

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE



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Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Give at least three examples of work situations where young workers may be at risk for workplace violence.
- Identify five things a store owner/manager can do to make the store less likely to be targeted for a robbery.
- Name at least three actions an employee should be trained to take to reduce the likelihood he/she will be assaulted.
- Name at least three actions an employee should be trained to take to reduce the likelihood of *being injured during* a robbery.

Time Needed: 40 Minutes

Materials Needed

- Video *Is It Worth Your Life?*
- DVD player and TV or LCD projector (with speakers).
- Handouts: *Preventing Injuries from Workplace Violence: Robberies (A)*
 Violence by a Customer or Client Scenario (B) – optional activity D
 Violence by a Co-Worker Scenario (C) – optional activity E

Preparing to Teach This Lesson

Before you present this lesson:

1. Locate the DVD file *Is It Worth Your Life?* on disc and preview prior to showing it to students. Identify potential points to pause the video to elicit class discussion.
2. Make photocopies of handouts you will be using with your students.

Detailed Instructor's Notes

A. Introduction: Why is this subject important? (5 minutes)

1. Explain why this topic is important.
 - Although workplace violence can occur in any workplace, it is common in the types of places in which many teens work because money is present.
 - Every year, about 1.7 million workers are injured during workplace assaults.
 - Every week, more than 10 people in the United States are victims of a homicide in the workplace.

- Homicide is the leading cause of death in the workplace for people under 18 years of age.
- Violence that occurs during a robbery is a major threat to young workers, especially those working in convenience stores, gas stations, restaurants, and other retail businesses.
- The risk of violence during a workplace robbery in retail establishments increases after dark.

B. Video and Discussion (35 minutes)



1. Divide the class into several small groups. Explain that the class will now watch the first three minutes of a video, *Is It Worth Your Life?* which will be stopped from time to time for small group discussion.
2. Before starting the video, ask the class to think about why the store might be an attractive target for a robber while they watch the first minute of the video. Students keep in mind these questions while they watch the first minute of the video.
Play the first segment (1:30) of the video (until the customer pulls the car out of the parking lot). Stop the video.

Ask the small groups to discuss and write down their ideas about the following:

- *What made the store an attractive target for robbers?*
- *What could be done to make the store a less attractive target?*

Ask for volunteers to read their group's ideas to the class.

3. Ask the class to think about what the clerk was doing that made him an easy target for robbery while they watch the next segment of the video.
Play the second minute of the video (until the robber pulls the gun from his belt). Stop the video.

Ask the small groups to discuss and write down their ideas about the following:

- *What was the employee doing that made him an easy target for a robbery?*
- *What could he have done to discourage a robber?*

Ask for volunteers to read their group's ideas to the class.

4. Ask the class to think about what the store employees did that increased the chances of getting hurt while they watch the next segment of the video.
Play the third minute of the video (until the robber runs from the store). Stop the video.

Ask the small groups to discuss and write down their ideas about the following:

- *What did each of the employees do that might have increased the chances they would be hurt?*
- *What could each of the employees have done that might have decreased the chances that they would be hurt?*

Ask for volunteers to read their group's ideas to the class.

5. Show the rest of the video. Point out that there are things that employers and employees can do to reduce the likelihood of being robbed and ways an employee can behave while being robbed that can reduce the likelihood of being hurt. Note that some of the suggestions made by the class were similar to the advice given in the video (if this is the case).
6. Distribute Handout (A) *Preventing Injuries in the Workplace: Robberies*. Summarize the key points (most of which are in the video):
 - The employer/owner of a business—especially one open late at night and/or which handles cash—should take the following steps to make the store environment safer:
 - Have bright lights outside the business
 - Have bright lights inside the business
 - Remove clutter from the windows, so others can see inside easily, like a fishbowl
 - Install surveillance cameras and/or large mirrors so all areas of the store are clearly visible
 - Keep cash in a drop box and post signs saying there is minimal cash in the register
 - Do not keep weapons in the store
 - Post emergency numbers in prominent locations
 - Keep the door to the delivery area locked
 - Have two employees in the store at night
 - Areas where trash bins are located should be well lit.
 - The employer should train employees to take the following actions while on duty to reduce their likelihood of being assaulted:
 - Keep busy when there are no customers; don't sit near the cash register
 - Keep watching the parking lot and call the police about anything suspicious
 - Make eye contact with everyone who comes in the store
 - Put all money in the drop box.
 - The employer should train employees to behave in the following ways if they are robbed or threatened:
 - Cooperate fully and do not argue or challenge
 - Explain each of their actions, avoid surprises, and use a calm tone
 - Hand over the cash
 - Don't try to fight or chase the assailant
 - Lock the door as soon as the assailant leaves
 - Call the police.



C. A Final Note

1. Explain to the class:
 - Robbery is, by far, the most common type of workplace violence
 - The types of places in which young people work, like convenience stores, are common targets of robbers.
2. Point out that there are other types of violence that occur in workplaces. These include customers or clients attacking workers, workers attacking other workers, and intimate partner violence. Discuss examples of each type of workplace violence.
 - Customers or clients attacking workers can include customers in a store, gas station, or restaurant; patients in a health care setting; clients of a business or social service agency.
 - Workers attacking co-workers can include physical violence or threats, bullying, verbal and emotional abuse, and sexual harassment.
 - Intimate partner violence in the workplace typically involves the spouse or partner of an employee coming to the workplace and threatening or attacking the employee with whom they are involved.

Optional Activities

The following activities provide the opportunity for students to explore two of these types of violence in more depth:

D. Preventing Violence by a Customer or Client (20 minutes)

Materials Needed

Handout (B): *Violence by a Customer or Client Scenario*

1. Explain to the class that, after robberies, the most common types of violence that teens face in the workplace are violence by customers and violence by fellow workers (including bullying and sexual harassment). Note that this activity will help them learn about responding to customer-on-worker violence.
2. Distribute and read Handout (B).

Ask the small groups to discuss and write down their ideas about the following questions:

 - *What could the employer have done to prevent this injury?*
 - *How could the worker respond to avoid being injured?*

Have one student from each group read the group's ideas to the class.

3. If the students have not mentioned any of these ideas, point out the following:

The employer could have done the following:

- Establish a policy that an adult must always be in the office
- Establish barriers (e.g. a counter with a closed gate) to separate customers or clients from staff

- Tell workers that their safety is more important than other procedures or rules
- Train employees to leave the building or call the police if they feel threatened by a client or customer
- Post the police emergency number (911) at each work station to remind staff to call the police if threatened
- Train employees how to act when confronted with an angry or irrational client or customer in order to defuse the situation and reduce the risk of violence
- Direct staff to call for assistance.

The employee (Jane) could have done the following:

- Called the police
- Left the office
- Stayed seated.

E. Violence by a Co-Worker (20 Minutes)

Materials Needed

Handout (C): *Violence by a Co-Worker Scenario*

1. Explain to the class that, after robberies, the most common types of violence that teens face in the workplace are violence by customers and violence by fellow-workers (including bullying and sexual harassment). Note that this activity will help them respond to worker-on-worker violence.
2. Distribute and read Handout (C).
3. Ask the small groups to discuss and write down their ideas about the following:
 - *What could the employer have done to prevent being bullied/verbally attacked?*
 - *How could the worker respond to avoid being bullied/attacked?*
 - *What can co-workers do when a worker is bullied by another worker?*

Have one student from each group read the group's ideas to the class.

4. If the students have not mentioned any of these ideas, point out the following:

The employer could have done the following:

- Establish a clear policy forbidding violence, abuse, verbal and emotional abuse, and harassment of all kinds
- Train supervisors and managers to recognize bullying, abuse, and other violations of these policies and know how to respond to violations
- Train workers about this policy and the ramifications of violating the policy
- Let employees know that they can come to the store manager or supervisor (or other adult) and confidentially relate any concerns about their own safety or the safety of other employees.

The employee (Guy) could have done the following:

- Told the manager about Frank's behavior
- Told a parent, guidance counselor, or other trusted adult, about Frank's behavior.

The employee's co-worker (Jenna) could have done the following:

- Told the manager about Frank's behavior
- Told a parent, guidance counselor, or other trusted adult, about Frank's behavior.

F. Additional resources

For additional background information on workplace violence, we recommend the following resource:

Violence on the Job: This 21-minute video from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) explores practical measures for keeping employees safe from violence at work. It is available as streaming video, a Flash video download, or on DVD. To stream, download, or order the video (or download a transcript that can be used to enhance your classroom presentation of this material), visit the NIOSH website at <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/video/violence.html>.

Another Resource for dealing with robberies and abusive customers:

<http://www.lni.wa.gov/IPUB/FSP0-919-000.pdf>

The following OSHA and State of Washington L&I-DOSH-WISHA codes correspond to information in this unit:

L&I DOSH WISHA WAC 296-296-832 Late Night Retail Worker Crime Prevention

Preventing Injuries from Workplace Violence: Robberies

Make the work environment safe

The employer/ owner of a business — especially one open late at night and/or which handles cash — should take the following steps to make the store environment safer:

- Have bright lights outside the store
- Have bright lights inside the store
- Remove clutter from the windows, so the store has a ‘fishbowl’ appearance
- Install surveillance cameras and/or large mirrors so all areas of the store are clearly visible
- Keep cash in a drop box and post signs saying there is minimal cash in the register
- Do not keep weapons in the store
- Post emergency numbers in prominent locations
- Keep the door to the delivery area locked
- Have two employees in the store at night
- Make sure areas where trash bins are located are well-lit.

Engage in safe work practices

The employer should train employees to take the following actions while on duty to reduce their likelihood of being assaulted:

- Keep busy when there are no customers; don’t sit near the cash register
- Keep watching the parking lot and call the police about anything suspicious
- Make eye contact with everyone who comes in the store
- Put all money in the drop box.

Know how to react

The employer should train employees to behave in the following ways if they are robbed or threatened:

- Cooperate fully
- Explain each of their actions, avoid surprises/ use a soothing tone
- Hand over the cash
- Don’t try to argue, fight, or chase the assailant
- Lock the door as soon as the assailant leaves
- Call the police as soon as the assailant leaves.

Violence by a Customer or Client

Jane is a high school senior with an after school job at a small insurance agency. One afternoon, the office manager left Jane alone while she did errands. A few minutes after the office manager left, a man came in and demanded to see an agent. His face was red and he was clearly angry. He said the company had refused to pay his claim and he wasn't going to be cheated.

Jane told him that none of the agents would be in until the next day, but he could come back or call the next morning. This made him even angrier. He said "I know they're hiding in the back office. I'm going to sit here until they come out." He sat down.

Jane was scared and thought about calling her parents, but she was also frightened that the man would hear what she was doing and get even angrier. The owner of the agency was constantly telling everyone that "the customer is always right."

About two minutes after the man sat down, he jumped up and again loudly demanded to see an agent. Jane told him that there wasn't anyone else there, but the office manager would be back in a couple of minutes.

The man yelled "I know someone is here!" and started toward the back office.

Jane had been told never to let clients into the back rooms alone, so she stood up as he passed her desk and said "Please sir, you aren't allowed back there!"

The man turned and pushed her. She fell backwards over her chair and he ran from the office.

When the office manager returned, Jane was taken to a doctor who discovered that she had a broken wrist.

In your group, discuss the following:

- What could the owner of the agency have done to prevent this injury? Think about the kind of training the employer should provide employees, what rules should be established, and how the office could be set up, in order to increase the safety of the employee.
- How could Jane have responded to avoid being injured?

Violence by a Co-Worker

Guy is a high school junior who works the evening shift in a fast food restaurant. Frank, the evening shift supervisor, was constantly berating the other workers. Frank was especially abusive to Guy.

Frank's abuse never started until after the store manager left for the day. Frank frequently yelled at Guy, belittling him in front of the other workers and the customers, and telling Guy that he was stupid and should be fired.

One evening, Jenna, one of Guy's co-workers and classmates, told Guy that Frank told her that someday he was going to "pop Guy in the mouth." Jenna said that Guy should complain to the store manager. But Guy was worried that if Frank heard that Guy complained, he would become even more difficult.

The next night, as Guy was carrying a tray of milkshakes, Frank approached Guy shouting "You made too many milkshakes. What's wrong with you? You can't do anything right!"

Guy said that "My work is just as good as anyone's, including yours."

In response, Frank knocked the tray out of Guy's hands and walked away.

As Jenna helped Guy clean up, she again told Guy that he should tell the store manager. Guy responded that "He won't do anything."

In your group, discuss the following:

- *What could the restaurant owner/manager have done to prevent this incident? Think about the kind of training the employer should provide employees, what rules should be established, what policies should be in place, in order to decrease workplace bullying and harassment.*
- *What could Guy have done to avoid being bullied/harassed?*
- *What could Jenna have done to help address the problem?*

