



## Violence Danger Signals

**W**orkplace security systems used to focus mainly on preventing theft. Now, we also have to prevent physical attacks on our staff. You're very unlikely to be assaulted at work. But as a public facility dealing with people in highly emotional states, it's a problem we can't ignore.

The danger isn't always from patients and visitors. Sometimes it's from staff members. People may have undetected emotional or mental problems. Some break under the stress of life-and-death work situations or long, tense hours on the job. Other breaking points stem from troubled personal relationships at work or at home. The easy availability of weapons simply adds to the danger.

Alcohol, illegal drugs, and prescription drugs can make bad problems seem worse and fuel dramatic, even violent, reactions.

When people reach the end of their rope, a few may turn violent. Some small event, or just a feeling of total desperation, pushes them over the edge. They may attack someone they believe is causing their problems. They may attack whoever is close at hand.

Violence is, however, usually a desperate last resort, with advance warning signs. We have to be alert to those signs and take them seriously. News reports on workplace violence episodes often feature employees recalling danger signals they didn't follow up on.

We don't want that to happen here. By identifying danger signs before it's too late, we can all help to prevent violence.

It helps to get to know the people you work with. When you know how your co-workers normally talk, act, and react, you're more likely to recognize changes that make you nervous.

As a start, report *any* threats against you or another staff member. You can tell the difference between good-natured kidding around and a threat. If it sounds like a real threat to you, don't ignore it.

An alarm should sound in your head if someone's words or actions begin to frighten you. Maybe there's someone you always found frightening. In either case, ask other workers you trust, in confidence, how they react to that person. If a lot of people feel scared, there may be a good reason. Report it.

I'm going to list some specific danger signs to watch out for, too. But first, let me emphasize that these are not *always* dangerous. We might all show one of these attitudes or behaviors on a bad day. And some people just express themselves dramatically. But when the behavior represents a change, or when it shows up more and more often, pay attention. There could be trouble ahead.

Here are the danger signs I'm talking about. There may be potential for violence in someone who:

- ✦ States that others are out to "get" him or her.
- ✦ Blames others for problems, setbacks, mistakes, etc.
- ✦ Shows anger easily and often.
- ✦ Attacks others verbally.
- ✦ Vows to get even with others for losing a job, not receiving a raise or promotion, receiving a warning or reprimand, etc.
- ✦ Holds grudges.
- ✦ Reacts defensively when criticized.
- ✦ Gets frustrated easily.
- ✦ Is always suspicious of others' motives.
- ✦ Has few positive relationships.
- ✦ Talks a lot about weapons (and may own them).
- ✦ Has serious personal or financial problems.
- ✦ Feels rejected in a relationship.
- ✦ Abuses alcohol or drugs.

Does this sound like someone you know? Does it sound like you? Then head off serious problems now. We have programs to help troubled employees and to protect people from becoming innocent victims. If you believe someone may be dangerous, report it. (**Note:** *Briefly mention whom to call and confidentiality provisions.*) We can give that person professional help and counseling. If necessary, we will also take action to protect everyone from danger.

If you're the one showing those danger signs, get help immediately. Don't take your problems out on others—or yourself. Contact our Employee Assistance Program. Use our confidential professional services to help get your life on a healthier track.