

Supporting Clients Through Workplace Violence Incidents

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Workplace violence is a significant exposure in the healthcare and social service industry. Bureau of Labor Statistics data showed that in 2013, the Healthcare and Social Assistance industry had almost four times the number of serious workplace violence incidents, compared to other large industry sectors.¹

Most join social services industries with the goal of helping a vulnerable community, and may feel a desire to protect supported individuals if an incident were to occur. While no one can or should be told that they must stay or leave in the event of a workplace violence incident, there are ways to help them prepare. Homeland Security, along with other federal agencies, states:

“While personal safety is the primary consideration in any emergency, helping others to safety increases the survivability for all potential victims. Rendering aid can be as simple as rallying likely victims to ‘Follow me!’ or aiding non-ambulatory persons and performing immediate first aid in safer areas.”²

When following this advice, there are some questions to consider when preparing clients for workplace violence prevention and response:

¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics data for intentional injuries caused by humans, excluding self-inflicted injuries.

² Incorporating Active Shooter Incident Planning Into Health Care Facility Emergency Operations Plans. 2014. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Workplace Violence Prevention: Supporting Clients

Educating Clients

It may be difficult for your organization to inform clients on potential workplace violence incidents. In cases where disabilities or cognitive development may be an impairment, it may be prudent to prepare them indirectly. Consider these questions when developing your plan:

- Have you clearly stated to clients your organization's zero tolerance Workplace Violence Policy?
- If a client sees suspicious activity, do they know how to report it?
- Are "See Something, Say Something" signs posted in common areas with reporting information?
- Are there multiple avenues to report incidents, including anonymous reporting?
- Have you educated clients on internal alarms and warnings that an incident is occurring?
- Are evacuation plans clearly posted and communicated to clients?

Workplace Violence Responses

Based on their ability to comprehend and react during an incident, running drills may be more alarming than helpful for clients. It is important to have a response plan that prompts the client to respond suitably in case of an emergency. The following are questions to consider in response to an incident:

- Are Shelter in Place Drills conducted for day care, day program, and residential facilities?
- For clients with developmental or cognitive disabilities, it may be helpful to practice being still and quiet on a regular basis, to aid with sheltering in place.
- For facilities with a variety of age groups and programs conducted (like community centers), have emergency drill protocols been developed with each program's population in mind?
- Has the emergency evacuation plan been tested with clients? How often is this completed?
- How will you communicate with clients and their families in the event of an incident?

Post-Incident Procedures and Services

Your organization's post-incident response is important, not only for employees, but also clients and their families. The trauma clients experience can have long-term damaging effects and pose financial and reputational threats to the organization. Here are a few questions to consider on post-incident services:

- Has your organization contracted with, or have a list of mental health care facilities specialized in workplace violence trauma response?
- Are these services available to support clients and their families?
- If applicable, is an Individualized Service Plan (ISP) backed up off site and accessible to staff?
- Is there a plan in place if dedicated staff are unable to provide supports to a client?

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