

Workplace Violence: Stages & Triggers

Triggers for workplace violence come from seemingly endless reasons; however, review of incidents reveals signs were present all along. Pay attention to behavior and situational signs that may trigger or motivate workplace violence: everyone has his/her own normal behavior patterns, and abrupt deviations can be observed and may signal a problem. Violence can be triggered by a number of experienced or perceived events in a workplace setting that result from personal interaction with others, disputes with workplace policies, or abusive relationships outside of work. Examples include layoffs or terminations, counseling or disciplinary actions, stress or unfair working conditions, not knowing work expectations, and poor management styles.

Workplace violence comes in stages. The sooner the stage is recognized and addressed, the more we protect ourselves. Below are the three common stages:

1st Stage:

In the first stage, workplace “violence” tends to be more passive behavioral actions and/or verbal. Examples include:

- Refuses to cooperate with supervisor(s) and other workers.
- Argues with co-workers.
- Behaves belligerently, such as swearing at others, or makes unwanted sexual advances or comments.
- Spreads rumors and gossip.
- Expresses hostility toward the company.

2nd Stage:

The second stage shows escalation in the actions the violent perpetrator expresses. Examples include:

- Makes threats.
- Sends violent messages.
- Talks about wishing to hurt others.
- Threatens suicide or murder.

3rd Stage:

In this stage, the violent perpetrator acts on the aggressive passive behavior, verbal announcements, and expressed action. Examples include:

- Acts of aggression or physical contact.
- Destroys property.
- Carries a weapon.
- Commits murder, rape, or arson.

It is important to note the appearance of any of these examples by themselves does not, by itself, mean it is a potentially violent act. On the contrary, context of the situation plays a role and must be considered when determining where the situation is in the stage of violence.