



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services

Human Service Worker Safety Training



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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



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Employee Health and Safety

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

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 program operated, licensed, certified, or funded by a department, commission, office, board, division, institution, or other entity within EOHHS that provides direct services to clients to establish a crisis response plan and the plan must be readily available to all employees.



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Important Definitions

- **Human Service Worker:**
 - Any person who works for a program. This includes, but is not limited to employees, contracted employees, and volunteers.
- **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.
- **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.
- **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



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Question

Which of the following employees that works for your organization would be considered a Human Service Worker?

- a) A social worker
- b) A custodian
- c) A receptionist
- d) All of the above



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Answer

d) All of the above

Since all of these people work for your organization, (a program as defined on page 4) they are all human service workers.



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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 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



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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>)
- 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>)
- 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)



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Question

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



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Answer

- 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



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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



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Environmental Risk Assessment

- Certain factors may increase the risk level:
 - High-stress situations
 - Family stressors
 - Severe weather
 - Big deadlines approaching
 - Financial challenges
 - Dark, isolated locations



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

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



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De-escalation

The goal 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.



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De-escalation

The following discussion of de-escalation is meant to act as a introduction to de-escalation techniques. For in-depth discussion, we suggest that you seek out opportunities for in-person, classroom training.



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Strategies for De-escalation

- 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



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Strategies for De-escalation (continued)

- 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



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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



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Scenario

Fiona, a client, enters the lobby of the your office filled with rage. She begins yelling at and threatening Carl, the receptionist in the office.



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Scenario

What should Carl do in this scenario?

- a. Maintain self control
- b. Ask questions in a calm manner
- c. Seek help if he feels threatened
- d. All of the above



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Answer

d) All of the above

All of these are valid tips for handling this situation.



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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"



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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



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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



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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



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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



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Scenario

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 log book and throws it, hitting Beth on the head.



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Question

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



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Answer

a) Kept a calm tone of voice

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



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Question

What is one thing Beth could have done differently?

- a) Turn up the volume on the TV
- b) Walk out of the room and slam the door
- c) Try to understand Alice's viewpoint
- d) All of the above



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Answer

c) Try to understand Alice's viewpoint

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



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Scenario

A bathroom in the office is vandalized. There is an explicit, threatening note directed at a maintenance worker named Jerry written crudely across the mirror.



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Question

Does this scenario fall under the jurisdiction of this policy?

- a) Yes
- b) No, the victim, Jerry, is a maintenance worker and therefore not a human service worker
- c) No, the act, vandalism, is neither physical violence, nor a verbal threat
- d) No, the vandal is unknown and can therefore not be disciplined



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Answer

a) Yes

This act of vandalism falls under this policy because it is a threatening and property damaging act directed against a human service worker.



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Question

What should Jerry do to get help in this scenario?

- a) Contact a manager
- b) Contact a supervisor
- c) Contact the designated workplace violence safety coordinator
- d) Any of the above



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Answer

d) Any of the above

Any one of the persons of authority listed would be a good person to contact in this scenario.



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Scenario

A client for your organization comes into the office. A few minutes later, the client's spouse enters the office and there is an altercation between the two of them.

True or False? This scenario falls under the jurisdiction of this policy.



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Answer

False

Since there are no human service workers involved in this altercation, it does not fall under the jurisdiction of the policy.

Nevertheless, proper actions, including alerting authorities, should be taken.



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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



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Human Service Worker Safety Resources

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



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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



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Executive Orders Pertaining to Commonwealth Employees

Executive Order 511

Requires the establishment of a safety committee in each agency

Executive Order 442

Establishes a Policy of Zero Tolerance for Workplace Violence



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Additional Training

EOHHS strongly encourages all Human Service Workers to seek additional training through your organization on the topic of worker safety. Contact your training director for additional materials, opportunities, and requirements.



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Additional Training

Many of the strategies and tips outlined in this training are best learned in a classroom setting.

Your organization has a response plan specific to your workplace.



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**Human Service Worker Safety is
Important**

Thank You



Human Service Worker Safety Training Completion Verification Form

By signing below, I acknowledge the following:

I have received and read the EOHHS Human Service Worker Safety Training Guide.

Please complete ALL fields below:

Print Name (please print clearly)

Employee ID

Signature

Agency

Work Phone Number

Date

Please submit this completed form to your Agency's Training Director.