

Dear friends,

We grieve nearly weekly about heart-breaking extreme violence in America. Atlanta and Boulder are two more horrific incidents of hate that add to our grim societal record of innocents being caused ineffable pain.

Violence in America's workplaces and in our greater society is real. I believe that we have a responsibility to acknowledge this as employers by preparing for emergencies through planning and training.

While I have presented recent events as an appalling reminder that *anything* can happen, I want to bring us back to thinking about personal safety generally. We should strive to clearly understand what to do in emergencies, and how to *train* for them. There are also steps you can take to tighten up workplace security procedures to increase your safety status.



As a former manager of a dozen Extension properties and current library trustee, I know how challenging it can be to make progress on safety topics and emergency policy, procedure, and planning. Nevertheless, planning for an emergency and making our workplace as safe as it can be is as important as anything else we do. At UVM Extension we have a plan for each office, a meeting point to make sure everyone is accounted for, and other key contacts within the organization and community – after 911, if appropriate, of course!

The danger could be, as I and some of you may have experienced, threatening patron behavior, or threats from the greater community, which may include threats from partners of employees. Let's be prepared. Think of this short document as a

reminder that may help you move along the path to safety.

The *Society for Human Resource Management* (SHRM) has created a slide deck for training supervisors about workplace violence¹. It was created to be adapted by any organization. Please [email me](#) if you would like to receive (via file transfer protocol because the file is big) the PowerPoint presentation for full reading and use. According to their introduction, the main focus of the training “is to help supervisors be more aware of warning signs of potential violent situations and steps you can take to keep yourself and others out of harm’s way.” They add that emergency response procedures are important to know as an aid to all employees.

In reality, there isn't any way to prevent violence. However, in their slide presentation, SHRM writes about recognizing violent potential. If you know the person as a co-worker or regular patron, some things that may point to *potential for violence* include their history. Are they obsessed with weapons, acts of violence, or do they have a history of violent acts?

Threatening behaviors to be aware of include grudge-holding, stating their intention to hurt someone, or demonstrating obsessive behavior, in gift-giving or phone calls, for instance. They may display *intimidating behavior*. Challenging peers and authority figures is a behavior to watch, as is unwarranted anger or being argumentative. *Socially isolated* people, people who have *marked changes in mood*, and negative personality characteristics such as *entitlement* or *feelings of victimization* are also broad traits that help identify violent potential.

According to SHRM, “a potentially violent person may be demonstrating” behaviors such as speaking loudly or quickly, “or using aggressive stances and gestures, such as pointing, getting close or clinching fists.”

There are some proven steps you can take to help calm someone down, or at least avoid an escalation.

SHRM says that there are ways to deal with a person who may be on edge:

- **Assess** the situation in your mind.
- **Project** calmness.

¹ Workplace Violence Training for Supervisors, SHRM February 2018.

- Be **patient and empathetic**, and encourage the person to talk.
- **Focus your attention** on the person so that they feel that you are interested in what they have to say.
- **Maintain a relaxed yet attentive posture**, and position yourself at a right angle instead of directly in front of the person.
- **Ask for small specific favors**, such as if you could talk in a quieter area.
- **Be reassuring** and point out choices.
- **Arrange yourself** so that your exit is not blocked.
- **Do not be the hero**. Your focus should be diverting the aggressive individual and keeping others safe without putting yourself in harm's way.
- **Do not make promises** you cannot keep.
- **Do not make physical contact** with the individual.

Taking steps to improve library security will go a long way to feeling and being more at ease. These recommendations from the Society are compelling.

- **Dark or secluded parking areas**. Are any additional security options needed?
- **Situations when employees may be working alone**. What steps can we take to create a safe situation for them?
- **Front desk where patrons first enter the library**. What training or changes can we make to improve security in this area?
- **Termination meetings**. What steps can we take to reduce the risk of these types of emotional situations turning violent? If you are terminating someone, it is very important to have someone else in the room with you to act as a witness and so that you don't have to face any situation alone².

For additional reading, please visit my website at <https://www.uvm.edu/extension/vermont-public-libraries-educational-program>. There are four sample documents available for download and

² All Employers Need a Workplace Violence Plan By Joanne Deschenaux, September 17, 2015, <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/risk->

Better to know, than not know

Clicking on the image below brings you to a YouTube training video about gun violence on the University of Ohio campus. I received training at UVM using this video. While I am nearly first in line in trying to deny that this could actually happen to me, my workmates, or to those I care for, my denying does little to change what is starkly evident about American society. That's why I invite you to see this video. If you can remember just a few things – run, hide, fight - you've memorized a plan. As you view it, you will have to ignore the context of the University of Ohio; focus on the core messages.

This video is a rendition of the "original" *Run, Hide, Fight* video. That video, created by the City of Houston, Texas, has logged 9 million viewers. It is a more violent rendition of the Ohio State production. While it is much less violent than a typical video download from your favorite streaming service, there is something particularly upsetting about it because it feels like this is not a show: these are our loved ones just going about their daily work. Again, the context of a large organization must be put aside as you think about the main concepts, again run, hide, and fight.

Click on image to follow link.



From <https://dps.osu.edu/active-aggressor>, accessed March 24, 2021.

City of Houston *Run, Hide, Fight*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5VcSwejU2D0>
accessed March 24, 2021.

[management/pages/workplace-violence-plan-.aspx](https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/risk-management/pages/workplace-violence-plan-.aspx)
accessed March 24, 2021

guidance and editing. They were created by Officer Sue Roberts, UVM Police, who has been instrumental to me and my organization in safety training. She created these for the 2019 UVM Extension *Town Officer Education Conference*. They are:

1. **An emergency action plan guide.** This document lists types of emergency by category in table form, defining the emergency, and detailing action steps and resources.
2. **A suspicious person or activity response guide.** This document provides a table with emergency type and specific steps to follow in each emergency.
3. **Be more aware – suggestions for feeling safer at work.** The document provides simple behavior modification suggestions that may greatly reduce your vulnerability.
4. **Workplace violence guidance.** This document covers workplace violence including potential warning signs, risk factors, prevention, as well as workplace safety planning considerations.



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Special thanks to [VTLIB](#) staff for their talented editorial review of *HR and Budget Minutes*. I am responsible for all content. I am not an attorney and this does not constitute legal advice. Please visit my [website](#) for more short articles and other resources on safety, HR, and budgeting.

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