

# Suggestions to Minimize Workplace Violence

Six Tips to Remember



## SIX FUNDAMENTALS TO REMEMBER DURING A VIOLENT CONFRONTATION:

1. **Keep your eyes open.** As simple as this sounds, most people tend to close their eyes during physical altercations. Our natural reaction is to close our eyes when we think we will be hit. We have to fight the urge and keep our eyes open. This is the only way we know what is happening so we can react effectively.
2. **Watch their hands.** Hands are the most dangerous part because they can kill you the fastest. They hold guns and weapons.
3. **Do something.** You have to do something—scream, kick or run. The worst thing you can do is to do nothing. If you let the fear or shock of the situation freeze you, you have completely wiped out any chances of your survival. Doing something does not always involve something physical. Whether it is talking to the aggressor, calling the police or evacuating innocent bystanders, we can always do something to affect the situation.
4. **Have presence of mind.** It is easy to panic and get tunnel-vision where you are focused only on what is in front of you. Fear, pain and exhaustion are just some of the factors that keep us from thinking clearly. When you have presence of mind, you are able to make decisions and act. You may even find ways to outsmart your assailant. If you stop thinking, you are giving up.
5. **Do not turn your back to the assailant.** Unless you have enough room to get a good head start and run away, do not turn your back. You are completely exposing yourself, and you cannot see what the assailant is doing. You cannot react and defend if you do not know what is going on.
6. **Keep your will to survive.** Never give up. The mind is capable of defying physical boundaries. We have all heard of stories of people surviving situations that would have killed a regular person. They are not superhuman nor do they possess special abilities. They just refuse to give up.

“The safety of students, faculty, staff and visitors is a top priority at Metropolitan Community College.”

Don Thorson  
Chief of Police

## CONTACTING THE POLICE

Police officers are located at the Elkhorn Valley, Fort Omaha and South Omaha campuses and can be reached by dialing 531-622-2222 or:

Elkhorn Valley (EVC) ..... 531-622-1218

Fort Omaha (FOC) . . . . . 531-622-2313

South Omaha (SOC) . . . . . 531-622-4569

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## PERSONAL CONDUCT TO MINIMIZE VIOLENCE

Follow these suggestions in your daily interactions with people to de-escalate potentially violent situations. If at any time a person's behavior starts to escalate beyond your comfort zone, disengage.

### WHAT TO DO

- ✓ Project calmness: move and speak slowly, quietly and confidently.
- ✓ Be an empathetic listener: encourage the person to talk and listen patiently.
- ✓ Focus your attention on the other person to let them know you are interested in what they have to say.
- ✓ Maintain a relaxed yet attentive posture and position yourself at a right angle rather than directly in front of the other person.
- ✓ Acknowledge the person's feelings. Indicate that you can see he/she is upset.
- ✓ Ask for small, specific favors, such as asking the person to move to a quieter area.
- ✓ Establish ground rules if unreasonable behavior persists. Calmly describe the consequences of any violent behavior.
- ✓ Use delaying tactics that will give the person time to calm down. For example, offer a drink of water (in a disposable cup).
- ✓ Be reassuring and point out choices. Break big problems into smaller, more manageable problems.
- ✓ Accept criticism in a positive way. When a complaint might be true, use statements like "You're probably right" or "It was my fault." If the criticism seems unwarranted, ask clarifying questions.
- ✓ Ask for his/her recommendations. Repeat back what you feel is being requested of you.
- ✓ Position yourself so that a visitor cannot block your access to an exit.
- ✓ Train employees so that they know how to handle such situations before they occur.

### WHAT NOT TO DO

- ✗ Use styles of communication that generate hostility such as apathy, brush off, coldness, condescension, going strictly by the rules or giving the runaround.
- ✗ Reject all demands from the other person from the start.
- ✗ Pose in challenging stances such as standing directly opposite someone, hands on hips or crossing your arms. Avoid any physical contact, finger pointing or long periods of fixed eye contact.
- ✗ Make sudden movements, which can be seen as threatening.
- ✗ Notice the tone, volume and rate of your speech.
- ✗ Challenge or threaten the individual. Never belittle the person or make him/her feel foolish.
- ✗ Criticize or act impatiently toward the agitated individual.
- ✗ Attempt to bargain with a threatening individual.
- ✗ Try to make the situation seem less serious than it is.
- ✗ Make false statements or promises you cannot keep.
- ✗ Try to impart a lot of technical or complicated information when emotions are high.
- ✗ Isolate yourself with the person. If you need to move to a quieter area, notify employees where you will be, ensure another employee is nearby to assist you or act as a witness to your conversation.
- ✗ Take sides or agree with distortions.
- ✗ Invade the individual's personal space. Make sure there is a space of 3 to 6 feet between you and the person.
- ✗ Hesitate to call 911 if the situation escalates or the person refuses to leave. Be familiar with follow-up options, such as internal documentation, police reports, Ban and Bar, etc.