



The Nature of Violence and Harassment

Presenter: Mark Greene

Behaviour-Based Health and Safety Approach to Workplace Violence and Harassment Prevention:

To prevent violence (and harassment, which is violence targeted toward a person's psychological wellbeing), we must first understand the nature of violence itself. This allows us to find ways we can change the environment at the workplace to avoid triggering violent behaviour.

To understand violence, we need to look at two parts of the human brain:

- The lower brain (basic functioning).
- The higher brain (thinking).

The Lower Brain and Rage Triggers

The lower brain works mostly autonomically. It keeps our heart beating, regulates body temperature, as well as prepares us to protect ourselves. That's where rage comes in.

Rage is an autonomic response to one or more of the nine biological/evolutionary triggers. If any of these things are threatened/occur, the lower brain will automatically switch on our rage circuit, which prepares us to fight.

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| 1. Life or death | 6. Order in Society (social injustice) |
| 2. Dominance | 7. Resources |
| 3. Family | 8. Tribe |
| 4. Territory | 9. Being trapped |
| 5. Mate | |

The workplace environment may unintentionally (or intentionally) trigger our primal rage response. By knowing the causes of rage, employers can work to remove triggers and, thereby, eliminate a portion of the hazard of violence in the workplace.

The Higher Brain and Rage Safeguards

But what if a worker experiences a rage trigger? That's when the higher brain can stop a person from becoming violent. People do not have control over feeling rage if triggered, but they can control their actions.

There are four safeguards in our higher brains that keep us from acting violently when triggered:

- | | |
|----------------|-----------------|
| 1. Moral Sense | 3. Self-Control |
| 2. Empathy | 4. Reason |

These safeguards are quite effective at ensuring we don't become violent... if they are allowed to work properly. Our higher brains can become impaired (and not only by alcohol and drugs). When our basic biological needs are not being met (e.g., food, water, sleep, overheating), our higher brains will shut down to support our basic survival systems (heart, lungs, etc.). This leaves us with limited or no ability to control primal rage responses.

At the workplace, employers might unintentionally impair workers' ability to control their responses to rage (e.g., long working hours, not ensuring proper breaks for food and hydration). By understanding the functioning of the higher brain, employers can ensure workers are well-equipped to control any rage response that might occur.

Takeaways:

Remember:

- Violence is a response to certain triggers.
- Employers can do a lot to protect against workplace violence by understanding the rage triggers and eliminating those triggers, where possible.
- If workers do become triggered, there are safeguards in the higher brain that can stop a person from acting violently.
- Employers can control the risk of violence by strengthening those safeguards and not doing anything that might weaken workers' ability to refrain from violence.
- This is the application of behavioural-based health and safety principles to the hazard of violence. Understanding the connection between our minds and our behaviour can help us eliminate/control other hazards. This is a promising new approach that has the potential of ensuring more workers make it home at the end of the day, safe and healthy.

Questions to ask:

- What rage triggers are present at my workplace?
- Can these triggers be eliminated or reduced?
- What are the ways we can support workers in using the four safeguards that stop people from acting violently?
- Is there anything we are doing at the workplace that might impair workers' ability to refrain from violence (e.g., job stress, long hours, not enough breaks)?





The Nature of Violence and Harassment: Worksheet

Presenter: Mark Greene

Behaviour-Based Health and Safety Approach to Workplace Violence and Harassment Prevention:

Nine Violence Triggers

Violence Trigger	Describe how this trigger is present at my worksite	Possible ways to eliminate this trigger at my worksite
Life or Death		
Dominance		
Family Protection		
Territory		
Mating		
Order in Society (Social Injustice)		
Resources		
Tribe		
Being Trapped		

Violence Safeguards

Safeguard	Ways my worksite can strengthen these safeguards	Ways my worksite might be weakening these safeguards
Moral Sense		
Empathy		
Self-Control		
Reason		

