

## How to Handle a Violent Employee

### This Guide Covers:

- Step 1: Establish Goals
- Step 2: Create and Implement a Written Policy on Violence
- Step 3: Educate
- Step 4: Act Immediately and Carefully
- Step 5: Focus on the Behavior
- Step 6: Communicate Effectively With the Employee
- Step 7: Gather Evidence from Other Employees
- Step 8: Complete an Incident Report
- Step 9: Meet With All Levels of Management
- Step 10: Meet With the Employee
- Step 11: Incident Review

### About XpertHR

XpertHR is a practical online service to help you comply with federal, state, and municipal law. It is designed and organized around the day-to-day tasks of HR professionals so that you can quickly unravel the complexities of HR law across multiple jurisdictions.

Our team of experienced in-house editors and external law firms provide extensive coverage of new laws, and offer practical advice on how to comply with legal changes so that you can stay on top of a rapidly evolving social and legal landscape.

**Get a FREE Trial**  
[www.xperthr.com](http://www.xperthr.com)

© Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc

## Introduction

**Author:** Kimberly-Anne Murphy

Legally, employees are entitled to a safe work environment. This includes a workplace free from violence. Although there are no guarantees that an employer can stop all acts of violence, the best an employer can do is to create a policy and implement it as clearly and consistently as possible to ensure an early warning system for addressing potential threats of violence in the workplace.

### Step 1: Establish Goals

The employer's first goal should be to ensure the immediate safety of all employees, including the perpetrator. No one should confront a violent or potentially violent employee alone. Instead, there should be a witness or, at a minimum, another individual nearby. Employers should also consider whether other individuals in the vicinity should be asked to leave, especially if it is not possible to get the employee in question to cooperate. In most instances, if an employee is displaying signs of violence, the best thing to do is remove him or her from the workplace. Whether the removal is temporary or permanent depends on the employee's record of service and his willingness to get help.

Before any act of violence occurs, employers should consider these issues and decide how the workplace should answer certain questions:

- Who should be in charge of responding to an act of violence?
- What type of training should that individual(s) have?
- Should the employee be asked to leave regardless of the threat level of the incident or only if a viable threat is felt?
- Should the employee be allowed to return to his or her work area or should another employee be assigned to retrieve any personal possessions?

Answering these questions and setting goals based on the answers is a precursor to creating a violence policy.

### Step 2: Create and Implement a Written Policy on Violence

Setting expectations in the work environment begins with a strong policy.

*Have a rationale for the policy.* Employees must understand that the policy has been created for their benefit and protection to ensure a safe work environment.

*Be concise.* Employers should deliver all information as clearly as possible. Being concise does not necessarily mean making the message short, but being direct in highlighting all pertinent information. By writing the policy in this style, there is nothing left to personal interpretation.

*Assign responsibility.* In building a community, everyone has an important role to play. Everyone is responsible for contributing to a culture that promotes a secure work environment. Employees should feel empowered to say something if they witness any behavior that constitutes a hostile work environment. The policy should clearly state what the employer expects the employee to do should this occasion arise. Employees should feel confident in mitigating a situation, escalating an incident to management or calling law enforcement per the policy instruction.

*Enforce the policy.* The policy should include an enforcement clause that is consistent with existing personnel policies, making it clear to the audience that anything less than a safe and secure workplace will not be tolerated. The clause should be very specific by using clear communication that violence in the workplace will result in immediate removal.

With a policy in place once a violent situation arises, action can be taken swiftly.

### **Step 3: Educate**

HR should review the policy with all employees at every level to ensure understanding of the entire policy, including penalties. The employer might consider inviting outside resources from law enforcement to help convey messaging and prepare the staff should a violent situation arise. It is good practice to include a signed acknowledgement for each employee upon completion of a training seminar on adherence to a violence-free workplace.

### **Step 4: Act Immediately and Carefully**

When an employee becomes violent, the employer should take steps to immediately diffuse the situation and ultimately the employee. This should be done by surveying the entire scene and establishing an escape route; removing items that can be used as a weapon; and alerting someone outside the room or area of incident to be listening for trouble and alerting authorities accordingly.

If the situation is serious and if time permits, law enforcement personnel should be involved.

When addressing the violent employee, HR should speak calmly but firmly to him or her. It is important that no one argues or loses his or her temper when dealing with a violent person. Instead, the violent individual should be treated sensitively, humanly and considerately. It should be explained to the employee that his or her behavior is unacceptable and a violation of the employer violence-free workplace policy, which dictates that an employer is obligated to follow up on violations of the policy.

### **Step 5: Focus on the Behavior**

Employees should be given an opportunity to respond and to explain the reasons for his or her behavior. These responses should be considered and assessed when deciding the potential for further immediate violent behavior. In listening for the employee's responses, HR should be trained in active listening as well as in paying attention to and understanding the employee's body language.

If there is any real risk of further violent behavior or if the initial behavior is very serious, someone should proceed to remove the employee from the premises.

Law enforcement should be contacted to help remove the employee if a threat is felt; or they may be contacted after the employee's removal for security backup in the event that the employee returns.

## **Step 6: Communicate Effectively With the Employee**

When communicating with an employee, the employer should be very clear in its instructions to the employee and phrase them politely, but as official directives.

For example, "It would be better for you not to work right now. If there are any personal effects you need to take home, we will go with you to get them. Then you must leave and you are not to return until you've been given permission to return. Do you understand?"

Then, a time can be established for follow-up communication with the employee:

"I will contact you at your home in the morning and we will discuss the incident as well as what happens going forward."

It is important to honor this commitment and to follow up with the employee as per the agreement upon the employee's exit.

## **Step 7: Gather Evidence from Other Employees**

Employers should try to determine the reason for potential violence and talk to other employees that may have seen the signs, such as his or her bad temper or threats in the workplace. This information is not only important for talking to the employee and determining what steps to take next, but may also need to be provided to law enforcement later, if further action is necessary.

## **Step 8: Complete an Incident Report**

All incidents of violence should be followed by an incident report. When filling out the report, it is important to begin with the five Ws - who, what, where, when, why and how. The report should also include all information on every witness, including witness statements. It should also include any law enforcement involvement and follow-up instructions with the employee. It should be factual and detailed and not speculate or add personal commentary.

## **Step 9: Meet With All Levels of Management**

Everyone should be apprised of the situation. Communication and preparation are important, especially if the employee meeting does not go well or if the employee continues to show signs of potential violence. Management staff need to be aware of these concerns. This not only helps them to plan ways to keep other staff safe, but it also ensures that security protocols are followed properly. If the situation escalates or worsens, all staff should be informed not to allow the employee on the premises and be given steps to take if he or she comes back to the workplace and threatens further violence.

## Step 10: Meet With the Employee

Any meeting with an employee following a violent outburst should be held in a safe place where there is no access to items that could be used as weapons. Because this meeting may be seen as a confrontation, the employee may become violent during the meeting, so this should be anticipated and planned for accordingly. The meeting should have more than one employer representative in attendance and no one should project a threatening attitude. If the employee feels cornered, he or she may react.

There are many things that an employer can do during this meeting. For example, employers may:

- *Offer to get the employee some help for his or her violent issues.* This could be done through the employer's employee assistance program (EAP) or through other mental health services provided by the company's healthcare provider. The more that is done to stave off the violence and help the employee, the better the outcome that can be expected.
- *Explain why the employer's behavior was inappropriate and discuss what happened.* Now that the employee has had time to cool off, he or she may be fully aware of why the behavior was wrong. Having this discussion again will let the employee explain what happened at a time when his or her anger has resided.
- *Clearly and concisely explain the consequences of the action.* The employer or a member of HR should explain the violence policy and its enforcement provisions. If this means termination, the employer should be told this and all termination procedures should be strictly followed. If the conduct was mild and the employer feels that it is warranted, it may chose probation until appropriate anger management courses are taken or a write-up in the employee's files. However the employer chooses to handle the employee, the employee should be fully informed at the meeting.

## Step 11: Incident Review

After meeting with the employee, HR should meet with all levels of management again to review the incident from inception to outcome. All stages of the incident should be reviewed and any take-aways from the situation should be noted to use as a best practice guide when dealing with a similar situation in the future. It is also important to note what could have been handled better to ensure the easiest diffusion should another incident arise in the future.

## **Additional Resources**

[Risk Management - Safety, Health, Security > Workplace Security > Securing Employees](#)

[Risk Management - Safety, Health, Security > Employee Health > Managing Mental Health Concerns](#)

[How to Create a Crisis Management Team](#)

[How to Handle a Bomb Threat](#)

[Handling a Violent Employee - Supervisor Briefing](#)

[Report Suspicious Behavior Poster](#)

[Workplace Violence Prevention Policy](#)

[Responding to an Act of Violence Checklist](#)



## Get Free Access Now

XpertHR is the most comprehensive online service that empowers HR professionals with all the practical tools and resources needed to manage daily tasks and challenges. See what it can do for you...

Phone: **1-855-973-7847** Email: [inquiries@xperthr.com](mailto:inquiries@xperthr.com) Website: [www.xperthr.com](http://www.xperthr.com)

© Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc.

