



*Commonwealth of Massachusetts*  
*Executive Office of Health and Human Services*

# **Human Service Worker Safety Training Community Based Organizations**

# Purpose of this Training

- Raise awareness about the need for Human Service Worker Safety training.
- Introduce risk assessment techniques.
- Present de-escalation strategies.
- Offer resources for additional training.
- Provide information about pertinent laws and regulations.

# Training Requirements

The Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) seeks to be a violence free workplace for all human service workers.

All human service workers in community-based programs are required to complete human service worker safety training offered by EOHHS.

This training must be completed this training every 2 years.

# Employee Health and Safety

101 CMR 19.00 governs the procedures and criteria for workplace violence prevention and crisis response plans for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human services (EOHHS) programs.

EOHHS recognizes that workplace violence threatens the health and safety of all employees in the workplace.

The “Human Service Worker Workplace Violence Prevention Policy” requires every agency within EOHHS to establish a crisis response plan and the plan must be readily available to all employees.

# Important Definitions

## **Human Service Worker:**

Any person who works for a program. This includes, but is not limited to employees, contracted employees, volunteers, and contractors working on site.

## **Program:**

Any entity operated, licensed, certified, or funded by a department, commission, office, board, division, institution, or other entity within EOHHS under M.G.L. c. 6A, § 16 that provides direct services to clients.

# Important Definitions-2

## **Workplace:**

Any location where business is conducted, or site where the human service worker is considered “on-duty.”

Private vehicles used for business are included in this definition.

# Important Definitions-3

## Workplace Violence:

Includes but is not limited to physical assault and/or battery; property damage; and intimidation or threats communicated by any means or other disruptive or aggressive behavior that causes a reasonable person to be in fear of his or her personal safety or that of a colleague.

- Violent behavior can include actions or communications in person, by letter, note, telephone, including texting or voicemail message, by fax, by electronic mail, or through social media.

# Knowledge Check

Which of the following employees would be considered a Human Service Worker?

- a) An adoption worker at New Bedford Child & Family Services.
- b) A custodian at Tobey Hospital in Wareham.
- c) A receptionist in the central office for Massachusetts Commission for the Blind.
- d) All of the above.



# Answer

D. All of the above.

Since all of these people work for a department, commission, office, board, division, institution, or other entity within EOHHS, they are all human service workers.

# Human Service Worker Safety Is Important

- Although most of the time Human Service Workers are in a safe, incident-free environment, it is important for everyone to be prepared.
- Employees/Contractors who have completed workplace safety training are more likely to:
  - Recognize the signs of a dangerous situation.
  - Notify management or security staff of the potential threat.
  - Make more informed decisions.

# Human Service Worker Safety Statistics

## Healthcare Workers

US healthcare workers have accounted for two-thirds of the nonfatal workplace violence injuries involving days away from work across all industries over the last decade.

<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/updates/upd-08-12-13.html>

# Human Service Worker Safety Statistics-1

## Social Workers

A 2005 study of social workers found that 14.7% had experienced physical assault perpetrated by clients in the past year.

<http://www.naswma.org/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=51>

# Human Service Worker Safety Statistics-2

## Mental Health Workers

According to a study, the rate of assault against mental health workers was 3.8 percent; the rate has been declining significantly since 1993 (OSHA).

# Knowledge Check-1

Which of the following is true?

- A. Employees who have completed workplace safety training are more likely to make informed decisions.
- B. The rate of assault against mental health workers is increasing.
- C. Safety training does not help us recognize the signs of a dangerous situation.
- D. All of the Above.

# Answer-1

A. Employees who have completed workplace safety training are more likely to make informed decisions

Trained employees are also more likely to recognize the signs of a dangerous situation and notify management or security staff of the potential threat.

# Awareness: The Key to Assessing Risk

- Be mindful of individuals who seem upset or whose behavior has changed.
- Some individuals may become withdrawn and sullen.
- Others can't stop talking about being wronged.
- An individual at risk to commit workplace violence will often display signs of tension or agitation and may begin pacing, cursing, or shouting.
- However, there are not always warning signs.



# Environmental Risk Assessment- 1

- Certain factors may increase the risk level:
  - High-stress situations:
    - Family Stressors
    - Severe Weather
    - Big Deadlines Approaching
    - Financial Challenges
  - Dark, isolated locations.

# Environmental Risk Assessment- 2

When a hostile situation does present itself, it is time for de-escalation.

Always remember, if you feel threatened at any time, do not hesitate to call for assistance.

# De-Escalation-1

The first and only objective of de-escalation is to reduce the level of agitation so that a discussion becomes possible.

Sometimes the outcome of a situation can be altered by adjusting *our* behavior.

# De-Escalation-2

The following discussion of de-escalation is meant to act as an introduction to de-escalation techniques.

For in-depth discussion, we suggest that you seek out opportunities for in-person, classroom training.

# Strategies for De-Escalation-1

- Begin defusing early.
- Avoid coming across as bureaucratic.
- Recognize that each situation is unique.
- Strive to control the interaction.
- Be assertive, not aggressive or passive.

# Strategies for De-Escalation-2

- Appear calm, centered, and self-assured even though you may not feel it.
- If you lose control, the situation will escalate.
- Do not be defensive even if the comments or insults are directed at you.
- Try not to ask accusatory or confusing questions.
- Avoid high risk behavior, such as physical contact.

# Think “LADDER”

- **L**ook at the person.
- **A**sk questions.
- **D**on’t Interrupt.
- **D**on’t change the subject.
- **E**motions, be aware of your own; really listen.
- **R**espond with verbal and non-verbal cues.

# Scenario

Fiona, a client, enters the lobby of the Central Office and she is filled with rage.

She begins yelling at and threatening Carl, the Receptionist in the office.



# Knowledge Check-2

What should Carl do in this situation?

- A. Maintain self control.
- B. Ask questions in a calm manner.
- C. Seek help if he feels threatened.
- D. All of the Above.

# Answer-2

D. All of the above.

All of these are valid tips for handling the situation.

# Interactions: Always Be Prepared

- Look for verbal and non-verbal warning signs.
- Think ahead about how you will respond.
- Try to remain calm and monitor your tone.
- Try not to overreact and don't intimidate.
- Use "I" sentences, such as "I am uncomfortable" instead of "You are making me uncomfortable".

# Be Aware of *Your* Reactions

- Know what triggers you.
- Don't respond to complaints with more complaints.
- Try to understand, even if you don't agree.
- If a person is yelling, speak softly and slowly.
- Do not argue or try to convince, give choices.

# Your Physical Reactions

- Never turn your back for any reason.
- Always be at the same eye level.
  - Encourage the individual to be seated, but if standing, you should stand also.
- Do not stand head-on; stand at an angle so you can sidestep away if needed.
- Do not smile; this may look like mockery or anxiety.

# Collect More Information

- Ask questions – it shows you care.
- Do not make assumptions of what the person knows.
- Learn to listen actively; ask clarifying questions – not “why” questions.
  - What do you mean by...?
  - How has ... affected you?
- Answer all serious questions, no matter how rudely asked.

# Exploring Alternatives

- Discuss available choices.
- Get input from the person on how to solve the problem.
- Try to make a working agreement.
- If possible, seek out your supervisor, sometimes a third-person presence helps.

# Scenario-1

Alice reports to work at a group residence. When she enters the living room, her co-worker, Beth, is sitting on the couch watching TV. Alice immediately goes to the office area and begins to review the daily log. She begins to ask Beth the plans for the upcoming shift. Beth is unresponsive. After repeated attempts to get Beth's attention, Alice raises her voice. Beth tells Alice, "just cool your jets. This show is almost over". With that response, Alice takes the logbook and throws it, hitting Beth on the head.



# Knowledge Check-3

What is one thing Alice could have done differently?

- A. Kept a calm tone of voice.
- B. Slammed the log book on the table to get Beth's attention.
- C. Yelled at Beth for watching TV.
- D. All of the Above.

# Answer-3

A. Kept a calm tone of voice.

Raising her voice was Alice's first step down the road of escalation.

# Knowledge Check-4

What is one thing Beth could have done differently?

- A. Turned up the volume on the TV.
- B. Walked out of the room and slammed the door.
- C. Tried to understand Alice's viewpoint.
- D. All of the Above.

# Answer-4

C. Try to understand Alice's viewpoint.

Sometimes looking at the situation from the other person's perspective can make all the difference.

# When Your Response is Not Working and You Feel Threatened

- Know office procedures, such as calling for assistance.
- Do not threaten in return.
- Stay calm but firm.
- Response should be immediate and fair without anger.

# Human Service Worker Safety: Resources-1

An immediate 911 call is required for all situations involving physical assault and battery, or threats thereof, unless otherwise noted in your organization's response plan.

# Human Service Worker Safety: Resources-2

## Pertinent Laws

### **ch. 3 § 30 of the Acts of 2013 & 101 CMR 19.00**

- Outlines what is required of entities operated, licensed, certified, or funded by a department, commission, office, board, division, institution, or other entity within EOHHS in regards to Human Service Worker Workplace Violence Prevention.

# Additional Training-1

EOHHS strongly encourages all Human Service Workers to seek additional training through your organization on the topic of worker safety.

Contact your agency for additional materials, opportunities, and requirements.



# Additional Training-2

Your agency has a Workplace Violence Prevention and Crisis Response Plan specific to your workplace that is available to you.

**Thank You!**

**Human Service Worker Safety  
is Important!**

**Thank you!**



# Completion Verification Form

By signing below, I acknowledge the following:

I have received and read the Human Service Worker Safety for Community Based Organizations.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name (please print clearly)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Organization/Affiliation

Please submit completed acknowledgement form to your agency training coordinator.