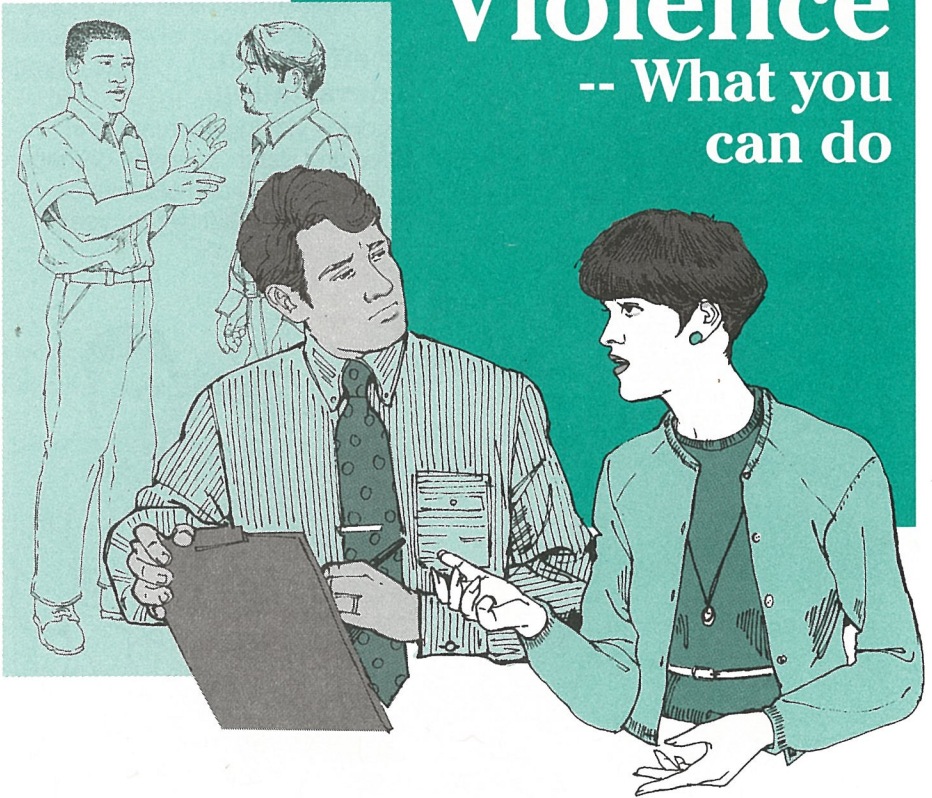


# Preventing Workplace Violence

-- What you  
can do



Hawaii Occupational Safety & Health Division  
830 Punchbowl Street — Room 425  
Honolulu, HI 96813

# Workplace violence is an unfortunate reality.



## It can strike any workplace.

Workplace violence affects hundreds of thousands of workers each year. No organization can afford an "it won't happen here" attitude.

## The effects can be devastating.

Workplace violence can result in injuries and death, property damage and lost profits. It can also cause emotional scars that last for years.



**Workplace violence destroys lives and businesses.**



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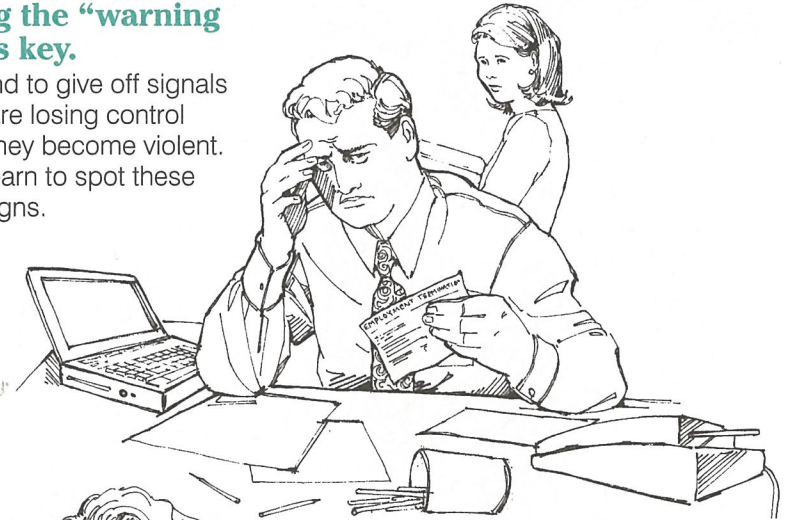
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# But, you can help prevent workplace violence.

## Knowing the "warning signs" is key.

People tend to give off signals that they are losing control -- before they become violent. You can learn to spot these warning signs.

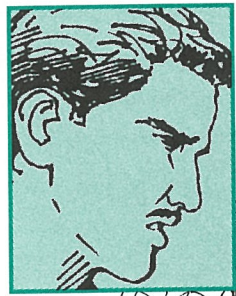


## Thoughtful action can help head off violence.

By learning how to respond to warning signs of violence, you can prevent violent acts or minimize damage.

**Everyone deserves a safe workplace.**

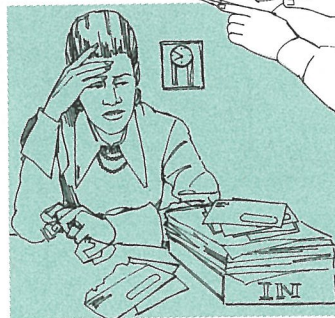
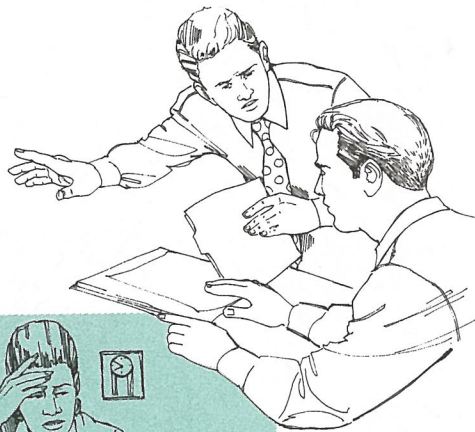
# What is violence?



## Violence is the use or threat of force.

Examples include:

- stalking
- robbery
- slapping, kicking, punching
- using weapons
- bombing or arson
- destroying property
- rape
- kidnapping
- suicide
- murder
- verbal abuse and harassment
- threats to do the above.

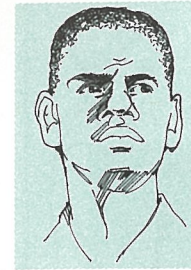


## Why do people commit violence at work?

There isn't one single cause, and crime is often random. But, common factors that contribute to violence include:

- job-related stress or frustration
- revenge for being fired or rejected for promotion
- fear of losing a job
- romantic interest in a co-worker that is rejected
- family or money problems.

# Who commits workplace violence?



**Anyone is capable of violence. But, people who commit violence often have one or more of these traits:**

## A history of violence

They tend to commit violence again and again.

## Fascination with weapons and violence

They may "show off" weapons and talk about violent incidents.

## Use of alcohol or other drugs

Drugs play a part in many acts of violence.

## Family and work problems

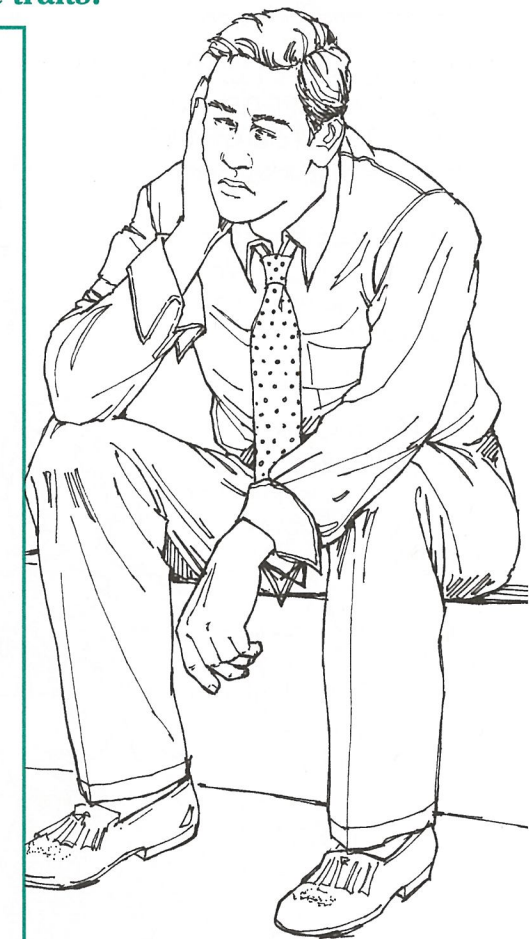
People who tend toward violence often have troubled relationships at home and at work. Poor work performance and safety problems are common.

## Low self-esteem

People who feel badly about themselves are more likely to become overwhelmed by stress.

## Physical and/or emotional problems

In some cases, these problems can reduce a person's emotional control.



**Violent people may come from inside or outside your organization.**

# Know these basic rules of violence prevention.

## Always follow proper security procedures.

- Know how to report emergencies.
- Know how to use warning codes to alert others of danger.
- Know how to reach safety quickly.
- Report any suspicious person or security violation immediately.

Ask for training, if needed.

## Try to spot trouble early.

You can often spot rising tension -- and head it off -- by staying alert.

## Consider a person's history.

Pay special attention to co-workers, customers or clients with a known history of violence.



## Trust your feelings.

Feelings of dread or uneasiness are important warning signs. Don't ignore them.

## Treat everyone with respect.

Courteous, respectful treatment of co-workers, customers and clients helps keep tension low.

## Take threats seriously.

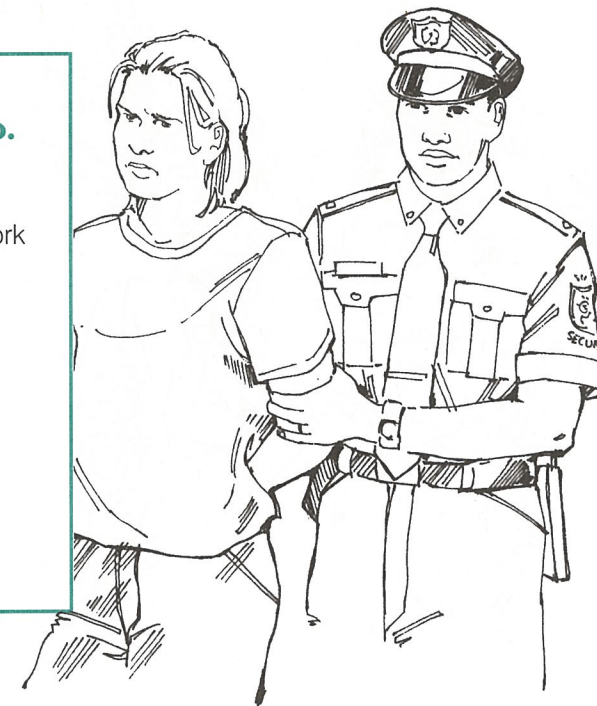
Report all threats and possible sources of trouble immediately. Follow your employer's procedures.

## Don't try to be a hero.

In the event of trouble, always let trained security personnel or police handle the situation.

## Stay safe outside the workplace, too.

- If possible, vary your routine for when you arrive at and leave work and where you enter and exit the building.
- Park and walk in well-lit places.
- Stay alert in elevators and stairwells. Avoid using them when you're alone or when suspicious people are present.



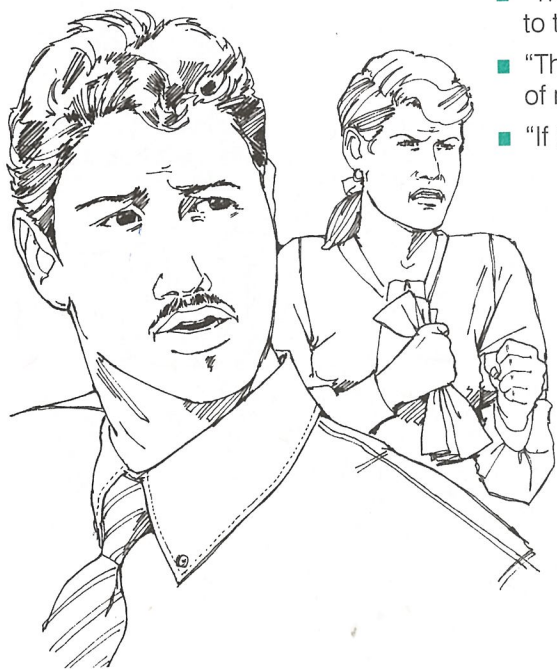
# Recognize the warning signs of violence.

## Never assume that only certain people may become violent.

Anyone can become violent, depending on the circumstances. This includes visitors, customers, clients and co-workers.

## Stay alert!

Pay close attention to what people say and do. Remember, most acts of violence follow warning signs.



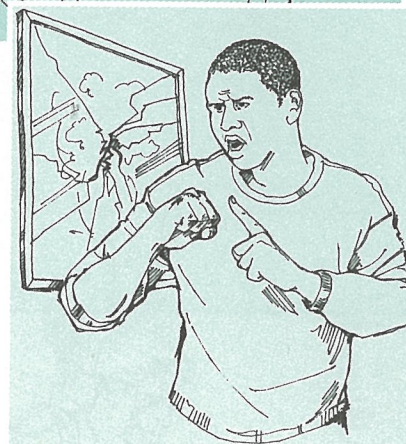
## Watch for verbal warning signs.

These may include:

- talking about weapons
- using an angry or threatening tone
- shouting, screaming, cursing
- making threats or sexual comments
- challenging rules or authority
- making unreasonable demands
- talking irrationally.

## Some examples:

- "I'm going to lose control."
- "They'll get what's coming to them!"
- "They haven't seen the last of me!"
- "If I don't get action right now . . ."



**A threat of violence is a form of violence. Report it!**

## Please note:

Not everyone who shows these signs will become violent. However, it is best to be cautious if such behavior occurs.

## Watch for physical signs.

These include:

- having a weapon
- nervous pacing, restlessness
- clenching fists or jaw, tightly gripping objects
- violent gestures, pounding on or breaking objects
- angry looks or staring
- frequent accidents (a sign of stress)
- staggering, slurred speech or other signs of being under the influence of alcohol or other drugs
- a major change in appearance or personal habits.



# If someone shows signs of losing control

## Follow your employer's guidelines.

Be prepared! Know the written policy for responding to violence. Review it regularly and attend training sessions.

## Alert security and other staff.

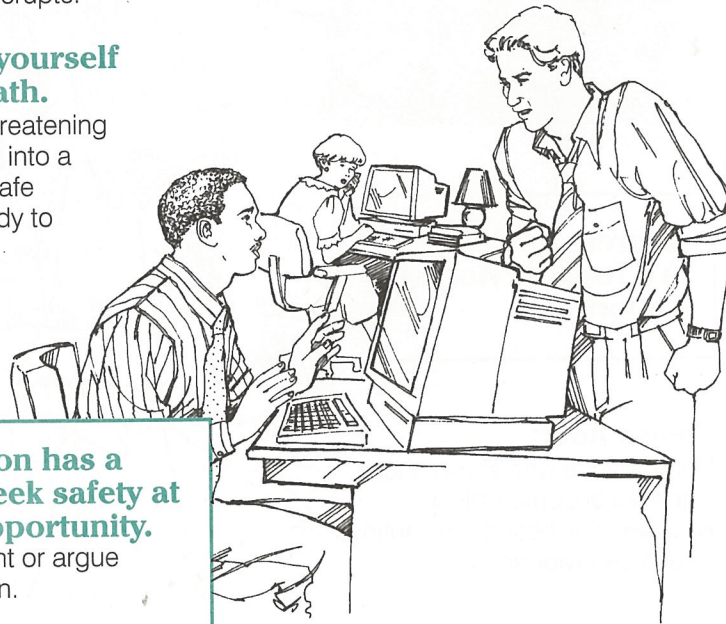
Get help before trouble starts. If you can't easily call for help, use a prearranged warning signal to alert co-workers.

## Stay calm and alert.

You can help the other person stay calm by staying calm yourself. At the same time, be ready to act quickly if trouble erupts.

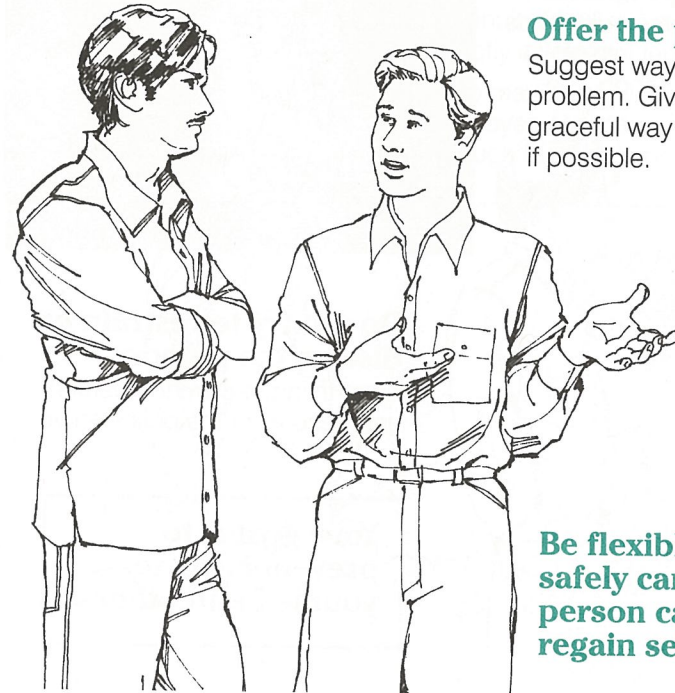
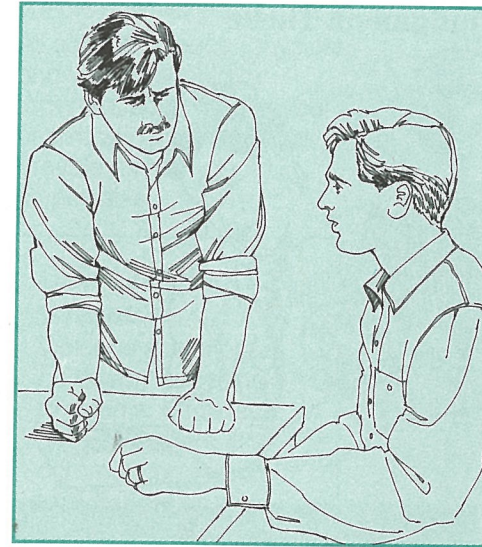
## Try to leave yourself an escape path.

Avoid letting a threatening person back you into a corner. Keep a safe distance. Be ready to escape quickly, if you must.



## If the person has a weapon, seek safety at the first opportunity.

Do not confront or argue with the person.



## Listen to the person.

Don't interrupt or respond with defensive words or angry gestures. Maintain eye contact without staring.

## Be supportive.

Acknowledge the person's feelings and ask questions. (Don't argue or accept blame for the problem.) Refer the person to others in the organization who could help.

## Talk slowly and calmly.

Use a firm, not angry, tone. Be clear and concise. Don't threaten, but state the consequences of any inappropriate behavior ("If you keep hitting the desk, I'll have to get my supervisor.").

## Offer the person choices.

Suggest ways to solve the problem. Give the person a graceful way out of the situation, if possible.

## Be flexible. Do what you safely can to help the person calm down and regain self-control.

## If physical violence strikes

Every situation is unique, and your response must depend on your training and judgment. These guidelines can help.

### Take immediate action to protect yourself.

Stay calm and follow your employer's procedures. If you can, leave the area and call for help.

### Sound the alarm.

As soon as you can safely do so, alert co-workers and contact security and/or the police. Tell them where you are, who is there, etc. Follow other instructions exactly.

### Give the person what he or she wants, if possible.

For example, if the person demands money, give it. Don't get into an argument. Let him or her go.



### Do not try to restrain or disarm the person.

Keep trying to calm the person until security or the police arrive.

**Your goal is to prevent harm to yourself and others.**

## When the incident is over

### Report every incident.

All acts of violence (physical and verbal) should be reported, according to your organization's procedures. Provide as many facts as possible.



### Don't neglect yourself.

Violence at work can be deeply upsetting to victims, witnesses and co-workers. It's common for people to suffer prolonged:

- fear
- grief
- anger
- anxiety
- difficulty sleeping and concentrating.

Consider seeking counseling after a violent incident, even if you weren't directly involved.

Help may be available through your employee assistance program or through therapists or counselors.



## Some questions & answers

### How should I respond to telephone bomb threats?

Take all threats seriously. Stay calm and follow these steps:

- Have a co-worker listen on an extension, if possible.
- Have the caller repeat the message. Write it down exactly.
- Ask for the caller's name and location.
- Ask what and where the device is and when it will go off.
- Remind the caller that the bomb may harm innocent people.
- Note the caller's voice -- sex, accent, etc.
- Listen for background noises that might help locate the call.
- Report immediately to the police and security personnel. Don't discuss the matter with others.

As always, follow your organization's policies.

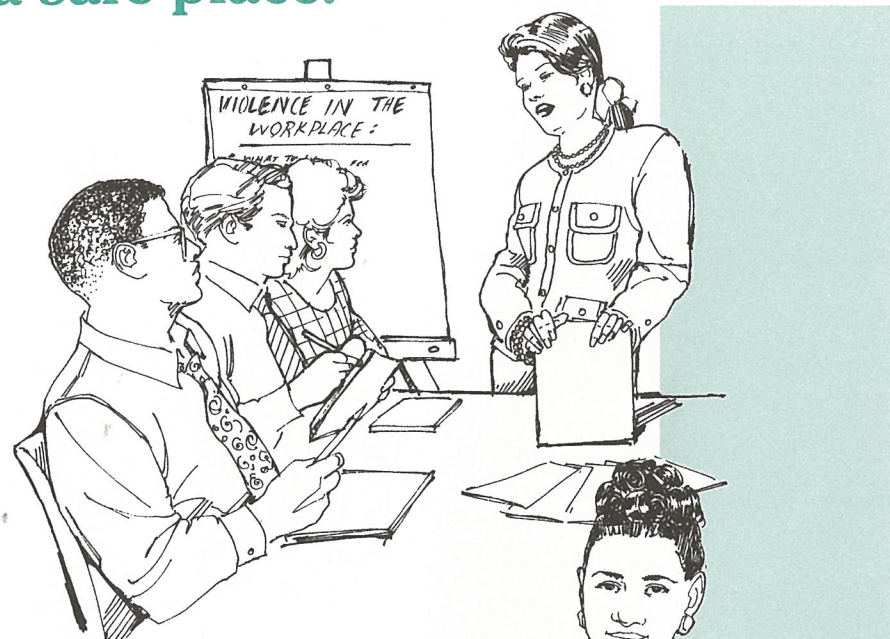
### How can I stay safer going to and from work?

If possible:

- Travel with a friend.
- Park and walk in well-lit areas.
- Ask your employer if an escort is available to walk you to your car, or the bus, train or subway stop.



## Help make your workplace a safe place.



**Understand the dangers** of workplace violence.

**Recognize warning signs** of violent behavior.

**Know your organization's policies** for responding to potential violence.

**Respond appropriately** if violence occurs.



**Help put an end to workplace violence!**