

When Violence Hits Close to Home

When violence happens in our communities and workplaces, we are shocked and saddened. It makes us aware that it can occur at any time, anywhere. Awareness and prevention should be part of an employer's proactive strategy and recent tragic events bring this issue sharply into focus.

Here are a number of suggestions for employers to help promote an overall safe and respectful work environment:

- 1. Implement security programs that protect employees.** Employers should regularly evaluate their security programs and make sure employees are aware of and understand existing security policies and procedures.
- 2. Provide personal counseling through an employee assistance program (EAP).** An EAP provides employees with a free, easily accessible, and confidential resource for addressing personal concerns. An EAP may also provide learning opportunities to inform and educate on a variety of topics.
- 3. Develop effective policies to protect employees from all types of harassment.** A thorough policy defines harassment and includes bullying and other inappropriate workplace conduct, specifies how to report it, explains how complaints will be investigated, and sets out the consequences. Regular [workforce education](#) regarding your company policy on these topics is important.
- 4. Have a plan for addressing social media posts.** It can be common for employees to share opinions and thoughts on their personal accounts. When those posts involve inflammatory comments, and also may cite where the employee works, an employer might get calls from the public expressing their displeasure. Employers can emphasize what behaviors are not acceptable in the workplace, but cannot control what an employee says, does, wears, posts, or tweets on his or her own time. Having a conversation with the employee should be carefully crafted, taking caution not to infringe on employee rights. See MRA's article [Social Media at Work: How to Manage the Chaos](#) for additional information.
- 5. Train supervisors on how to recognize signs of an escalating situation.** One way to reduce the potential for heightened conflict is by addressing a situation immediately. Strengthen the organization's leadership skills by giving them the right support and tools, like education in conflict resolution, emotional intelligence, communication, and authenticity.
- 6. Set up a crisis plan for dealing with critical incidents.** Doing so in advance will ensure the most effective management of a crisis if one occurs. MRA developed a [crisis situation checklist](#) to help proactively prepare HR professionals for any situation resulting in physical injury to and emotional distress of employees, damage or loss of company property, or death of an employee.
- 7. Encourage curiosity and open dialogue to share viewpoints.** While it is natural for employees to discuss current events in the workplace, conversations can quickly become emotional when employees have different viewpoints. Therefore, it's critical for employers to set ground rules for discussions that include being open-minded, patient, and respectful. See MRA's guide on [Difficult Conversations - Strategies for Success](#) for ideas on how to make difficult conversations more productive.

Promoting a workplace that embraces diversity, equity, inclusion, and respect is a goal of all HR professionals. Organizations that work through a proactive strategy will benefit from a more resilient workforce that can adapt quickly when uncertainty occurs.