

Vigilance and Validation: Dealing with Workplace Violence

This article by Continuum EAP's Kevin J. Mattran was originally published in the Lincoln Human Resources Management Association (LHRMA) newsletter in March 2008.

Within a year's time, three mass shootings have dominated the headlines. Virginia Tech seemed so far away, almost as if it were a dramatic, made for TV movie. Many of us were affected; some of us even knew people who were connected to Virginia Tech or the families of the victims. We empathized, mourned, discussed how frightening it was and then went back to our daily routines. Then came the Von Maur shootings; this time it was different, it happened in our back yard. Many of us knew the victims, witnessed the shootings, or had the Westroads' Von Maur location on our holiday shopping agenda. Most recently the shootings at Northern Illinois University shocked us again into a state of awareness and anxiety.

When events like this happen we have a hard time understanding. We don't understand how someone could do something so horrible, we don't understand why events like this can't be prevented and we don't understand why we feel afraid, depressed or like we've lost a member of our own family.

Workplace violence is a huge problem. The U.S. Department of Justice reports that about one million people each year are victims of workplace violence (some private sector studies say the number is closer to two million people). The annual cost to employers in lost time, insurance premiums, medical expenses, etc. is between \$20 and \$35 billion dollars.

We sometimes dismiss the feelings that we or others have following incidents of workplace violence, particularly if the event wasn't close to home. People should just be able to get over it, move on and feel fortunate that those kinds of things aren't happening here. These feelings are real and EAP can help people deal with these emotions. EAP counselors can help people sort through these feelings that can easily affect our work performance and personal lives.

EAP can also help employers take measures to help prevent violent events in the workplace. Training and resources can help an organization take steps to address security and awareness.

Often violent events in the workplace seem very random and spontaneous, but it has become more and more evident that there are warning signs that precede violent episodes. EAP can provide training and resources to help identify and address these signs.

People want and need to feel safe at work and employers must be increasingly vigilant to address concerns about security and violence in the workplace. We must also understand that people can be affected by news reports of violent events. Employers must understand that these feelings are real. Your EAP is a great resource. Use your EAP to remain vigilant with training and awareness; and validate the feelings that people are feeling as a normal reaction to traumatic events as well as remind them that EAP professionals can help deal with those emotions.

*Workplace violence is a serious issue. If you need help identifying warning signs of a potentially violence situation, contact Continuum EAP at: **(402) 476-0186 or (800) 755-7636**
If you wish to schedule a workplace harassment/violence training session, you may contact an employee assistance professional at: **easpecialist@4continuum.com***



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