovery

Participant Workbook

This course was developed by the National Transit Institute at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration Office of Safety and Security. Several transit agencies have also contributed to this program. These materials are provided for informational purposes only and are solely intended for the use of the transit industry. Use of the materials in this program should first be reviewed for compliance with local procedures and applicable state and local laws and regulations.

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Introduction

Workplace violence has emerged as an important workforce health and safety issue. The threat of workplace violence incidents is a daily concern in the transit industry. However, there are many steps that can be taken by front-line employees and supervisors to reduce the risk of such incidents. Every employee has the responsibility to help prevent, appropriately respond to, and report incidents of workplace violence.

Course Goal

The goal of this course is to provide transit employees with the knowledge and skills to prevent, recognize, appropriately respond to, and recover from workplace violence.

Course Objectives

This course is for front-line employees, supervisors, managers, union representatives and all other employees who work in the transit industry. The objectives of this course are to provide transit employees with the skills and knowledge to:

- Define workplace violence and recognize warning signs of potentially violent behavior
- Identify security measures that can reduce the risk of workplace violence incidents
- Describe strategies for dealing with “different,” “difficult,” and “dangerous” people
- Discuss the value of reporting workplace violence
- Review the importance of recovering from workplace violence

Course Outline

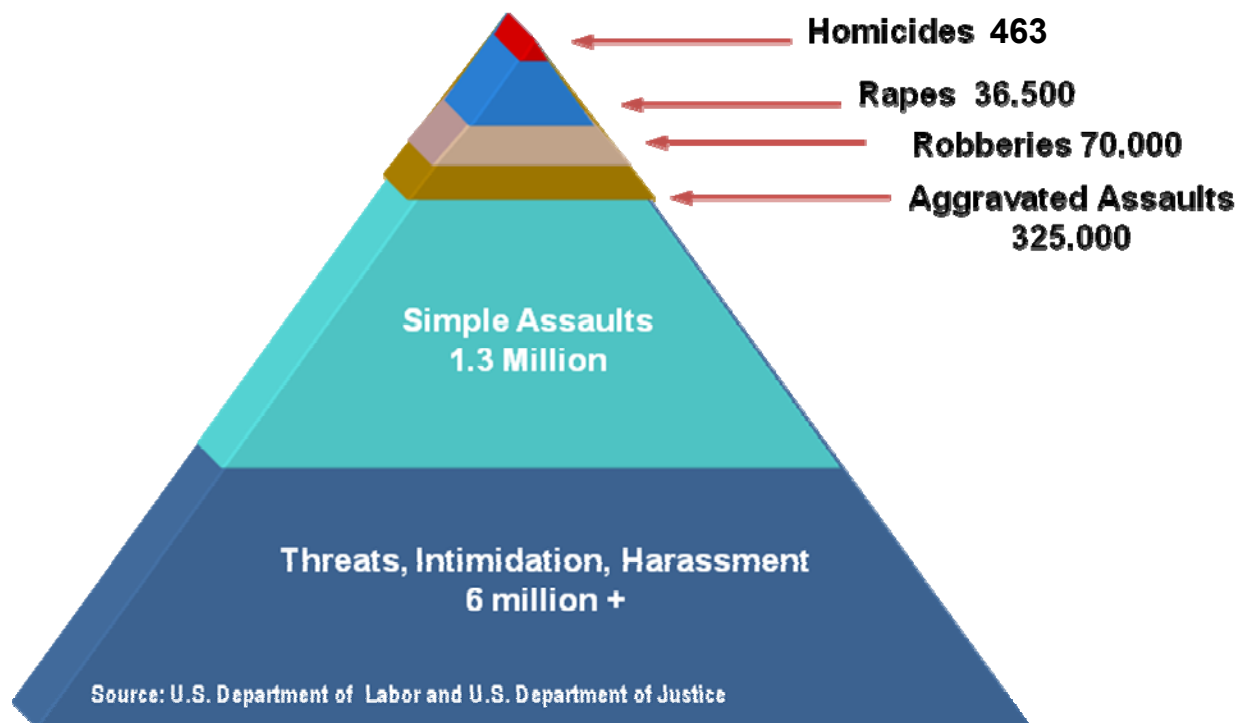
The following four (4) modules will be covered in this course:

- Defining Workplace Violence
- Recognizing Warning Signs
- Dealing with “Different,” “Difficult,” and “Dangerous” People
- Recovering from Workplace Violence

What is Workplace Violence?

National Statistics

A look at national statistics will help provide some perspective on the issue of violence in the transit workplace. The more serious incidents appear at the top of the pyramid, and are the types of situations that most people would agree are clear examples of violence, including homicides, rapes, and aggravated assaults. Towards the bottom of the pyramid, and making up the majority of workplace violence cases, are situations involving simple assaults, threats, intimidation, and harassment. Many of these types of incidents are never reported by employees.



Your Transit Work Environment

There are a variety of security risk factors employees face while working in the transit environment:

- Working in an open and accessible environment
- Handling money or items of value
- Working alone
- Interacting with the public and dealing with customer and/or employee complaints

Learning Activity 1: What is Workplace Violence?

Read the short descriptions below. Do you think this is a workplace violence incident? Indicate YES or NO in the space provided.

<u>Is it Workplace Violence?</u>	Yes	No
1. An employee is robbed at gunpoint in the agency's parking lot.		
2. A customer, who is upset and angry that service is behind schedule, spits on you as he enters the vehicle.		
3. A recently fired employee says to his supervisor, "You haven't heard the last of me. I don't get mad, I get even!"		
4. As you are driving the bus through an underpass someone from above throws a brick that hits the roof of the vehicle.		
5. While at work another employee grabs your hand and asks you out on a date. When you say "no" he/she doesn't let go of your hand and says, "I don't take no for an answer."		
6. A customer yells at you that the train is "late again." When you try to check his fare he calls you "stupid" and makes a racial slur.		
7. Your ex-boyfriend unexpectedly shows up on your route and says to you, "You'll never get rid of me." He then walks away.		
8. You are driving a transit vehicle when an impatient driver behind you gives you the middle finger and cuts you off almost causing an accident.		
9. A mechanic yells at another mechanic that he is a "worthless employee" who should never have been hired by the agency.		
10. Several teenagers sit down in the back of your bus, start acting rowdy, and are being disruptive to other customers.		

Definition of Workplace Violence

Sometimes, what may be considered workplace violence depends on how you perceive the situation. As front-line employees and supervisors, you need to trust your judgment when determining a threatening or intimidating situation. Do not second-guess yourself. If you feel threatened, intimidated, or harassed, you need to recognize and quickly assess the situation and be prepared to ask for help if necessary.

Workplace violence is defined as:

Defining the “Workplace”

- **“At work”** means any time you are on the agency’s property and/or at the workplace regardless of whether you are working or “on the clock.” Examples may include (but are not limited to) the following: (a) when you are in the agency’s parking lot, in the driver’s room, or in the break room or cafeteria; and (b) anytime you are on transit agency grounds.
- **“On duty”** means any time you are working, on the clock and/or engaged in the performance of your job duties. Examples may include (but are not limited to) the following: (a) driving a bus or operating a rail car in the communities served by the agency; (b) a maintenance mechanic or road supervisor dispatched to a location where a bus is and (c) anywhere else your duties as an employee are being carried out.
- **“Work-related”** means any event arising out of the employment of the employee. Examples may include (but are not limited to) the following: (a) an employee who retaliates against another employee at home and while off-duty because of a work-related issue; (b) a customer who is upset about the service he received from the agency and retaliates by assaulting, intimidating or harassing an employee at his/her home or elsewhere when that employee is off-duty and away from work; (c) anywhere an employee faces retaliatory behavior by another employee or customer because of a work-related issue.

Workplace violence may include a wide range of behaviors including the following:

- Physical assault
- Threatening behavior
- Verbal abuse

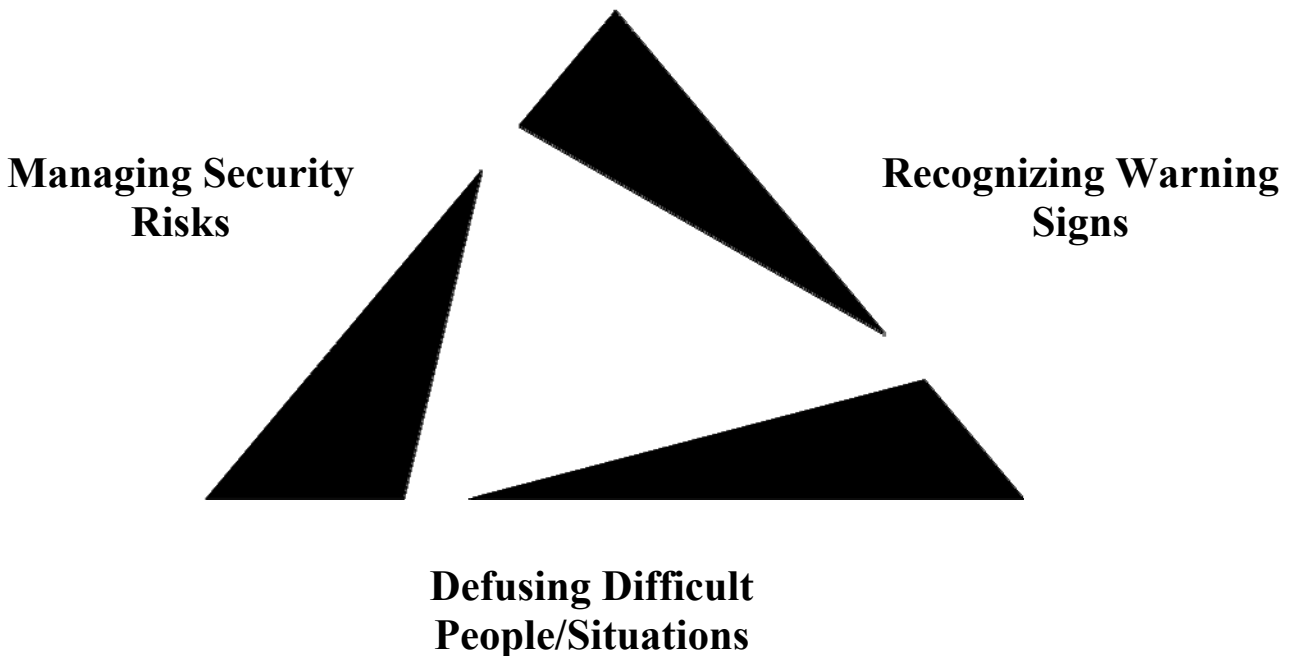


Types of Workplace Violence

There are four main categories of workplace violence:

- Criminal Intent
- Customer Conflicts
- Employee/Employee Conflicts
- Domestic Violence

A Three-Pronged Prevention Approach



Managing Security Risks

Your workplace is by nature an open environment, accessible to many different types of people. Additionally, depending on your role at your agency, you may handle money or items of value, and may also work alone. This type of environment exposes you to some risks, but there are three types of security countermeasures that can be used to help maintain your safety:

- Physical protective measures
- Procedural security measures
- Employee actions

Physical Protective Measures

These are the environmental design elements of our work environment that are implemented by our agency to enhance security. They are the design features of facilities and equipment that are in place in our work environment to enhance security:

- Locked doors
- Gated facilities and parking lots
- Card-access entry systems to buildings and work areas
- Security lighting in areas frequented by employees and customers
- Cameras and video or CCT surveillance systems
- Emergency exits
- Waiting areas for customers
- Deep service counters or shatterproof/bullet resistant glass enclosures
- Security devices including metal detectors
- Mirrors in stairwells and/or hallways with blind spots
- Emergency signaling/panic buttons in facilities and on vehicles

Procedural Security Measures

These are the work practices, policies, and procedures that are implemented by our agency to enhance our security at work:

- Pre-employment screening and background checks
- Termination procedures
- Employee training
- Uniform and identification policies



- Practices regarding the release of sensitive or personal information
- Updating and posting agency policies
- Pre and post-trip vehicle inspection procedures
- EAP and out-placement counseling
- Emergency preparedness plans
- Outplacement services during downsizing

Employee Actions

This refers to the personal security measures that each of us takes to reduce security risks that are inherent in our work environment. Although we cannot prevent every violent incident, there are a variety of personal security measures that we can implement and follow to reduce the risk that an incident will occur:



- Wear appropriate uniform and identification
- Don't wear expensive jewelry
- Avoid accessories that can be grabbed
- Don't leave personal items or agency equipment unattended
- Carry limited amounts of cash and valuables
- Avoid opening wallet or purse in public view
- Observe and report suspicious activity
- Survey parking lots and have keys ready
- Stay in well-lighted areas
- Use the "buddy system"

Recognizing Warning Signs

Recognizing early warning signs that may lead to violence is not an “exact” science nor is it always easy to do. However, the lessons learned from past incidents show us that often times there are:

- Missed warning signs
- Ignored or unreported warning signs
- Reported warning signs that were not acted upon

We need to be more alert for early behavioral warning signs that may indicate a potentially violent person:

- A change in behavior on the part of a co-worker or “regular” customer that causes concern
- Behavior that is unacceptable or inappropriate for the situation displayed by an employee, customer or “stranger”

Learning Activity 2: Recognizing Warning Signs Case Study 1

Instructions: Read the following case study and identify the behavioral warning signs that you believe may be of concern regarding potential violent behavior.

Case Study #1:

Frank and Lisa are both employees of the agency. It is no secret that Frank and Lisa don't get along as they both frequently get into shouting matches with each other. Also, lately a pattern of complaints indicate that Lisa has had a number of outbursts with, and has become increasingly hostile towards, other employees and customers.

Additionally, in the past few weeks Lisa has had five tardiness violations (she previously had none in the past two years.) Lisa often appears to be tired, and her eyes are bloodshot and red when she arrives at work. Lisa confides in Pat (another employee) that her husband just left her and that she has to arrange for additional day care and is working a second job to "make ends meet." Lisa has also said the following on a few occasions: "I feel frustrated with everything that is going on in my life and I feel like my life is out of control."

Notes: _____

Learning Activity 2: Recognizing Warning Signs Case Study 2

Instructions: Read the following case study and identify the behavioral warning signs that you believe may be of concern regarding potential violent behavior.

Case Study #2:

Martin has been riding the transit system for the past five years to go to and from work. Martin would always look professional and be dressed in business casual attire when going to work. Martin would always say “hi” and get along with the bus drivers on his route.

However, lately in the past few months, Martin has had frequent shouting matches with various bus drivers. Martin is upset that he was late to work on a few occasions because of delays in bus service, and he now blames the transit agency for being fired from his job.

Now it appears that Martin rides the bus for no particular reason or destination, but instead, to complain to any bus driver that will listen that the transit agency is to blame for losing his job and his wife leaving him, because he can no longer “provide for his family.” Often times when Martin is riding the bus he is observed mumbling incoherently to himself that “the world is such a mess” and “how hard I work, but I don’t seem to be getting anywhere.” Martin also looks sloppy and unshaven with wrinkled and dirty clothes, and his personal hygiene has deteriorated, which is a departure from his former “clean cut image.”

And just yesterday, when Martin was getting off the bus he turned to the bus driver and with a dead stare and monotone voice said the following: “I hope you have a good day today because tomorrow you and everyone else who works for this bus company will be sorry they messed with me!”

Notes: _____

Learning Activity 2: Recognizing Warning Signs Case Study 3

Instructions: Read the following case study and identify the behavioral warning signs that you believe may be of concern regarding potential violent behavior.

Case Study #3:

Recently, Susan's performance on the job has been deteriorating as she has had frequent unscheduled absences from work. Also, in the past few weeks Susan has received numerous phone calls at work. Susan's supervisor, Mel, noticed that each time Susan hung up the phone she was upset. Also, Susan appears very edgy at work. Then, two weeks ago Susan came to work with a cast on her arm and bruises on her neck. Susan told Mel that she suffered these injuries when she tripped and fell while walking to her car.

Mel then overheard Susan confiding in another employee that she has separated from her husband and is in the process of getting a divorce. Susan also stated that she is afraid that her husband is following her to work and is scared that he is "out to get her." Susan made the employee promise not to tell anyone.

On a few occasions Mel begins to notice Susan's husband waiting in his car in the parking lot at the end of their shift. When Mel makes eye contact with the husband he quickly drives away.

A week later Susan's husband appears at her work unexpectedly. He appears agitated and upset. As the husband waits, the receptionist pages Susan to the lobby.

Notes: _____

Learning Activity 2: Recognizing Warning Signs Case Study 4

Instructions: Read the following case study and identify the behavioral warning signs that you believe may be of concern regarding potential violent behavior.

Case Study #4:

Sam recently did not receive a promotion at work. Sam frequently expresses his disappointment that he did not get the promotion. Sam is overheard complaining that the promotion process is “unfair” at the organization, and offers up his own ideas about how to change it. Sam confides in Rachel that because he did not get the promotion he no longer feels motivated to give 100% on the job.

A few days ago Sam was overheard telling another employee about the new hunting rifle he just bought. He tells anyone that will listen how he went on a recent hunting trip with his new rifle and “bagged a deer.”

Notes: _____

Recognizing Warning Signs

Violent behavior is often preceded by a variety of early warning signs. Unfortunately these signs are often ignored until it is too late. Early recognition of the warning signs of workplace violence is critical to the incident. The following are the behavioral warning signs that you should be alert to:

Warning Signs

Expressions of Violence and/or Unusual Interest in Weapons:

- Demonstrates an unusual fascination with guns and other weapons
- Brings a gun or other weapon to the workplace
- Verbalizes his or her wishes to hurt other employees
- Shares fantasies about acts of revenge
- Makes direct, manipulative or veiled threats of harm toward others
- Talks about retaliation or “getting even” with someone
- Makes statements that approve of the use of violence to resolve problems
- Empathizes with persons who commit acts of workplace violence
- Discusses a fascination with incidents of workplace violence
- Openly identifies with perpetrators of workplace homicides
- Boasts of violent behavior or fantasies



Exhibits Signs of Depression:

- Frequent crying and mood swings
- Withdrawal and isolation from others
- Expresses feelings of hopelessness
- Shows signs of alcohol or drug abuse
- Demonstrates a loss of interest in life or work
- Changes in personal appearance and/or hygiene
- Makes statements indicating desperation and comments about committing suicide



Increased Work Problems:

- Decreased level of motivation
- Increased absenteeism and tardiness
- Sudden decrease in performance, productivity or inconsistent work patterns
- Increased conflicts with others
- Constant complaining about unfair treatment
- Overreaction to criticism (increased hypersensitivity)
- Refusal to acknowledge performance problems and/or blaming others
- Constant and blatant disregard for company policies and procedures
- Talking about the same problems without resolving them
- Misinterpreting communications, requests, and direction
- Becoming more accident-prone due to disregard for on-the-job safety
- Explosive outbursts of anger or rage without provocation



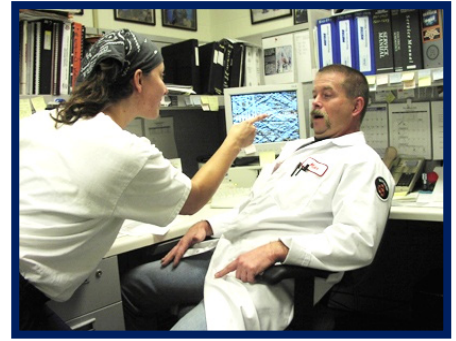
Signs of Domestic Violence:

- Frequent and/or unexplainable visible physical injuries or becoming more “accident-prone”
- Physical injuries which are inconsistent with explanation
- Bruises or handprints on wrists or throat
- Excessive clothing or make-up to cover injuries
- Strong emotional reactions to unusual or excessive phone calls received at work
- Disruptive and unannounced workplace visits by significant others (spouse, partner, family members)
- Stalking of employees by others
- Edginess or fear for no apparent reason



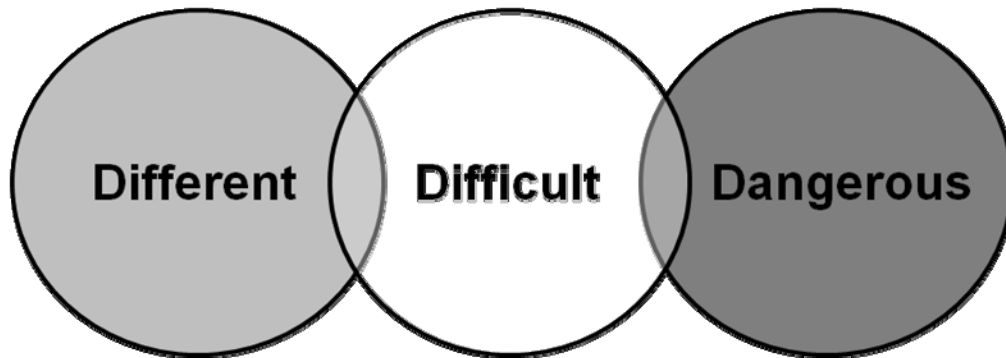
Other Behavioral Concerns:

- Destruction of property
- Increased emotional outbursts
- Displays of unwarranted anger
- Expression of irrational beliefs and ideas
- Unhealthy obsession with a co-worker
- Unusual or extreme changes in behavior
- Verbal, nonverbal or written threats or intimidation
- Behavior that is symptomatic of paranoia
- Expressions of the perception or belief that others are “out to get them”
- Words or conduct that causes concern that the person may act out in a violent manner



Not all warning signs are actual indicators that a person is about to engage in a violent act. These warning signs should be used only to heighten our concern as to a potential problem. As an employee, your responsibility is to recognize a warning sign and then communicate this information to an appropriate person in your agency (i.e., manager, supervisor, union officer, human resources representative) if it causes you concern. These observations or concerns should NOT be openly discussed among peers or others either within or outside the agency.

Dealing With Different, Difficult, and Dangerous People



In the course of our workday we may encounter people who are "different," "difficult" or sometimes even "dangerous."

Different people are those who may be unlike us in terms of the way they look, talk, or interact with others. However, different people are usually non-threatening. They pose no threat of harm to anyone simply because they look, act and/or talk differently.

Difficult people are those that direct their frustration, anger, and/or hostility at others, although they are not at the stage where they are a direct threat to anyone's safety. Quite often this anger or hostility is not *about* you, it is merely and unfortunately targeted *at* you.

As the above graphic illustrates, there can be some overlap between being a "different," "difficult," or "dangerous" person. A person may fluctuate into any one of these three "roles" at any time.

You need to recognize and remember that if at any time the "difficult" person becomes threatening to yourself or others (i.e., the person becomes "dangerous") then safety becomes your first priority and you need to get help immediately.

Dangerous people pose an immediate threat to your safety or the safety of others. For example, an angry customer won't calm down, and takes on an aggressive posture, like he is going to hit you.

Dealing with Different People

People who are “different” do not actually pose a threat to us. The management of our own behavior is important in dealing with “different” people. We need to remember to treat others with dignity and respect regardless of our cultural, religious, ethnic, racial, sexual, physical, or philosophical differences. Respecting others’ differences and being careful not to stereotype or label is an important component of managing our own behavior. In order to control negative behavior towards others because of differences, we need to be more aware of and recognize our biases. Make a conscious decision not to act upon biases and stereotypes when interacting with other employees and customers. Remember to always treat people with dignity and respect regardless of their differences and our personal beliefs.



Dealing with Difficult People

A “difficult” person is a person who directs his or her frustration, anger, or other hostility at you, although the person is not at the stage where he or she is an actual threat to your safety or the safety of others. A “difficult” person may also be one who is non-compliant with rules of order or authority. They can be a customer, co-worker, or other person we come into contact with while at work and/or performing our work duties in the transit environment.



The best way to handle dealing with a difficult person is to:

- Maintain self-control
- Avoid confrontation
- Defuse the situation

Maintain Self-Control

The following are a few strategies for maintaining self-control:

Identify your “hot buttons” and don’t “take the bait” — Understand and be aware of the topics, issues, actions beliefs or statements that ignite your temper and rile your emotions. When a person pushes your buttons don’t get defensive. Don’t counter attack that person because then you become part of the problem and not the solution.

Project calmness —Always remain calm when dealing with other people. If needed, take a few seconds to think rationally about the situation.

Slow down your responses — Pause, take a deep breath or count to 10 before responding to the person. Make sure you think before you speak and act.

Take a “time-out” — Disengage if you feel yourself getting angry and try to compose your thoughts and control your emotions.

Use positive self-talk —Self-talk can be used to remind ourselves of how we should react and behave in various situations. Using positive self-talk will help us to respond constructively



Avoid Confrontation

Avoidance can be a useful strategy. A potential conflict with a difficult person may simply go away if you avoid the person or situation.

Avoidance is different from denial. Denial means that you are deciding not to acknowledge the situation or even wishing or pretending that the situation didn't exist. Denial could actually make the situation worse.

Avoidance is a calculated, thought-out strategy to not take any action because you have decided that, on balance, it won't cost much to overlook the situation.

Guidelines for Using Avoidance

There are certain circumstances when avoidance will **NOT** be effective. The following are some guidelines for when to use and not to use avoidance in a situation:



When to Avoid a Situation:

- The issue is minor or inconsequential
- The conflict will most likely go away on its own
- To confront the person would result in an escalation of the situation
- Your safety is at risk

When NOT to Avoid a Situation:

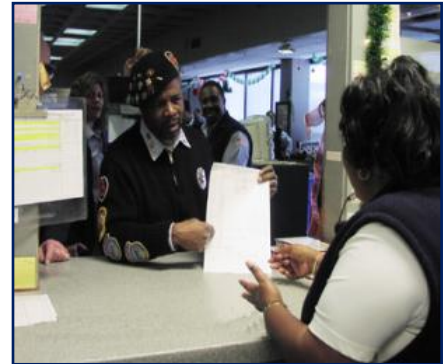
- The issue is important and needs to be addressed
- Doing nothing is too costly or damaging
- There are time constraints that push you to manage the conflict/issue quickly

- There is a potential for the conflict to quickly escalate
- The difficult person continues to force the issue
- There is a safety policy violation

Communication Guidelines

In communicating with the difficult person, the following are some general guidelines:

- Watch your body language
- Don't invade personal space
- Maintain eye contact
- Use active listening skills
- Use cooperative instead of confrontational language



Defusing Strategies

The following are five defusing strategies for dealing with difficult people:

1. Acknowledge the person's feelings
2. Ask open-ended questions
3. Summarize with empathy
4. Offer help, options or a referral
5. Give choices and consequences

Defusing strategies can be combined for optimal effectiveness. The key to using defusing strategies is to choose the appropriate one or more for the situation and to only use those strategies that you are comfortable with. Keep in mind that you should always be assessing your effectiveness to determine whether the strategy used has assisted in defusing the difficult person. If not, you may be dealing with a dangerous person for which you may need to get help.

Defusing Strategy #1 - Acknowledge the Person's Feelings

Acknowledgement refers to communicating to a difficult person that you are interested and concerned. You are letting a difficult person know that you understand his/her emotional state **WITHOUT** agreeing with the person or condoning his/her behavior.

Guidelines:

- Use the proper tone of voice
- Let the person know they have your attention
- Indicate that you can see that they are upset, angry, frustrated, annoyed, etc.

Examples:

- “Sir/ma’am, I see you are really upset.”
- “Sir/ma’am, you seem to be really frustrated.”
- “Sir/ma’am, it looks like you’re really annoyed.”

Defusing Strategy #2 – Ask Open-Ended Questions

Responding to questions requires a person to think rather than react to a situation. By keeping a person talking you may help them become more rational.

Guidelines:

- Ask *who, what, when, where, and how* questions to clarify the situation
- Get the person to think rather than react
- Keep them talking to keep them rational; be ready to ask follow-up questions
- Listen attentively to responses and encourage the person to talk
- Focus on the facts, don’t take sides or react defensively
- Accept criticism and don’t take it personally

Examples:

- “What was it that made you so upset?”
- “What time was it when that happened? What was the number of the bus?”
- “What route were you on? What station were you at?”
- “Where were you when that happened?”
- “What did the other employee look like?”
- “What did it say on the Internet about the new schedule?”
- “What did the day shift mechanic say to you?”
- “When did you speak with the customer service agent?”

Defusing Strategy #3 - Summarize with Empathy

Summarize the situation by using empathy statements to let a difficult person know that you have heard what he/she has said and understand the situation. You are not agreeing with a difficult person, you are just giving feedback as to your understanding of the facts that have been communicated to you without making any judgments.

Guidelines:

- Use reflective listening skills to acknowledge the person's right to be upset
- Paraphrase the person's concerns to let them know you "got it"
- Avoid "I understand how you feel" because the focus should be on the feelings of the difficult person. Also, this statement may seem patronizing.
- Avoid making judgmental or accusatory statements

Examples:

- "You're frustrated because you had to wait a long time."
- "It sounds like you feel you have been getting the runaround."
- "It must be very upsetting to have to worry about... No wonder you're annoyed."
- "So if I understand you correctly, you're saying that ... Is that correct?"
- "Let me make sure I understand. Are you saying... You're right, that is a problem."

Defusing Strategy #4 - Offer Help, Options, or a Referral

This strategy can help you control the interaction and aid in the problem-solving process. It also communicates to a difficult person that you empathize with his/her situation and want to help.

Guidelines:

- Don't reject all demands
- Break down big problems into smaller, more manageable issues
- Be reassuring and point out options
- Give the person an "out"
- Avoid making promises you can't keep
- Offer to call in additional resources

Examples:

- “Is there anything I can do to help?”
- “I can call my supervisor for you if you like?”
- “I’d be happy to get you some additional information to help you solve that problem.”
- “I’m not able to approve what you want, so would you like to wait to talk to my supervisor, or would you prefer I have the supervisor give you a call?”

Defusing Strategy #5 - Give Choices and Consequences

This strategy is a stronger approach to handling the situation by politely making it clear that you will not accept the behavior that a difficult person is exhibiting. This strategy is a way to communicate our limits to a difficult person by encouraging the person to modify his/her behavior.

Guidelines:

- Keep your tone non-threatening
- Avoid saying things like “I require...” or “I can’t allow . . .”
- State the ground rules
- Present negative and positive choices and their consequences
- Consequences should be reasonable and enforceable
- End on a positive choice

Learning Activity 3c: Practicing Choices and Consequences

Instructions: Write in your response to the following situations. Remember to use the defusing strategy.

Situation #1: A customer boards your vehicle and starts loudly playing music from their MP3 player so that everyone can hear it. The customer refuses to turn the music off even after you politely make this request.

Response: *Miss, we need to proceed on the route. For the comfort and safety of all passengers, company policy prohibits you from playing your MP3 player without headphones while on the vehicle. **If you continue to play your music out loud we will not move, and I'll have to call in, report the situation, and get a supervisor or a cop out here. Or, you can turn off your music or use your headphones so you can get to where you want to go.***

Situation #2: You are a mechanic on a road call. You are expecting the operator to come over to talk to you about why the vehicle is not running properly. Instead, he is angry, curses at you and says: "Can't you ever give me a straight answer about what's wrong? I bet you don't even have a clue what the problem is. You never know how to fix anything. Are you really a mechanic or just a glorified coffee drinker?"

Response: _____

Situation #3: You are responsible for "signing in" all visitors to the workplace. An "unknown" person enters the agency building and walks right past you toward the door that leads to the rest of the offices in the building. When you ask the person who she is, she says, "It's none of your business who I am. I've been here before to visit my husband and I know where I need to go, so leave me alone and stop harassing me!"

Response: _____

Top 10 Guidelines for Defusing Difficult People

The following list summarizes some general guidelines to keep in mind when dealing with a difficult person:

- # 1: Accept criticism in a positive way. Remember don't take it personally.
- # 2: Avoidance is not always the best defense, especially when there is a policy violation or the situation needs to be addressed.
- # 3: Acknowledge the person's feelings to indicate that you can see that they are upset or angry.
- # 4: Summarize with empathy to show concern.
- # 5: Give reasonable choices and consequences to defuse a difficult person by encouraging him or her to modify behaviors.
- # 6: Be patient when dealing with a difficult person.
- # 7: Allow the person to maintain his/her dignity.
- # 8: Always use respectful and non-confrontational language.
- # 9: Don't let the person push your "hot buttons."
- # 10: Maintain self-control!

Note: If you become involved with a person who is threatening or dangerous, you should seek immediate assistance by following your agency's emergency procedures.

Dealing With Dangerous People

Dangerous people pose an immediate threat to your safety or the safety of others. When you are confronted with a dangerous person you need to call for help ***immediately***. Your safety is the top priority; so do not do anything that puts yourself or others at risk.

The following are some guidelines for dealing with dangerous people:

- Protect yourself
- React appropriately to the situation
- Call for help
- Report the incident

Keep in mind that maintaining self-control when confronted by a dangerous person is a critical component of your safety. Try to remain calm and do not overreact to the situation. In addition, use a non-threatening tone and behavior. If possible, think of positive outcomes and don't focus on the negatives of the situation.



Protect Yourself

Above all, your safety should be your top priority when confronted with a dangerous person. You cannot call for help or provide assistance if you are injured or worse. The following are some basic tips for preserving your safety when dealing with dangerous people:

- Stay calm and don't panic
- Don't try to be a hero
- When possible, call for help and/or alert others
- Know your agency's emergency policies and procedures



General Tips for Dealing with a Dangerous Person:

A Dangerous Person Threatens You — If the dangerous person threatens you, don't argue with the person. Do as you are told. Follow all instructions given to you. Maintain normal eye contact. If possible, physically maintain a distance from the dangerous person and yourself.

A Dangerous Person has a Weapon — If the dangerous person has a weapon, such as a gun or a knife, do not try to grab the weapon. Remain calm and do NOT make any sudden movements. Tell the person what you are doing whenever you need to move. Constantly assess the situation and look for an escape route. Attempt to escape only if you are certain you will be successful OR if your life is in immediate danger.

A Dangerous Person Threatens Another Person — When you observe a dangerous person threatening another person, don't intervene. You may think you are helping, but you may actually make the situation worse. Instead, your best option is to get immediate assistance. While you are waiting for help to arrive, keep others away from the situation so that their safety is not at risk. When help arrives, give a thorough description of both the dangerous person and the situation.

A Dangerous Person is in a Transit Facility — If the dangerous person is in your facility, try not to get trapped where there are no avenues of escape. When the dangerous person has entered your facility, remain active in looking for avenues of escape. As you are exiting the building, pull an alarm or use any other means to alert others if you can do so without jeopardizing your own safety.

A Dangerous Person is on a Transit Vehicle — If the dangerous person is on your vehicle, let passengers or the dangerous person off, if possible. Or, if you can, drive to a public or crowded location. Look for potential places of refuge including a police station, fire station, or other public facility. Flash your high beams, use a radio "alert" button, and/or the destination sign to safely signal for help.



Call for Help

When dealing with a dangerous person you need to call for help as soon as possible. Prior to making this call, quickly observe and assess the situation and make a mental note of the incident.

When calling for help, follow your agency's emergency procedures. When you request help, give as much relevant information as possible so emergency personnel can adequately respond to the situation.



Here are some tips on calling for help and requesting assistance:

Give your exact location —

If you are calling from an agency building, give your address, floor location, and room number. If you are on your transit vehicle give your vehicle number, route number, street you are traveling on, as well as the cross street, and the direction you are traveling.

Identify yourself —

Give your first and last name, identification number, and badge number.

Request immediate assistance —

Be specific about the type of assistance you need (e.g., police, fire, EMS.)

Explain the situation —

Be specific in giving information on the situation. Give specific facts and observations. Answer all questions posed by emergency personnel. Provide any information that may be important or helpful. Give a description of the dangerous person or persons who are involved in the situation.

Identifying the Perpetrator

Eyes
Ears
Mouth/Nose
Hair/Facial Hair
Forehead
Cheeks/Chin
Neck
Complexion
Body Shape/Size



Hat
Jewelry
Shirt/Blouse/Dress
Coat
Pants/Skirt
Socks/Shoes
Oddities/Tattoos
General Appearance
Accessories

In giving a description of a dangerous person or person(s) you need to give as much detailed information as possible. In addition to gender and approximate age, any and all physical characteristics you can give will help the police identify the perpetrator when they arrive on the scene, or if he or she is fleeing from the area.

Consider giving a description of the following:

- *Eyes*: Color, shape, eyelashes, eyebrows
- *Ears*: Size, shape
- *Mouth/Nose*: Size of lips, shape, nostrils
- *Hair/Facial Hair*: Color, length, texture, hairline, clean-shaven
- *Forehead*: Skin texture, height
- *Cheeks/Chin*: Flesh texture, bone structure, shape, type (cleft, dimpled)
- *Neck*: Adam's apple, hanging jowls, length, width
- *Complexion*: Skin color, texture, pores, pock marks, acne, rashes, scars, birthmarks
- *Body Shape/Size*: Height, weight, build
- *Hat*: Color, style, how it is worn
- *Jewelry*: Rings, watches, bracelets, earrings, necklaces, body piercing
- *Shirt/Blouse/Dress*: Color, pattern, design, sleeves, collar
- *Coat*: Color, style, length
- *Pants/Skirt*: Color, pattern, design, length, cuffs
- *Socks/Shoes*: Color, pattern, style, clean/dirty
- *Oddities/Tattoos*: Shape, size, color, location on body
- *General Appearance*: Neat, sloppy, clean, dirty
- *Accessories*: Purses, briefcases, backpacks, packages

Report the Incident

It is extremely important to use your agency's reporting processes, not only to document incidents, but so the information can be used to analyze what steps can be taken to try to minimize incidents from occurring in the future. It is critical that you report all workplace violence incidents to the appropriate personnel in your agency:

- Follow your agency's procedures
- Write legible, accurate and complete reports
- No report = No Incident

In completing incident reports or forms, get assistance from your manager or supervisor if necessary. Incident reporting forms should be legible, factually accurate, and complete so the situation can be adequately assessed. In addition, these reports may be used to assess prevention efforts to reduce the risk of similar incidents in the future.



Recovering from Workplace Violence

In the aftermath of violence, the survivors who were injured, those who may have been targeted but missed or spared, those who witnessed the events, co-workers, family, friends, and other people in the organization may all experience emotionally devastating consequences. Whenever an incident of workplace violence occurs, the impact is felt not only by those directly involved, but also on many others as well.



Identifying Stress

Whether you are a victim or a co-worker, one of the primary impacts of workplace violence is stress. Stress can occur as a result of a single traumatic incident (i.e., post-traumatic stress) or due to culmination of a series of incidents (i.e., chronic stress).

Post traumatic stress, also known as PTSD, is an anxiety disorder that results from exposure to an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others.

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The Symptoms of Stress

Symptoms of stress can be exhibited in a variety of ways. They may be:

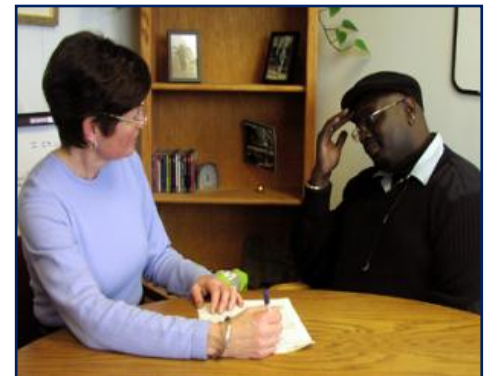
- **Physical** – Difficulty breathing, elevated blood pressure, sweating and chills, muscle twitches and teeth grinding
- **Emotional** – Fear, panic, depression, grief, denial, feelings of hopelessness, guilt, agitation, irritability, intense anger
- **Psychological** – Hypersensitivity, paranoid thoughts, poor concentration and decision-making, disorientation, confusion, nightmares
- **Behavioral** – Withdrawal or other anti-social acts, disrupted sleep patterns, substance abuse, loss or increase in appetite



Seek Assistance

If you or someone you know exhibits symptoms of stress, you need to seek help for yourself and/or others so that recovery can begin. Seek assistance if you are exhibiting symptoms of stress due to workplace violence. You can seek assistance from:

- Your manager or supervisor
- A human resources representative
- A union representative
- Family members
- Support groups
- Medical providers
- Employee Assistance Program (EAP)



Provide Support

If you see signs of stress in co-workers, provide as much support as you can or feel comfortable doing.

If someone confides in you, be empathetic and a good listener. Don't be judgmental or belittle a person's feelings.

When possible make referrals to other support resources. Whatever you can do to be supportive will go a long way.

Keep in mind that if stress is left unaddressed, it could fuel the "cycle of violence" and contribute to future workplace violence incidents.



Conclusion

There are many prevention efforts that you and your agency can take to reduce the risk of violence in the transit workplace.

The challenge is to incorporate prevention efforts into your daily routines, each and every day. This can be accomplished by paying attention to inappropriate and out-of-the-ordinary behaviors, communicating concerns about warning signs, effectively managing interactions with people, and reporting all incidents to the appropriate people in our agency in a timely fashion.