

11 Dos & Don'ts for Dealing with a Workplace Violence Incident



Workplace violence incidents have become far too common in both Canada and the U.S. Whether involving a disgruntled former employee, angry spouse of a current employee or a criminal, it's critical that your employees know what to do to protect themselves and others'and what to avoid doing.

Utah State University's security department recommends that if a workplace violence incident occurs, call 911 as soon as possible, notify others in your work area and follow these dos and don'ts:

DON'T use styles of communication that generate hostility such as apathy, brush off, coldness, going strictly by the rules or giving the run-around.

DO project calmness: move and speak slowly, quietly and confidently.

DON'T make sudden movements, which can be seen as threatening. Notice the tone, volume and rate of your speech. Keep you speech low and slow.

DO focus your attention on the other person to let him know you're interested in what he has to say.

DON'T reject all of the person's demands from the start.

DO maintain a relaxed yet attentive posture and position yourself at a right angle rather than directly in front of the other person.

DON'T try to make the situation seem less serious than it is.

DO accept criticism in a positive way. When a complaint might be true, use statements like 'You're probably right' or 'It was my fault.' If the criticism seems unwarranted, ask clarifying questions.

DON'T challenge, threaten or dare the person. Never belittle him or make him feel foolish.

DO acknowledge the feelings of the other person. Indicate that you can see he's upset.

DON'T invade his personal space. Try to maintain a space of 3-6 feet between you and the other person.

Bottom line: If the situation is life threatening, get out immediately. If necessary, defend yourself.

For more on workplace violence, see these OHS Insider resources:

- Train workers on how to respond to an active shooter
- Special Report on protecting workers from violence
- 5 strategies for addressing domestic violence in the workplace.