



PREVENTION STRATEGIES FOR YOUR BUSINESS

The following materials are provided to assist you in developing a workplace violence policy. They are intended to be used as a first step, tailored to your business, and continually developed, implemented and reviewed.

Eight practical steps to preventing workplace violence, bullying and harassment:

1. KNOW YOUR OWN BUSINESS

Look for signs of trouble:

- High staff turnover
- Lots of 'sickies' especially 'long weekends' (why can't they face work on Mondays?)
- Women who don't come back from maternity leave, but do go on to work somewhere else
- Apprentices and juniors who resign suddenly, without explanation
- High rates of absenteeism generally

Always have exit interviews. You might also contact staff a few months after someone has 'resigned' and see if they have anything they might like to tell you.

Some other signs are:

- A 'traditional' workplace where the staff are very closely knit and socialise outside work, where minorities are few and where they assure you that "it's like a family here" - why don't they want you to get involved?
- A workplace where grievance procedures aren't used at all. This does not mean all is well - it means that pressure is building.

Check the culture of the workplace. Most bullying and violence is tolerated - if only by the code of silence and misguided loyalty.

- Violence and bullying is often unrecognised. It is accepted by the 'culture'. It may also be reinforced by a group dynamic: 'don't dob'. You might do better by having an outside expert audit the workplace for you, rather than someone familiar with the culture.
- The best way to tackle it is to ask workers and managers their views without creating anxiety or artificially creating a problem; review accident reports, and assign a particular person to deal with enquiries and reports of violence.
- Record all incidents, encourage workers to report them, and classify them - look for common causes and patterns.
- If there are patterns, find out the common elements - certain times of day or the week? A particular place or places? Particular types of aggression? Similar circumstances? Look at conditions that allow or facilitate it, and then for reasons and solutions.
- Then, develop a co-ordinated program to prevent or reduce aggression.

2. Develop A Set Of Integrated Policies

- Make sure that all your procedures in relation to occupational health and safety, equal opportunity, anti discrimination, sexual harassment, WorkCover and discipline, are designed with each other in mind.
- Have a very clear disciplinary code - a Code of Conduct - that clearly defines what 'bullying' and 'harassment' (including, but not limited to sexual harassment) actually are. Make sure the Code is consistent with your occupational health and safety, and equal opportunity, rules and procedures.
- Prohibit initiation rites in that Code, and make it known that breach of the Code will trigger a disciplinary response, including possible dismissal.
- (See the attached Model Code of Conduct.)
- Act promptly on any reports or observations of any form of workplace violence or aggression. Don't wait for a complaint. If you see it, stop it. It is a management responsibility.
- Continue to check the workplace culture for problematic behaviours and attitudes. You need a systematic approach. Often work practices that tolerate hounding and bullying are just bad habits.

3. Develop An Anti-Violence/Bullying/Harassment Strategy

The best response to workplace violence, bullying and harassment is **prevention**.

There is a wide range of strategies, including looking at:

- ♦ Physical environment
- ♦ Work organisation
- ♦ Work procedures
- ♦ Work design, and
- ♦ Training and selection of staff

You will need to:

- ♦ Cost each initiative
- ♦ Implement them, and
- ♦ Evaluate and monitor them

These are the basic rules:

- Workplace violence management is a core human resource management issue.
- Workplace violence is never acceptable as 'part of the job'.
- Concentrating on the 'sick' employee misses the point: it is an organisational issue to deal with the problem effectively.
- Management should manage the risk- identify and assess the risks and the losses, and develop strategies for action.
- Action on workplace violence should be part of mainstream business planning, and part of line management responsibility - managers are responsible for preventing it and dealing with it.
- Action on workplace violence should include employees and their representatives.
- Effectiveness depends on clear communication through all levels of the workplace.
- Preventing and managing conflict, assault, harassment and bullying should be part of human resource management and occupational health and safety planning and training.
- Potential areas of conflict are performance and discipline management. Reassess those strategies in line with the management of violence and harassment strategies.
- Clinical and medical services provided by the organisation are not a substitute for a violence management strategy - just part of it.

Remember:

- **Prevent foreseeable harm, and ...**
- **protect yourself against vicarious liability for the wrongs of others by ...**
- **taking every reasonable step to prevent them.**

4. Some Specific Preventive Measures Include:**Training -**

Regular and updated, instilling interpersonal and communication skills that defuse and prevent potentially threatening situations, improving the ability to identify these, and preparing a 'core group' of mature and competent staff to take responsibility for more complicated interactions. It is useful to train a core group in dealing with potentially violent situations and defusing aggression.

Communication -

This defuses tension and frustration, and is very important in removing the taboo of silence that often surrounds sexual harassment, bullying and ganging up. Information sessions, personnel meetings, office meetings, group discussions and problem-solving groups are very effective.

Physical environment and layout -

Look at stress-reduction factors such as good ventilation, temperature control, seating (especially where waiting is required), comfort and size of spaces, noise, natural and adequate light and colour levels, and adequate toilet facilities. Special protection is required for people working alone.

Work organisation and job design -

Best dealt with at the beginning. Unresolved, persistent organisational problems cause powerful stresses, and gradually stress tolerance diminishes, which can cause a 'scapegoat' mentality and trigger acts of rejection against individual workers. So make sure staffing levels are adequate; tasks are assigned according to experience and competence (not nepotism or favourites), and shifts are adequate to the situation. Reduce tension and aggression.

Breaking bad habits: starting off right -

Where there are practices with harassment or bullying potential, or misconduct involving young workers, replace them with other ceremonies or celebrations. For example, arrange and cater for a barbecue to welcome the new apprentices. Make sure new staff are properly oriented and introduced to standard practices, and that they have a mentor or 'big brother' or 'big sister' to talk to in confidence.

Creating a culture of respect -

Bullying and violence is less likely where the culture is inclusive and respects younger workers and other minority groups. This can be fostered by:

- Codes of conduct that prohibit initiation rites and teasing;
- Directions to supervisors and older workers instructing them to act to prevent this type of behaviour at work, or work-related events, without waiting for a complaint;
- Training during the induction process for all new staff and ongoing training for all staff, and
- Clear procedures for complaints and grievances to deal with the concerns of vulnerable staff.

5. Develop A Workplace Violence Policy And A Grievance Process

These **must** be:

- An important, and integrated, part of your business or strategic planning;
- Seen to be an important responsibility of top management;
- Clearly seen to be supported and backed by authority, and
- Tailored to your organisation.

6. Establish Performance Measures

- Make it clear what you expect to achieve - no violence, no threats, no aggression and the management of disputes, together with a properly functioning grievance process.
- Make your supervisors and managers aware that **they will be held accountable** for violence and aggression at work. Write the objectives of your strategy into their statement of work duties. Then review their performance regularly. Make promotion and bonuses contingent on their satisfying you that they have achieved the stated objectives.

7. Educate, Communicate And Train

None of this will work unless you have a **comprehensive education, training and communication strategy** which will make sure your policy and procedures are known to present and future staff.

There is no point at all in having strategies and policies that nobody knows about, does not know how to implement, or does not take seriously.

- Never establish a one-off education program, and never leave responsibility for disseminating information or training people to a single, enthusiastic individual. There is a tendency for such programs to disappear without trace when the individual does.
- Always make sure you train old staff and new; young and old; senior management and middle management, as well as the 'shop floor', in the standards of behaviour you expect, and will enforce. And keep doing it.
- Put the Code of Conduct up on the wall.
- Check regularly that the information in the Code of Conduct is current, particularly the name of the person to contact in confidence if workers have a grievance.

8. Watch/Monitor/Review

No policy will work if it isn't being used, or nobody knows it exists.

- Policies or procedures which are not regularly reviewed against quantifiable performance criteria expose employers to **greater** liability, not less. These employers have demonstrated that they are aware of the risk, but have not bothered to ensure their procedures minimise or avoid it.
- Management should be regularly informed of how the strategies are working, as part of its ordinary planning and reviewing strategies and timetables.
- This review process should not be left to a junior employee. Eliminating violence and bullying is a top management responsibility.

MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT

(FOR A COMPANY NAMED HONEST AND SAINTLY)

Honest and Saintly is committed to creating and maintaining an environment for all employees that is free from violence.

Courtesy, understanding and mutual respect towards all persons are necessary for excellence in what we do, for safety in the workplace, and in creating an environment that serves all our needs.

We will not tolerate violence and threats at work or work-related events by our staff against other people or property.

For the purposes of this policy, violence includes, but is not limited to:

Any act that is physically an assault

Any threat or behaviour or action that is interpreted by a reasonable person as having the potential

- To harm or endanger the safety of others
- To result in an act of aggression, or
- To destroy or damage property

Any employee who commits a violent act or threatens to commit a violent act towards other persons or property at work or a work-related event will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal from employment, exclusive of any other civil remedy or criminal penalty that might be pursued if appropriate.

It is the responsibility of every employee, supervisor and manager to take any threat or violent act seriously, and report acts or threats of violence to the appropriate authorities.

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These Factsheets are intended only to provide an alert to some of the important matters in workplace violence. They do not purport to be comprehensive Legal advice. Any person presented with such a problem should seek specific Legal advice in relation to that matter.