Workplace Violence – Recognizing Threat Cues Meeting Kit

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Workplace violence rarely comes out of nowhere – most incidents are preceded by warning signs that go unnoticed or unreported. Ignoring these cues can put workers, customers, and anyone on-site at serious risk. Recognizing threat cues is not about judging people – it's about protecting yourself and others by responding early instead of reacting in crisis.

WHAT'S THE DANGER

The danger with workplace violence is that it rarely erupts without warning – but those warnings are often missed, dismissed, or ignored. When early cues are overlooked, frustration can escalate into verbal threats, physical aggression, or a full-blown violent incident.

Escalating Behavior

Aggression usually grows over time. A person may start with irritation or sarcasm, then move toward intimidation, yelling, or physically aggressive movements. If these signs go unnoticed, the situation can escalate quickly.

Verbal and Non-Verbal Threats – Some cues are obvious – others are subtle.

- Direct or indirect threats
- Angry tone, raised voice, or harsh language
- Clenched fists, pacing, or invading personal space
- Sudden, intense staring or glaring

Fixation on Conflict

When a person repeatedly talks about being wronged, targets a coworker or supervisor, or can’t let go of a grievance, it increases the risk that anger may turn into action.

Ignoring Boundaries or Safety Protocols

Individuals who refuse to follow rules, disregard instructions, or challenge authority may be testing limits — and these behaviors can escalate into more serious aggression if not addressed.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Protecting yourself from workplace violence starts with trusting your instincts and responding early. When something feels “off,” it usually is. Recognizing threat cues before they escalate gives you time to step back, get help, and prevent a dangerous situation from growing. You don’t need to diagnose someone — you just need to notice changes, respect your own safety, and act before things get out of control.

Pay Attention to Early Warning Signs

Small behaviors matter. Irritation, sudden mood shifts, or unusual agitation can signal that someone is struggling. When you notice these changes, create distance, stay calm, and avoid escalating the situation.

Maintain Safe Distance and Protect Your Space

If someone begins showing aggression — pacing, clenching fists, raising their voice, or invading your personal space — give yourself room. Position yourself near an exit, avoid turning your back, and keep barriers or furniture between you and the person if possible.

Use Calm, Non-Confrontational Communication

A steady tone, simple language, and respectful body posture can help de-escalate tension.

- Listen without interrupting.

- Speak slowly and avoid sudden movements.
- Do not argue, criticize, or match their aggression.

These small actions reduce tension and keep the situation from escalating.

Report Concerns Early

If something feels unsafe or someone is behaving aggressively, don’t wait to see if it gets worse. Report it to a supervisor, security, or HR immediately. Early reporting helps protect everyone — including the person who is struggling.

Know When to Remove Yourself

If you ever feel physically threatened or sense the situation is about to escalate, leave the area and get help. Your safety comes first. No task, deadline, or conversation is worth staying in harm’s way.

FINAL WORD

Your safety matters more than avoiding conflict or “not wanting to make a big deal.” When something feels wrong, act early. It’s always better to prevent a crisis than to respond to one.