Handling Harassment, Aggression and Violence Meeting Kit

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Harassment, aggression, and violence are significant concerns for workers in the hospitality industry. Workers in this industry are often exposed to long hours, high social contact, large crowds, and excessive alcohol consumption by guests, which can create potentially unsafe working environments. Workers may also face the risk of aggression, and violence, particularly from members of the public.

WHAT'S THE DANGER

Workers in the hospitality industry can face various dangers, risks, and hazards at work, including:

- **Physical Violence:** Hospitality workers face the risk of physical assault from guests who may become aggressive due to various reasons such as intoxication, dissatisfaction with service, or personal issues. This can lead to injuries ranging from minor bruises to severe trauma or even death.
- **Verbal Abuse:** Verbal harassment is prevalent in the industry, with workers often subjected to insults, derogatory comments, and threats from guests or even colleagues. Constant exposure to such abuse can cause psychological distress, anxiety, and low self-esteem among workers.
- **Sexual Harassment:** Hospitality workers, especially women, are at high risk of experiencing sexual harassment from guests or coworkers. Unwanted advances, inappropriate touching, and suggestive comments create a hostile work environment, leading to emotional trauma and fear of retaliation.

Workers face a multitude of dangers and risks, particularly those related to aggression, and violence. Working alone or in isolated areas heightens the potential for violence and other risks, employees working in locations with uncontrolled public access are at increased risk of robbery and security issues, especially in environments where alcohol is served, amplifying the likelihood of violence.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

To prevent harassment, aggression, and violence, workers in the hospitality industry can take proactive measures:

- **Training and Education:** Employers should provide comprehensive training to all staff members on recognizing, preventing, and responding to harassment, aggression, and violence. This training should include de-escalation techniques, conflict resolution strategies, and how to report incidents.
- **Establishing Clear Policies:** Employers should establish clear policies and procedures for addressing harassment, aggression, and violence in the workplace. These policies should outline zero tolerance for such behaviors, provide avenues for reporting incidents confidentially, and ensure prompt and appropriate disciplinary action against perpetrators.
- **Implementing Safety Measures:** Employers should implement safety measures such as installing surveillance cameras, providing panic buttons or emergency alarms, and ensuring adequate lighting and security personnel presence in areas with high-risk factors.
- **Buddy System:** Encourage workers to use the buddy system, especially when working alone or in isolated areas. Having a colleague nearby can provide support and assistance in case of confrontations or emergencies.
- **Awareness and Vigilance:** Workers should remain aware of their surroundings and trust their instincts. If a situation feels unsafe or uncomfortable, they should remove themselves from the situation if possible and seek assistance.

If workers find themselves in a situation involving harassment, aggression, or violence, here's what they can do:

- **Stay Calm and Assess the Situation**: Remain calm and assess the level of danger. If possible, try to de-escalate the situation by using a calm tone of voice and non-threatening body language.
- **Remove Yourself Safely:** If the situation escalates or becomes too dangerous, prioritize your safety and remove yourself from the situation. Seek refuge in a safe area and alert a colleague or supervisor immediately.
- **Report the Incident:** Report the incident to your supervisor, human resources department, or designated authority as soon as possible. Provide as much detail as you can about the incident, including the date, time, location, and description of the perpetrator(s).
- **Seek Support:** Seek support from your colleagues, friends, or family members. It's essential to talk about your experience and seek guidance from trusted individuals who can provide emotional support and assistance in navigating the situation.
- **Document the Incident:** Keep a written record of the incident, including any witnesses, conversations, or evidence. Documentation can be valuable if further action, such as filing a formal complaint or seeking legal recourse, becomes necessary.

When facing violence or harassment from a coworker or supervisor, consider the following:

Speak Privately with the Individual: Before taking formal action, consider addressing the issue directly with the individual involved. Choose a private setting where you feel safe and comfortable, and express your concerns calmly and clearly. Use "I" statements to describe how their behavior is affecting you and request that they change their conduct. However, exercise caution and prioritize your safety; if you fear escalation or retaliation, it may be best to skip this step.

Consult with HR or Management: If the issue persists or if you

don’t feel comfortable addressing it directly with the individual, seek assistance from your company’s human resources department or higher management. HR professionals are trained to handle workplace conflicts and can guide how to proceed. They may investigate the matter and take appropriate disciplinary action against the perpetrator.

Keep Records of Conversations and Incidents: Documenting conversations and incidents is essential for building a case and providing evidence if further action is needed. Keep detailed records of dates, times, locations, and descriptions of the harassment or violence you’ve experienced.

Consider Seeking Advice from a Union Representative or Legal Counsel: If the situation persists or worsens despite your efforts to address it internally, consider seeking advice from a union representative or legal counsel. Union representatives can provide support and advocate on your behalf during discussions with management or HR. Legal counsel specializing in employment law can offer guidance on your rights, potential legal avenues, and strategies for resolving the issue effectively.

FINAL WORD

By promoting a safe and respectful workplace culture through training, reporting mechanisms, and security measures, organizations can reduce the risk of harassment, aggression, and violence. If faced with such situations, remember to stay calm, report promptly, and seek support. Stay vigilant, speak up, and prioritize your safety.