

# IN THE KNOW

Developing top-notch CNAs, one inservice at a time

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*A Safety Module:*

## **VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE**

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# IN THE KNOW

Developing Top-Notch CNAs. One Inservice at a Time

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## A Safety Module: Violence in the Workplace

### ARE YOU AT RISK FOR VIOLENCE?

A nurse is kicked in the chest by an angry patient and suffers a cardiac contusion (bruising on the heart).

A patient becomes enraged when a healthcare worker won't allow him to smoke. He leaves briefly, then returns to drench the worker in gasoline and set her on fire with his lit cigarette. She dies from the injuries.

Do these stories sound like plots in a murder mystery? Well, they're not. They really happened.

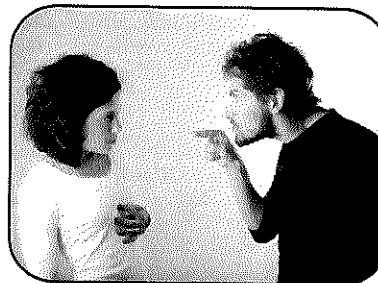
Healthcare workers fall victim to nearly *half* of all injuries caused by workplace violence. In fact, *nursing assistants* who work in long-term care facilities have the highest incidence of workplace violence of all American workers.

- Twenty-seven percent of all workplace violence happens in nursing homes.
- Every year, just under 1000 people die in America as a result of workplace violence.

- Hundreds of thousands are injured every year as a result of workplace violence.

These statistics are shocking, yet no one knows if they're accurate because many cases of workplace violence are *never even reported*.

There is a dangerous myth among healthcare workers ... many believe workplace violence is "just part of the job." Getting hit, pinched, slapped, yelled at, or threatened is not okay in any situation and is especially not okay while you are at work.



Workplace violence is defined as "verbal threats and physical assaults occurring to workers while on duty," and can be committed by co-workers, clients, clients' family members, strangers, or even someone you personally know and love.

Keep reading to learn more about violence in the workplace and how you can protect yourself, your clients and your co-workers.

## WHAT IS CONSIDERED WORKPLACE VIOLENCE?

**VERBAL HARASSMENT:** Verbal harassment can include name calling, humiliation, criticism or inappropriate sexual remarks.

- Verbal harassment can come from co-workers or clients and should always be reported.

**VERBAL THREATS:** A verbal threat is when someone actually says they are going to harm you (or someone else) in some way. They may tell you what they would like to do or how they would like to do it, or they may just make statements like, "I'm going to get you," or "Watch your back."

- If you hear someone being threatened or are the victim of a verbal threat, tell your supervisor immediately.
- Don't place yourself in the position of *trying to decide* if the person will actually follow through and cause harm. Assume the person means to follow through and take action to protect yourself and others.

**DISORDERLY CONDUCT:** Disorderly conduct can be defined as any disruptive behavior such as fighting, yelling or throwing things—and continuing to do so after being asked to stop. This type of behavior can cause you (and others) to feel unsafe and may actually lead to physical harm.

- Do not attempt to stop the person yourself. Get yourself and others out of harm's way and call for help immediately. If you work in a place that has security on site, call for a security officer. If you are in a client's home, call 911.



**SLANDER:** Slander is when someone intends to harm the character, reputation or career of another person. It is usually a false statement of fact about a person to someone else that causes actual harm. In the workplace, this may be done by current or former co-workers.

- Just to clarify: name calling, spreading rumors, gossip and personal opinions are usually not considered slander *unless* they lead to harm or cause someone to get fired for something that is untrue.

**ATTEMPTS TO CAUSE PHYSICAL HARM:** Your client, Mr. Williams is upset because his breakfast is not ready at 8am. He yells, then grabs a book from his nightstand and throws it at you. You duck and it misses. No harm done, right? Wrong. This is an attempt to cause you physical harm and needs to be reported.

- Even if the attempt is unsuccessful, you need to report any attempts to cause physical harm in order to protect yourself and others from potentially being harmed in the future. The next time Mr. Williams throws something, you may not be so lucky.

**ACTUAL PHYSICAL HARM:** Actual physical harm can be the result of intentional grabbing, pinching, scratching, slapping, punching, thrown objects or burns—which are all reportable offenses. This is *not just part of the job*.

- Notify your supervisor and seek treatment immediately for bruises, breaks in the skin, blows to the head or other trauma.

# WHAT'S NEW?

Grab your favorite highlighter! As you read through this inservice, **highlight five things** you learn that you didn't know before. Share this new information with your supervisor and co-workers!



## TYPES OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

**TYPE I (COMMITTED BY A STRANGER):** This type of violence is done by someone who is a stranger to the victim. It is usually the result of some type of criminal activity.

- Example: A robbery is being committed (the robber has no relationship to the workplace) and, during the robbery, two people are wounded by gunfire.

**TYPE II (COMMITTED BY A CLIENT):** With this type of violence, the person who commits the crime is a customer or client at your workplace and becomes violent while under your care.

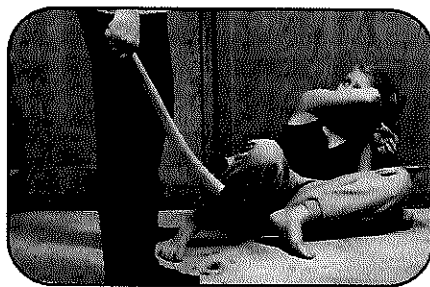
- The majority of threats and assaults against healthcare workers come from patients or clients.

**TYPE III (COMMITTED BY A CO-WORKER):** This type of violence is committed by employees or *past* employees of the workplace.

- These types of violent acts often happen after a series of angry or hostile behaviors. There are usually warning signs that a person is unstable or capable of committing an act of violence. This is why it is important to report these behaviors to your supervisor and the authorities.
- Type III violence accounts for about 7 percent of all workplace murders.

**TYPE IV (COMMITTED BY A LOVED ONE):** The person responsible usually has a personal relationship with an employee. The conflict is an extension of domestic violence.

- Women are affected more often than men, although both male and female co-workers and supervisors may end up becoming involved.
- These confrontations usually result in an employee's current or former spouse or significant other appearing at the workplace and creating a scene or causing physical harm.



## WHAT EXCITES YOU?

The best defense against workplace violence is Personal Empowerment.

There are many ways to become empowered but one of the most popular ways is to take a course in Self Defense!



If you have ever taken a self defense course, offer to show your co-workers a few of the tactics you learned.

If you'd like to take a self defense course, check your local community college, YMCA, women's gyms or go on the internet and Google the words "self defense class in (town where you live)."

If you find an affordable course, ask the course facilitators for fliers you can hand out to your co-workers.

You can also ask the course facilitators if a group discount is available or if they would be willing to come to your workplace to present the class to you and your co-workers.

## WHY ARE HEALTHCARE WORKERS MOST AT RISK?

Anyone who works in healthcare is at risk of becoming a victim of violence. However, nurses and CNAs have the highest risk. Nurses and aides have the most direct contact with patients and usually receive the full force of the clients' anger and frustration.

### Factors that put nurses and CNAs most at risk include:

- Working while understaffed—especially during meal times and visiting hours.
- Long waits for service.
- Overcrowded, uncomfortable waiting rooms.
- Working alone in a client's home.
- Caring for clients who may be under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- Working with clients who have a history of mental illness.
- Inadequate security.
- Poorly lit halls, rooms, and parking lots.

### THE BROKEN WINDOWS THEORY

This theory was originally used to describe crime that occurs in neighborhoods. According to this theory, when people accept a low level of crime, such as graffiti or other petty crimes, then the level and types of crime slowly *increase* to more and more serious offenses.

This same theory can also be applied to violence in the healthcare field. Remember the dangerous myth: "*It's just part of the job.*" This myth leads to many cases of workplace violence *never* being reported.

The silence of *failing to report* is interpreted as *acceptance* by the criminals who are committing these crimes.

***Offenders do not fear getting into trouble for hurting you because they are sure you won't tell.***



# THINK about it!

Not all violence in the healthcare workplace is done with criminal intent.

Sometimes, clients with dementia or Alzheimer's Disease (AD) can become violent and harm a nurse or aide without intending to cause harm . . . it's just a symptom of the disease.

When caring for clients with dementia or AD who become violent, the best defense is a good offense!

There are ways you can protect yourself from physical harm while maintaining the rights and dignity of the client.

Here are a few suggestions:

- Block blows but never hit back.
- Duck, bob and weave.
- Stay out of reach.
- Take a buddy with you.

**1. Do you have any other tactics for dealing with these types of clients?**

**2. Share your experiences and ideas with your co-workers and find out how they handle these situations.**

# HANDLING AGGRESSIVE PEOPLE

## SIGNS AN AGGRESSIVE CLIENT MAY BECOME VIOLENT:

- Yelling, swearing and making threats.
- Looking flushed and tense, with clenched fists.
- Speaking or breathing too fast.
- Glaring intensely.
- Standing too close to others.

***"Nothing good ever comes of violence.***

***~ Martin Luther***



- Pacing or stamping their feet.
- Throwing objects.

## PROTECT YOUR PERSONAL SAFETY:

- Don't wear jewelry—especially necklaces—to reduce your risk of being strangled during a violent situation.
- Avoid touching angry clients unless you know from past experience that touching them is safe.
  - Be a good role model. If you get angry or aggressive because of a client's violence, it will only make the situation worse.
  - Make sure you know your workplace policy for getting help if a client becomes violent.



***Violence is unnecessary and costly.***

***Peace is the only way.***

***~ Julius K. Nyerere***



# CONNECT IT NOW!

*Apply what you know*

## What should you do if a client becomes aggressive?

Here are a few suggestions:

- Never tease or ignore an angry client.
- Keep yourself calm. If you get upset, the aggressive person may become more violent.
- Stand at least an arm's length away from an aggressive person.
- Avoid letting the person trap you in a corner or block your exit from the room.
- If you fear for your safety, leave the room and contact your supervisor.
- "Buddy up" to provide care to clients who are known to be aggressive.

**1. How have you handled combative and/or aggressive clients in the past?**

**2. Share your experiences and ideas with your co-workers and ask them how they handle these situations.**

# WORKPLACE VIOLENCE ACTION PLAN

## WHAT TO DO IF YOU FEEL THREATENED

Whenever you are in a situation where you feel threatened, remain calm, trust your instincts and follow these four important steps:

### 1. QUICKLY, CALMLY END THE INTERACTION WITHOUT MAKING THE SITUATION WORSE.

- You can do this by telling the person you will not accept abusive treatment.
- If the behavior continues, ask the person to leave—or leave yourself.
- If the person does not agree to leave, remove yourself from the scene and inform your supervisor immediately.
- Do not return to the situation if you believe there may be a physical threat.
- Tell other staff members and have them leave the immediate area as well.

### 2. KNOW YOUR WORKPLACE POLICY FOR HANDLING A DIFFICULT INDIVIDUAL.

- Ask your supervisor, TODAY, for your workplace policy on dealing with a difficult or dangerous situation.
- If no policy is in place, volunteer to be on a committee to create one.

### 3. GET HELP

- Send for security or call 911.
- If you have threatened to call the police or security, you must follow through.

### 4. FILE AN INCIDENT REPORT.

- Remember, if it is not documented, it didn't happen.
- Don't allow abusive clients or co-workers to get away with threatening or abusing you.
- Do your part to end violence against healthcare workers.



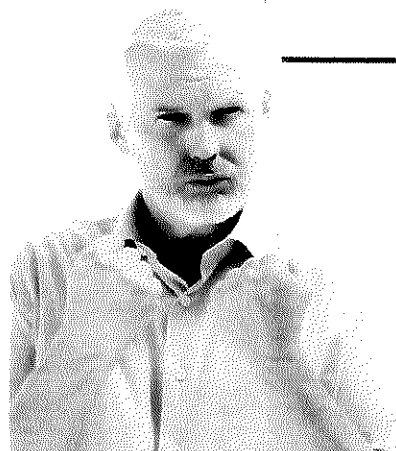
# TALK about it!

## Open the Discussion

**The only way to break the cycle of violence in the workplace is to TALK ABOUT IT!**

Here are some conversation openers you can use to get the discussion started with your co-workers:

- Have you ever been hurt by a client? How did you handle it?
- Once, a client hurt me by *(fill in the blank)*. I handled it by *(fill in the blank)*. What would you have done?
- What would you do if a co-worker's spouse came to the workplace with a gun?
- Have you ever been too frightened to make a home visit alone? How did you handle it?



**"Violence is the way stupid people try to level the playing field."**

**~ John Gregory Dunne**

# WORKPLACE VIOLENCE ACTION PLAN, CONTINUED

## WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE ATTACKED

- 1. GET HELP. GET TO A SAFE AREA.**
  - Yell for help if you think someone will hear and can help.
  - Get away from the attacker as fast as possible.
  - Find a safe place to wait for help.
- 2. CALL SECURITY OR 911 FOR POLICE ASSISTANCE.**
  - If your workplace has security officers on site, call for security.
  - If you are in a client's home, call 911.
- 3. GET MEDICAL ATTENTION.**
  - Be sure to inform the security officer or the 911 operator if you are injured so emergency medical services can be activated.
- 4. REPORT THE ASSAULT TO YOUR SUPERVISOR.**
- 5. FILE CHARGES WITH THE POLICE.**
- 6. GET COPIES OF ALL REPORTS AND KEEP A DIARY OF EVENTS.**
- 7. TAKE PHOTOGRAPHS OF YOUR INJURIES.**
- 8. SEEK COUNSELING TO HELP HANDLE STRESS RELATED TO THE INCIDENT.**
  - Often times, after a person is a victim of a violent act, symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) appear.
  - Signs of PTSD include trouble sleeping, nightmares, fear, anxiety and depression.
  - It's important to recognize the signs of stress in yourself and seek help. This type of stress is not something you can just talk yourself out of. It won't go away on its own.
- 9. RETURN TO WORK ONLY WHEN YOU FEEL SAFE AND SUPPORTED.**



## 5 KEY POINTS

### *Key Points to Remember*

*The 5 most important key points to remember when you are feeling threatened or have been attacked while at work are:*

1. Remove yourself from the situation. Get to a safe place.
2. Call for help.
3. Get medical attention if you have been physically harmed.
4. Report the incident.
5. Seek counseling to help you understand and work through your feelings after a traumatic incident.



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***"All violence, all that is dreary and repels, is not power, but the absence of power."***

***~ Ralph Waldo Emerson***



## THINK LIKE A BOY SCOUT

**The boy scout motto is: BE PREPARED!** It's always better to plan for the worst but hope for the best. The following guidelines outline some things you can do to be prepared for the worst while you are at work. Hopefully, you will never need to use these precautions—but it's better to have a plan in place . . . just in case.

1. Know your workplace's policy for handling violent people or situations.
2. Always keep your cell phone in your pocket in case you have to call for help.
3. Make sure you always have identification on you. For example, wear a name tag on your uniform, or keep your driver's license in your pocket.
4. Be sure to always keep a small amount of cash in your pocket for emergencies.
5. Make sure at least one other person knows where you are at all times, especially if you are doing a home visit by yourself.
6. Keep a piece of paper in your pocket with the address and phone number of your location. That way, if you have to call for help, you don't have to rely on memory to tell the 911 operator where you are.
7. If you work in a facility, know the location of several exits. Think about how you would escape if any of the main exits were blocked.
8. When you enter a client's home, make a mental note of other people present, any signs of danger and any doors or windows that may be used for escape, if needed.
9. Use a pre-arranged code word, that all your co-workers are aware of, to let others know if danger is present.

Keep in mind, being prepared doesn't mean you're walking around with your finger on your mace trigger all day! It just means you have a clear idea in your head about what you would do if a situation arose. Being prepared in advance eliminates the chance that your nerves will get the best of you during times of stress.



## THE NEXT STEP!

*Apply what you've learned!*

### File an Incident Report

*When it's reasonable and safe to do so, you need to file a report of any workplace violence incident. Here is what you should include:*

1. The date, time and location of the incident.
2. Your name and job title.
3. The assailant's name, gender and contact information (if known).
4. A physical description of the assailant.
5. The assailant's relationship to the victim (client, co-worker, stranger, spouse, etc.).
6. A description of the incident (scratched, hit, threatened).
7. Was there a weapon?
8. Were you injured? Was medical treatment provided?
9. Name and contact information of any witnesses.

### REMEMBER:

**If it isn't documented,  
IT DIDN'T HAPPEN!**

## SAFETY IN THE CLIENT'S HOME AND COMMUNITY

*Nursing assistants who work in the community, go from one client's home to another and sometimes travel in the dark should follow these additional safety precautions:*

- Get specific, clear directions to each client's home—before you leave your office.
- Make sure your supervisor knows your visit schedule. If your schedule changes for some reason, call the office right away.
- If you drive to clients' homes, make sure your car is in good working order. Keep the gas tank at least half full and check your oil and tires frequently.
- Drive with your car doors locked.
- Keep a blanket in your car during the winter and a thermos of water in the summer. Keeping a snack in the car is a good idea, too.
- Park as close as possible to the client's home and walk directly to the client's door.
- Look around before you leave your car. Don't get out of the car if you feel unsafe.
- Attach a whistle or chemical spray to your key ring. Keep your keys ready—in your hand—while walking to and from your car.
- Always knock on the door before entering a client's home.
- Wear your name tag so people know you are there to help.
- If your client has relatives or neighbors who create a safety problem, discuss the issue with your supervisor.
- If you are the victim of a robbery, don't resist giving up your money or valuables. *They are not worth getting hurt over!*
- Tell co-workers about any safety issues you've encountered at a specific client's home.
- If a client's home feels unsafe to you, ask your supervisor to send another aide with you or plan your visit to overlap with the visit of a nurse or therapist.

# GET OUT!



### *Thinking outside the box!*

*Working with clients in the home often requires coming up with creative solutions to common problems.*

- **THE PROBLEM:** You are caring for a client with mild dementia whom you visit three days a week. On prior visits, she has remembered you—or was easily reminded by her husband.
- When you arrive at the house today, she accuses you of being a burglar. She is standing in the kitchen where she reaches for a rolling pin to use as a weapon.
- **WHAT YOU KNOW:** You know her husband should be in the house somewhere because he never leaves her alone. And, you know he will be able to calm her.
- Right now, she's coming at you with the rolling pin.
- **GET CREATIVE:** Think of **3 creative solutions** you could try to keep yourself safe while protecting your client's rights and dignity.
- **TALK ABOUT IT:** Share your ideas with your co-workers and supervisor and find out how they would solve the problem.

# LEARN MORE ABOUT WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

## READ MORE ABOUT VIOLENCE IN HEALTHCARE SETTINGS:

Google the words, "workplace violence in healthcare"

- [www.google.com](http://www.google.com)

Occupational Safety and Health Administration

- [www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov)

American Nurses Association

- [www.nursingworld.org](http://www.nursingworld.org)

## FOR GENERAL INFORMATION ON VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE, GO TO:

The Institute for the Prevention of Workplace Violence

- [www.workplaceviolence911.com](http://www.workplaceviolence911.com)

Workplace Violence Research Institute

- [www.workviolence.com](http://www.workviolence.com)

Workplace Violence in the News

- [workplaceviolencenews.com](http://workplaceviolencenews.com)

## RESOURCES FOR VICTIMS OF VIOLENT CRIME:

The National Center for Victims of Crime

- [www.ncvc.org](http://www.ncvc.org)

Safe Horizon

- [www.safehorizon.org](http://www.safehorizon.org)

## RESOURCES FOR SELF DEFENSE CLASSES:

Google the words, "self defense class in (your town)"

- [www.google.com](http://www.google.com)

The YMCA or YWCA

- [www.ymca.net](http://www.ymca.net)
- [www.ywca.org](http://www.ywca.org)

Safety for Women

- [www.safetyforwomen.com](http://www.safetyforwomen.com)



**WHAT I  
KNOW  
NOW!**

*Now that you've read this inservice on Workplace Violence, take a moment to jot down a couple of things you learned that you didn't know before.*

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