VIOLENCE-FREE WORKPLACE

The Ventura County Office of Education (VCOE) has adopted a Zero Tolerance Policy for workplace violence because it recognizes that workplace violence is a growing nationwide problem that needs to be addressed by all employers. Consistent with this policy, acts or threats of physical violence, including intimidation, harassment, and/or coercion, which involve or affect VCOE employees, or which occur on VCOE property will not be tolerated.

1. EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES

VCOE's prohibition against threats and acts of violence applies to all persons involved in VCOE's operation, including but not limited to VCOE staff, outside contractors and temporary workers and anyone else on VCOE property. Violations of this policy by any individual on VCOE property, by any individual acting as a representative of VCOE while off VCOE property.

Every employee and every person on VCOE property is encouraged to report incidents of threats or acts of physical violence of which he/she is aware. The report should be made to the Human Resources Department, the reporting individual's immediate supervisor, or another supervisory employee if the immediate supervisor is not available. Nothing in this policy alters any other reporting obligation established in policies or in state, federal or other applicable law.

2. SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES

Supervisors have a crucial role in making VCOE a safe and secure working environment by reducing the potential for employee workplace violence through appropriate and consistent use of sound supervisory practices and by applying timely corrective action when necessary. Adherence to VCOE policies, workplace rules and regulations, documentation of employee performance problems appropriately identifying early warning signs, appropriate workplace conduct, and/or conflict resolution will greatly assist in the prevention of potential workplace violence.

It is the responsibility of all supervisors to report the results of their investigations into alleged violations of this policy to their next-in-line supervisor and to consult with the Human Resources Department on potential employee workplace violence situations as appropriate. Supervisors shall document all violations of the workplace violence prevention procedures so that appropriate corrective action can be taken.

3. WORKPLACE VIOLENCE WARNING SIGNS

Acts or threats of violence include conduct that is sufficiently severe, offensive or intimidating to alter the employment conditions or to create a hostile, abusive, or intimidating work environment for one or several VCOE employees. Examples of workplace violence include, but are not limited to, the following:

a. All threats or acts of violence occurring on VCOE premises, regardless of the relationship between the County Schools and the parties involved in the accident.
b. All threats or acts of violence occurring off VCOE premises involving someone who is acting in the capacity of a representative of VCOE.
c. All threats or acts of violence occurring off VCOE property involving a VCOE employee if the threats or acts affect the legitimate interests of VCOE.

d. Any acts or threats resulting in the conviction of an employee or of an individual performing services for VCOE on a contract or temporary basis, under any criminal code provision relating to violence or threats of violence which adversely affect the legitimate interests and goals of VCOE.

Specific examples of conduct that may be considered threats or acts of violence include, but are not limited to, the following:

a. Hitting or shoving an individual.
b. Threatening an individual or his/her family, friends, associates, or property with harm.
c. Intentionally destroying or threatening to destroy VCOE property.
d. Making harassing or threatening phone calls.
e. Performing harassing surveillance or stalking.
f. Suggesting or intimating that violence is appropriate.
g. Unauthorized possession of firearms or weapons on VCOE property.

4. STRATEGIES TO DE-ESCALATE THREATENING BEHAVIOR

The following conflict resolution strategies may be helpful to de-escalate situations where an individual is exhibiting threatening or intimidating behavior:

a. Project calmness; move and speak slowly, softly and confidently.
b. Encourage the person to talk; listen actively and patiently.
c. Maintain a relaxed but attentive posture.
d. Position yourself at an angle to the person rather than directly in front.
e. Arrange yourself so your access to an exit is not blocked.
f. Seek assistance; ask someone to sit in or signal to call for additional support.
g. Acknowledge the person’s feelings.
h. Make small, specific requests such as asking the person to move to a quieter area, open area, or to move outside.
i. Do not isolate yourself with the individual.
j. Provide the person time to calm down.
k. Point out options, break big problems into smaller ones.
l. Avoid sudden movements and maintain 3-6 foot distance.
m. From reception, use the call button to call an adjacent department for assistance.
n. Lock down building and department to prevent intruder entry.
o. Notify the Human Resources Department.

Any emergency, perceived emergency, or suspected criminal conduct shall be immediately reported to the Police Department. If someone is acting violently or is threatening someone, call 9-911 for immediate police response.
5. INCIDENT MANAGEMENT

The degree to which employees are able to survive an actual act of violence in the workplace may depend greatly upon recognition of potential problems and the measures taken in advance of an incident.

The following are basic building blocks for the development of a safety plan:

a. Identify the physical security needs of the workplace.
b. Discuss and coordinate emergency strategies with employees.
c. To the extent possible, arrange for limited and authorized access to the affected work area.
d. Establish protocol for calling the Police (emergency/non-emergency).
e. Develop prearranged office procedures to alert others to the need for help.
f. Develop a procedure to cease normal operations and secure the premises.
g. Outline emergency evacuation procedures.
h. Evaluate the need for security alarm, call button, surveillance cameras, security personnel, etc.

Employees should mentally “map out” a personal survival strategy in the event of workplace violence.

Workplace violence incidents will differ greatly and each situation will dictate a different response. The particular circumstances of a given situation will suggest which of, and in which order, the following should occur:

a. Report to the Police by dialing 9-911 at the safest opportunity.
b. Alert others (email, phones, signals, call button).
c. Activate prearranged safety and security plan.
d. Secure surroundings, lock doors.
e. If appropriate, evacuate employees/leave the area.

6. MANAGING THE AFTERMATH OF AN INCIDENT

Police and other emergency response personnel will be available to manage all emergencies. Police will deal with criminal activity. However, it remains the responsibility of VCOE employees, supervisors and managers to work together to try to normalize the workplace following an incident.

The aftermath of a violent situation can be traumatic, characterized by confusion and disorientation. The wave of uncertainty, panic and disbelief will pass and in its place will be the task of normalizing the workplace. Depending on the severity of the incident and the recommendations of the HR Department, the Director of Human Resources will normally coordinate post incident normalization. Managers will be expected to take the lead in initiating and participating in debriefings following a violent act, normally within 72 hours of an incident.
7. VIOLENCE-FREE WORKPLACE QUICK REFERENCE SHEET

I. For an angry or hostile encounter
   a. Stay calm by taking deep, slow breaths.
   b. Listen attentively.
   c. Maintain eye contact.
   d. Be courteous and patient.
   e. Keep the situation in your control.
   f. Maintain a calm, soft tone of voice.
   g. Attempt to avoid arguing or making statements that might intensify the individual’s angry/hostile demeanor.

II. For a person shouting, swearing, and threatening
   a. Signal a coworker or supervisor that you need help (e.g. 2-way radio, call button, phone, hand signal, etc.).
   b. Avoid statements and/or behaviors that could escalate the individual’s threatening statements/behavior.

III. For someone with a weapon
   a. Lock down building and department if person with weapon is outside.
   b. Stay calm.
   c. Maintain eye contact.
   d. Keep talking...but follow instructions of the person with the weapon.
   e. Don’t risk harm to yourself and others.
   f. Don’t ever try to be a hero.
   g. Never try to grab a weapon.
   h. Watch for a safe chance to escape, and then contact the local police if they have not already been contacted.

IV. For telephoned suicide or bomb threats
   b. Do not hang up.
   c. Signal a coworker or supervisor.
   d. Listen attentively and write down details.
   e. For a bomb threat, ask where it is and when it will go off; repeat these questions if necessary.
   f. Listen for background noises; write down what you hear.
   g. Write down whether it is a man or a woman; pitch or tone of voice or accent; anything you notice.
   h. Try to get the caller’s name, location, and phone number.
   i. Report details to supervisor or Administrative Services Department as soon as you are able.