



TIPS

NO SURPRISES - Employer tips

to help Hospitality Workers make smart, safe decisions in the face of violence

How can employers convince employees to exercise good judgement in that moment of crisis, to choose de-escalation over confrontation, and to value personal safety over heroism and ego by letting the criminal walk away? There is no easy answer, as evidenced by a Statistics Canada study, which reported that one in five violent incidents occurred in the victim's workplace.

An effective way to improve violence prevention programs for the workplace is to apply a criterion of "no surprises." Surprise, after all, is what causes basic instincts to run amok. Here are 50 ways employers and employees can prepare for and reduce the potential for violent situations.

Custom-build your program

Designing a best-practice, workplace violence prevention program that fits the reality of your workplace and community is the single most important demonstration of commitment to staff well-being that a leader can make.

1. Know your environment inside and out.
2. Anticipate surprises by scanning the risks unique to your workplace and community and address them in your workplace violence program.
3. Consider these questions when building your program:
 - What kind of people live and work in the neighbourhood?
 - What kind of workers do you hire?
 - What kind of customers do you serve?
 - What processes are performed alone?
 - What risks have staff themselves identified?

Make the unexpected familiar

Talk about health and safety expectations starting from day one: during orientation, in staff meetings and informally.

4. Share your expectations with employees: use storytelling and role-playing.
5. Talk about stories in the news.
6. Ask staff to describe a potentially violent scene and how they would react.
7. Discuss potential scenarios to mitigate surprise in any way you can.

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Reduce the risk

There are dozens of preventative measures that can be undertaken, from the obvious to the creative, which can help to discourage surprise attacks.

8. Trim shrubbery.
9. Have staff take garbage out to dumpsters (which may be in isolated or confined locations) before dark.
10. Consider installing security cameras.
11. Keep the facility well lit.
12. Institute a buddy system, when possible.
13. Invite police to do a safety seminar.
14. Recruit wisely. Look for individuals who have a strong locus of control; i.e. can discuss potential crises easily and without fear or defensiveness; have a healthy self-esteem and confidence; are clear-headed and rational decision-makers; and can manage stress within themselves and in others.
15. Integrate health and safety messages into your orientation session, be specific about expectations, and be a role model for how you want things done.

Manage Emotions When Confronted with Anger or Aggression

What comes naturally in a confrontation can be a rush of emotion that crowds out other, more appropriate reactions. You can't eliminate emotion, so why not prepare for the natural reactions that everyone experiences in a crisis.

16. Prepare staff for what they might see and hear. Describe what aggression looks like: standing tall, red face, raised voice, rapid breathing, direct and prolonged eye contact, exaggerated gestures, and clenched fists.
17. Teach staff how to de-escalate the situation by projecting confidence and calmness, speaking slowly and clearly, not staring or arguing, listening carefully and respectfully, and acknowledging the aggressor's concerns without being patronizing.
18. Teach them to manage surprises for the criminal, too, by giving advance warning of their own or their coworkers' movements.

Reward and reinforce

Employees want to make the boss happy, so be sure to recognize the actions of your staff and remind them that their personal safety is both the priority and the reward.

19. Praise employees for following the process in a crisis and share successes with other employees.
20. Provide additional training when the process isn't followed.
21. Remind staff to make a note of details so they can be reported to police.
22. Be consistent. Asking your staff "Why didn't you stop him?" is the kind of negative response that can torpedo the best workplace violence program, and decimate workplace culture.

Stay on top of best-practices and seek additional support when needed

Resources abound. Do some research to make sure your program addresses all of the potential risks in your workplace, and that your employees have all of the support they need to stay safe.

23. Contact OSSA's Client Service Line for answers to questions, or to be connected with an OSSA consultant 1-888-478-6772
24. Visit OSSA.com to order OSSA's 2.5-hour, interactive awareness module, designed to assist staff in managing the risks associated with working alone and handling cash.
25. Visit the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety for checklists, Q&As, and guidelines www.ccohs.ca.
26. Google "Working Alone Safely" to find Alberta's best practices document on this topic.

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