

# Workplace Violence



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## Introduction

Workplace violence can affect any worker in health care. It is not limited to physical attacks, but includes any act where a person feels that her/his safety is threatened.

We must all become aware of the risks and know what we can do to prevent and deal with violence in our workplace.



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## Objective

In this program you will learn:

- Capital Health's Workplace Violence Prevention Statement
- Your rights under the Occupational Health and Safety Act
- What workplace violence is and the different types
- How to recognize a situation in which there is a potential for violence  
– warning signs
- How to respond to actual or potentially violent situations
- How to report and document incidents of violence
- The importance of Investigation and follow-up
- Learn tips for your personal safety



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## Capital Health's Workplace Violence Policy Statement

Capital Health is committed to providing a healthy and safe workplace that is free of harassment, violence and threats of violence. We believe that physical and emotional safety is the right, and responsibility of every person.

Capital Health acknowledges that violence in the workplace is an occupational health and safety hazard that can cause physical and emotional harm. We view any acts of violence or threats of violence in the workplace as unacceptable. We are committed to working to prevent workplace violence and to responding appropriately if workplace violence does occur. All members of Capital Health are responsible for creating and maintaining a safe environment.



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## Capital Health's Workplace Violence Policy Statement (continued)

Any acts of violence or threats of violence are unacceptable and will be responded to immediately. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Threats, including a threatening statement or behavior that gives a person cause to believe he/she is at risk of injury,
- Conduct that endangers the health and safety of a person

In all situations, if you witness or experience violence or threats of violence, take precautions to assure your own safety and the safety of others.

To report an incident, please do the following:

- Non-emergency – contact manager/supervisor and call 473-SAFE (473-7233).
- Emergency – follow emergency “Code White” procedures for your facility.



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# Nova Scotia Occupational Health & Safety Act

Capital Health Facilities must comply with all aspects of the Act. The Act is based on the Internal Responsibility System and ensures three fundamental rights to all Nova Scotia employees.

**Right to Know** what hazards you are expected to work with. You are entitled to training and information to allow you to work with the hazards safely. You also have a right to information on issues that may affect your health and safety or the health and safety of others at the workplace.

**Right to Participate** in decisions regarding health and safety in your workplace. This right is affected through your Occupational Health and Safety Committee (JOHSC). Members of the JOHSC are posted on designated bulletin boards located in your facility. You also have the right to participate on these committees.

**Right to Refuse** work that you believe is unsafe. If you choose to exercise this right, advise your immediate supervisor/manager. They will guide you through the specific process (CH80-045 Refusal to Work Situation)



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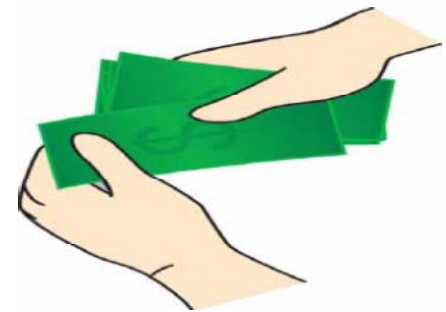
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## What is Workplace Violence?

Any threats, including a threatening statement or threatening behavior that gives an employee reasonable cause to believe that the employee is at risk of physical injury and conduct or attempted conduct of a person that endangers the physical health or physical safety of an employee.



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## Workplace Violence can include:

- Threatening or intimidating behavior
- Verbal or written threats
- Physical attacks
- Sexual assault
- Bullying or Harassment from co-workers



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## High Risk Situations

Although violence can happen in any workplace, the following situations can pose a higher risk:

- Dealing with patients with illness.
- Dealing with public
- Dealing with persons under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- Working alone or in isolated locations
- Working late or early morning hours
- Handling money or valuables



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## Types of Workplace Violence

There are four main types of workplace violence:

- Violence by patients, family members, clients or customers
- Violence by strangers
- Violence by coworkers
- Violence by personal relations



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## Violence by Strangers

- It often occurs when a stranger enters a workplace to commit theft or a crime
- No legitimate reason to be at the workplace



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## Violence by Patients, Clients or Customers

- This type of violence is the most common type of violence at Capital Health
- Health care workers are at highest risk for this type of violence.
- Generally against workers who provide services to the public or provides direct patient care
- Committed by someone who receives services from the affected workplace



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## Violence by Coworkers



- Can be a current or former employee
- Any workplace is at risk for this type of violence
- Less common than violence by customer, client, patient
- Individual may be seeking revenge for what they see as unfair behaviour.
- Includes bullying or harassment
- Individual may experiences a stressor which causes temporarily unacceptable behaviour.



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## Violence by Personal Relations

- These acts are committed by someone known to an employee of the workplace from outside of work.
- Can include a current or former spouse, relative, friend or acquaintance.
- Motivated by the assailant thinking there are difficulties in his or her relationship with the victim.



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## Hazard Levels

The three levels of concern are:

- Escalating – opportunity still exists to de-escalate
- Threatening – trained intervention is required, always seek assistance
- Physically Acting Out – separate, warn and get assistance or activate “Code White – Violent Person”



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## Three Level of Threats

All threats are to be taken seriously.

- Direct Threats – clear statement of what will happen. (eg: I'm going to come there and hurt you.)
- Conditional Threats – if a particular condition is or is not met, there will be consequences. (eg: If you don't move, I'll kick you)
- Veiled Threats – body language or behaviour show an intent to harm. (eg: shaking fist motion, hand signal like a gun)



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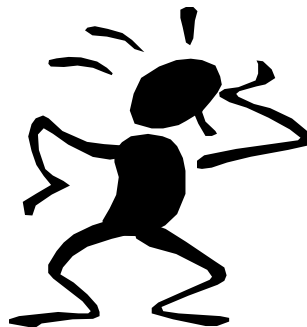
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## Non - Verbal Warning Signs

The following are signs of anxiety and a supportive approach may help defuse the situation

- Flushed or pale face
- Sweating
- Pacing, restless and/or repetitive movements
- Signs of extreme fatigue
- Trembling or shaking
- Finger tapping
- Sighing
- Facial grimacing
- Shallow, rapid breathing
- Avoiding eye contact or glaring
- Frustration
- Violating your personal space (they get too close)



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## Verbal Warning Signs

The following are signs of an individual who is continuing to escalate or is at a heightened crisis level. Continue a supportive approach, avoid power struggles, set limits; keeping them simple and clear. Be prepared to enforce limits and if necessary request assistance from Immediate Team (co-workers) or activate the “Code White” response for your facility.

- Angry, loud, forceful speech
- Confrontational/argumentative
- Abusive language
- Change in voice
- Verbal threats – all threats are to be taken seriously, seek assistance immediately.
- Using fragmented sentences
- Defensive, hostile reaction to inquiries
- Claims of previous violent acts
- Admit to “command” hallucinations



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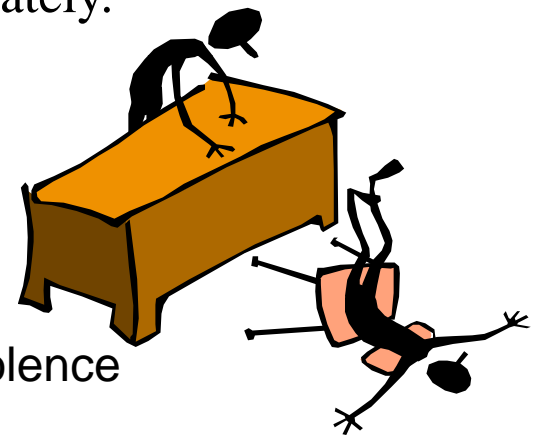
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## Physical Warning Signs

If the individual continues to escalate in their crisis they will proceed to the physically acting out level.

If any individual is physically acting out you are to initiate the “Code White” response for your facility immediately.

- Clenched fists, shaking fists
- Advancing or retreating
- Hitting
- Kicking
- Punching
- Grabbing
- Biting
- Threats of violence
- Destroying property
- Throwing objects



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## Dealing With a Potentially Violent Person

- When dealing with a potentially violent person, your actions may determine whether or not the situation escalates.
- The following slides give tips on what you should and should not do if you find yourself in a potentially violent situation.



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## Do

- Be calm
- Be Supportive
- Give undivided attention
- Be alert to the individuals behavior and body actions
- Be conscious of your voice: volume, tone and rhythm (avoid sounding condescending or impatient, talking too slow or fast)
- Be conscious of your body language, adopt an open stance. Stand at an angle, and approximately 1.5 to 3ft away from the individual
  - ✓ respects the person's personal space
  - ✓ Is non-confrontation, non threatening stance
  - ✓ Provides safe movement if needed



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## Do

- Be non-judgmental
- Listen carefully to determine the person problem
- Acknowledge the person's feelings
- Be reassuring and point out choices, as well as consequences
- Accept criticism in a positive way
- Set ground rules, limits
- Position yourself so that you have access to an exit
- Exit the situation as soon as possible
- Seek Assistance
- Do Not take behaviour personally



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## DO NOT

- Challenge, dare or argue
- Criticize or belittle
- Reject all demands outright
- Stand in a threatening pose
- Make sudden, threatening movements
- Bargain while being threatened
- Make false promises or statements
- Take sides or agree with distortions
- Minimize the situation
- Invade the person's personal space (1.5 to 3 feet)
- Take personally



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## Never Say.....

These are some “hot button” words that may escalate a person who is angry or upset:

- **Calm Down**
- **It's your fault**
- **I told you**
- **We have no control over that**
- **I can't**
- **I going to call the police/security – just call if necessary “3333”.**

**Avoid using these types of phrases. They can give the impression that the situation isn't being taken seriously and that nothing will be done to fix the problem.**



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## Assisting Co-workers (Immediate Team)

If you suspect, witness or are called to assist a co-worker dealing with a potentially violent person, you can assist in the following ways:

- Be unobtrusive, and available to the employee without appearing to be congregating, which could be seen as either ganging up or providing an audience;
- Do not intervene unless requested by the co-worker, only one person should be speaking with the crisis individual;
- Be prepared to assist as requested or as obviously needed;
  - ✓ Assist with removing others at risk from the area and stop others from entering;
  - ✓ Observe the area and if possible, remove any items which could be used as a weapon.
  - ✓ Call to activate the “Code White” Response for your facility, if necessary.



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## How to respond to and obtain assistance in an Emergency Situation

If you are unable to de-escalate the situation or you are in an emergency situation:

- Remain Calm
- Secure your personal safety and the safety of others
- Call for your co-workers (auxiliary team) to assist and/or activate the “Code White” response for your facility if necessary (3333 or 9-911)
- Cooperate with security and law enforcement personnel



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# Reporting and Documenting Incidents of Violence

Reporting incidents of violent behavior is the responsibility of all employees. All incidents of violence or potentially violent situations are to be reported.

As soon as possible after an event:

- Seek First Aid/Medical Attention if necessary
- Call Manager/Supervisor and report incident
- Call 473-SAFE (473-7233) to report and document

If your manager/supervisor is unavailable, leave a message on voice mail indicating:

- Your Name
- Your contact phone number
- A description of the event



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## Investigation and Follow-up

Investigation and follow-up of incidents of violence are important. It allows your Manager/Supervisor to:

- ensure affected employees are advised of available assistance, if necessary
- identify controls/actions which could decrease or eliminate possible reoccurrences
- strengthen the violence prevention plan
- assures that lessons learned are applied and effective
- allows for closure.



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## Preventing Workplace Violence

Workplace Violence Risk Assessments have been completed throughout Capital Health to identify risks associated with the hazard of violence.

You can learn more about the specific risks within your department and the preventative measures taken to reduce any identified risks by asking your manager/supervisor.

Additional information in regard to Violence and other safety information is available at the Wellness and Safety Department website on the CDHA Intranet.



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# Personal Safety Tips

## Emergency Preparedness

- Know your emergency exits and evacuation routes, including safe areas of refuge
- Know where your telephones are located
- Know your emergency phone numbers (must dial first 3 digits from a cell phone)
- Know your Facilities emergency procedures for:
  - Code White – Violent Person
  - Code Black – Bomb Threat
  - Lock down procedures
  - Hostage Taking



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# Personal Safety Tips

## Trusting your instincts

- Keep personal information at a minimum when talking with anyone who makes you feel uncomfortable (where you live, hours of work, breaks, vacation times, and plans, etc.)
- Do not engage in conversations that make you feel uncomfortable. Excuse yourself and walk away.
- Be firm and confident and do not permit any kind of harassment.
- Be alert for signs of anxiety, anger or hostility, being supportive, de-escalate arguments whenever appropriate.
- If you feel you are being threatened, intimidated or harassed:
  - Tell the person to stop
  - Report the incident to your manager/supervisor
- Report any inappropriate behaviour toward yourself or your co-workers to your manager/supervisor



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## Personal Safety Tips

### Dealing with strangers or suspicious persons

Adopt a non-threatening, non-confrontation manner toward visitors and ask “May I help you?”

If appropriate and not uncomfortable, escort the stranger to the location or the person he/she identifies as his/her destination.

If the person seems suspicious do not confront him/her. Take the following steps:

- note the appearance of the person(s),
- the direction they are heading,
- and report to security (phone #)



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# Personal Safety Tips

## Elevator Safety

- Do Not get on an elevator with anyone who makes you feel uneasy. Wait for the next elevator
- Observe all passengers in elevators
- Board the elevator last and select floor buttons last
- Get off the elevator if a suspicious looking person gets on with you
- If possible, stand near the control panel when entering an elevator
- If someone or something makes you feel uncomfortable, push the button for the next floor or push the alarm
- If attacked, push the alarm and as many floor buttons as possible. Keep your back to the sidewall.



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## Unusual emergencies

There are some situations that are extremely rare, but you must know how to respond if you find yourself in one of these situations. They include:

- a bomb threat
- a hostage situation

The following slides outline some steps that you should take in each of these situations.



## Bomb Threat

- Bomb threats usually occur by telephone.
- Remain calm and obtain as much information as possible such as location, appearance and the time it will go off.
- Call your facility's emergency phone number (3333 or 9-911) and provide all information.
- Call your supervisor.
- NEVER touch or tamper with a suspicious object.



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## Hostage Situations

If you are taken hostage:

- Remain calm and polite.
- Don't make any sudden movements.
- Do not stare, resist, complain or argue.
- Try to stay low to the ground, away from windows and doors.
- DO NOT be a hero.
- Don't risk your own safety and that of others.



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## Myths About Workplace Violence

Some common myths about workplace violence include:

- it can't happen here
- we can't predict or prevent violent incidents
- most situations will resolve themselves if given enough time
- workplace violence is usually committed by people who “just snap” or disgruntled employees



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## Conclusion

Most workplace violence can be prevented.

Many incidents result when the warning signs are missed or there is an expectation that the problem will resolve itself and necessary steps are not take to prevent it.



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# Have a safe day.



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