



FACULTY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

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Staying Safe: How to Protect Yourself Against Workplace Violence

When local incidents of campus threats make the national news, we wonder if we are doing enough to keep ourselves safe from workplace violence. We worry about our security in late-night labs, and start to pay more attention to people around us who might pose a threat.

Security and self defense experts offer some ways to assess and minimize campus and personal safety risks.

Learn and Communicate

Information sharing is important for making a campus environment more secure, says Fred Leland, founder and director of Law Enforcement and Security Consulting, Inc. and a lieutenant with the Walpole, Mass. Police Department.

“Communication is often the missing link,” Leland notes. “College administrations, staff, students, parents, legal and medical staff need to share information they have gathered through intuitive or explicit observation when they believe there is a potential for violence.”

Special programs to get



- Lack of motion-sensitive video cameras in high security areas
- Failure by faculty and staff to use Student Incident Reports.

everyone on the same page can be helpful. “Crisis management programs can make faculty and staff more aware of warning signs and reporting procedures,” Sargent notes.

Information sharing, and awareness of campus policies on incident reporting, are critical if safety and security personnel are to be effective at preventing acts of violence.

Take a Look Around You

Some basic security measures may be overlooked in a college campus environment, says Jeff Sargent, Chief of Police at Triton College in River Grove, Ill.

Among these potential lapses in security are:

- Leaving rooms unattended without securing them
- Leaving computers on and active while unattended

Steps You Can Take

Sargent offers these basic risk assessment steps for potential crisis situations:

- Look for warning signs
- Listen to what people tell you and how they tell you
- Report odd behavior (See page 2, “Behaviors that could signal trouble”)
- Report threats
- Get counseling involved
- Develop a survival mindset

Sargent also recommends practicing “what if” scenarios. “Ask yourself what you would do in various types of emergency situations, and decide how you would respond. Have a plan with your fellow workers as well. Ask ‘If something happens, what will the group do?’”

Safety starts with knowing your own facility, and those who attend and frequent it.

-Lt. Fred Leland, Founder and Director, Law Enforcement & Security Consulting, Inc.



Workplace Violence: How to Protect Yourself

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Personal Safety Tips

“What-if” scenarios are a good way to prepare for personal threats, as well. Think about what you would do if someone approached you at an ATM late at night, for example, and plan your response.

Natalie Caine M.A., founder of Empty Nest Support Services, coaches women on personal safety. Many of her tips, however, can apply equally to men and women:

- Tell someone what your schedule is each day.
- Program emergency numbers on your cell phone’s speed-dial.
- Set a code word or phrase with family, friends and coworkers. Those words signal to the listener that you are in trouble and need help ASAP.
- Take a self-defense class (or team up with colleagues to bring in an expert instructor).
- Let campus security escort you as needed.

By being attentive to your surroundings, and by staying informed about the latest technology, policies and procedures available to you on campus, you can minimize your safety risks.

Resources

- MoBull Messenger
www.mobull.usf.edu
- WorkplaceViolenceNews.com
- *Blink: The Power Of Thinking Without Thinking*, by Malcolm Gladwell (Little, Brown & Co., 2005)
- Report to the President On Issues Raised by the Virginia Tech Tragedy
www.hhs.gov/vtreport.pdf

Putting it in perspective

The USF Police Department reported a 32% drop in crime during the past 3 years, coupled with a 23% increase in arrests. In a media release dated September 22, 2009, the department reported that these trends appear to be continuing, based on statistics for the first six months of 2009.



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Does Heightened Awareness Skew the Statistics?

Is campus violence increasing, or is it just getting greater visibility? Current statistics are somewhat elusive. “The problem is that official statistics take a few years to compile, analyze and release,” says Ross

Arrowsmith, editor and publisher of WorkplaceViolenceNews.com.

“After the Annie Le tragedy at Yale, we have definitely seen an increase in awareness about both campus violence and

workplace violence. The heightened awareness invariably results in an increase in reporting but that does not always reflect an actual increase in the occurrence of actual incidents.”

Workplace Violence—Behaviors that could signal trouble

While no one can predict with precision the specific triggers that may lead a person to become violent at work, there are some behavioral clues that may signal something’s wrong. Colonel (Ret.) Jill Morgenthauer, president of homeland security consulting firm CJMI, offers eight categories of behavior to keep in mind.

Acting out behaviors:

The employee acts out his or her anger by yelling, shouting, slamming doors, and so on.

Blame game behaviors:

The employee takes no responsibility for his actions and sees no connection between what he does and the consequences

or results of his actions.

Me-First behaviors: The employee does what she wants, regardless of the negative effects on others.

Mixed-Messages behaviors: The employee talks positively but behaves negatively. As an example, the employee acts in a passive-aggressive manner saying he is a team player, but refuses to share information.

Non-negotiable behaviors: The employee is rigid, inflexible, and controlling. It’s her way or the highway.

Escapist behaviors: The employee deals with stress by lying and/or taking part in

addictive behaviors such as drugs or gambling.

Out-of-Character behaviors: The employee suddenly acts in ways that are out of character and/or inherently extreme.

Loner behaviors: The employee is remote, has poor social skills, becomes fixated on an idea and/or an individual.

If someone displaying these behaviors poses an immediate threat, follow department emergency procedures. For situations that are less volatile but nonetheless troubling, your Faculty Assistance Program is a ready resource.