

Guideline For Diffusing A Potentially Violent Situation In The Workplace

The University of California, Davis, has outlined a very informative three step approach that guides employers and their representatives in diffusing a potentially violent situation in the workplace. The guidelines which follow are meant to outline a common sense approach to various scenarios which you may encounter. Certainly, if there is a threat of imminent danger, an employer's first step should be to call 911.

Step 1: General response to disruptive behavior (no threats or weapons)

- 1. Respond quietly and calmly.** Try to defuse the situation.
- 2. Do not take the behavior personally.** Usually, the behavior has little to do with you, but you are used as a target in the situation.
- 3. Ask questions.** Respectful concern and interest may demonstrate that aggression is not necessary.
- 4. Summarize what you hear the individual saying.** Make sure you are communicating clearly. In crisis, a person feels humiliated and wants respect and attention. Your summary of the individual's concerns reflects your attention. Focus on areas of agreement to help resolve the concern. If this approach does not stop the disruption, assess whether the individual seems dangerous. If in your best judgment, he/she is upset but not a threat, set limits and seek assistance as necessary.

Step 2: Step 1 response ineffective, individual DOES NOT seem dangerous.

- 1. Calmly and firmly set limits.** "Please lower your voice. There will be no disruptions in this office." "Please be patient so that I can understand what you need and try to help you."
- 2. Ask the individual to stop the behavior and warn that official action may be taken.** "Disruption is subject to Company action. Stop or you may be reported."
- 3. If the disruption continues despite a warning,** tell the individual that he/she may be disciplined or prosecuted, state that the discussion is over, and direct them to leave the office. "Please leave now. If you do not leave, we will call the Police."
- 4. If the individual refuses to leave after being directed to do so,** state that this refusal is also a violation subject to discipline, termination from work, or arrest.

Step 3: Step 2 response ineffective and the individual SEEMS DANGEROUS.

- 1. If possible, find a quiet, safe place to talk, but do not isolate yourself** with an individual you believe may be dangerous. Maintain a safe distance, do not turn your back, and stay seated if possible. Leave the door open or open a closed door, and sit near the door. Be sure a co-worker is near to help if needed.
- 2. Use a calm, non-confrontational approach to defuse the situation.** Indicate your desire to listen and understand the problem. Allow the person to describe the problem.
- 3. NEVER touch the individual yourself to try to remove him/her from the area.** Even a gentle push or holding the person's arm may be interpreted as an assault by an agitated individual who may respond with violence toward you.
- 4. Set limits to indicate the behavior needed to deal with the concern.** "Please lower your voice." "Please stop shouting (or using profanity) or I'll have to ask you

to leave.”

5. **Signal for assistance.** The individual may be antagonized if you call for assistance so use a prearranged ‘distress’ signal to have another staff member check on you to determine how you are. If you need help, the co-worker should alert your supervisor and/or the police.
6. **Do not mention discipline or the police if you fear an angry or violent response.**
7. **If the situation escalates, find a way to excuse yourself, leave the room/area and get help.** “You’ve raised some tough questions. I’ll consult my supervisor to see what we can do.”