

# **The Town Of Middlefield Workplace Violence Policy**

## **I. Statement of Policy.**

The Town of Middlefield's policy and position on workplace violence are clear. It is our policy to promote a safe environment for our employees and the visiting public, and to work with our employees to maintain a work environment that is free from violence, harassment, intimidation, and other disruptive behavior. Middlefield's position is that violence or threats of violence — in all forms — is unacceptable behavior. It will not be tolerated and will be dealt with appropriately.

All employees and all facilities of the Town of Middlefield are covered by the policies and program guidance contained in this document. The policy also applies to contractors and visitors to Town facilities.

## **II. Definition.**

Workplace violence is any behavior that is violent, threatens violence, coerces, harasses, or intimidates others, interferes with one's legal rights of movement or expression, or disrupts the workplace. Menacing/threatening behavior, intentional, unwanted physical contact including possession of firearms, knives, or other dangerous instruments or materials also represents unacceptable behavior.

## **III. Roles and Responsibilities**

The Town Supervisor will be responsible for the implementation of this policy including communication, education of those affected by the policy, assuring appropriate investigation and follow up for all incidents, and provision of relevant training programs.

The goal of the Middlefield's Workplace Violence Policy is to support a work environment in which violent or potentially violent situations are effectively addressed with a focus on prevention by increasing employee understanding of the nature of workplace violence, how to respond to it, and how to prevent it. Success in the protection of all requires personal attention and, as necessary, appropriate action.

**IT IS UP TO EACH EMPLOYEE, ELECTED OFFICIAL, AND APPOINTED OFFICIAL TO HELP MAKE THE DEPARTMENT A SAFE WORKPLACE.**

The expectation is that each of the above will treat all other employees, board members, and public, with dignity and respect.

Depending on the parameters of the incident the Superintendent, the Supervisor or the Town Board may be called upon to help assess, investigate, and/or respond to a violent or potentially violent situation.

**Employees (Including Supervisors) are responsible for:**

- their own behavior by interacting responsibly with fellow employees, supervisors, and public;
- being familiar with Middlefield policy regarding workplace violence;
- promptly reporting actual and/or potential acts of violence to appropriate authorities;
- cooperating fully in investigations/assessments of allegations of workplace violence;

**Managers and Supervisors are additionally responsible for:**

- informing employees of the Department's workplace violence policy and program;
- taking all reported incidents of workplace violence seriously;
- investigating all acts of violence, threat, and similar disruptive behavior in a timely fashion and taking the necessary action(s);
- providing feedback to employees regarding the outcome of their reports regarding violent or potentially violent incidents;
- requesting, where appropriate, assistance from functional area expert(s);
- being cognizant of situations that have the potential to produce violent behavior and promptly addressing them with all concerned parties;
- encouraging employees who show signs of stress or assuring, where needed, that employees have time and opportunity to attend training, e.g., conflict resolution, stress management, etc.

**Unions and Their Representatives are responsible for:**

- supporting Middlefield's workplace violence policy;

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- being cognizant of situations that have the potential to produce violence and promptly addressing them with all concerned parties;
- being sensitive to stress generated by the workplace and assisting employees in alleviating it;
- advising employees, if they inquire, of the procedures for reporting violent behavior.
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## **IV. Work Environment**

The best prevention strategy is to maintain an environment which minimizes negative feelings, such as isolation, resentment, and hostility among employees. Although no workplace can be perceived as perfect by every employee, there are several steps that management can take to help create a professional, healthy, and caring work environment. These include, but are not necessarily limited to:

- promoting sincere, open, and timely communication among managers, employees, and union representatives;
- offering opportunities for professional development;
- fostering a family-friendly work environment;
- maintaining mechanisms for complaints and concerns and allowing them to be expressed in a non-judgmental forum that includes timely feedback to the initiator;
- promoting "quality of life" issues such as facilities and job satisfaction; and
- maintaining impartial and consistent discipline for employees who exhibit improper conduct and poor performance.

## **V. Education**

Education and communication are also critical components of any prevention strategy. The following types of education and communication are effective in preventing violence and other threatening behavior:

- communicating an awareness among employees, supervisors, board members and public regarding all aspects of the Middlefield's Workplace Violence Policy: what it is, what to do when faced with possible problems, employee and management responsibilities, early intervention techniques, who to call for assistance, etc.; and

- educating employees and communicating to them techniques designed to effectively deal with conflict resolution, stress reduction, etc.

## **VI. Early Intervention and Risk Awareness**

Intervening early in a threatening or potentially violent situation is vital to preventing its escalation. There are many intervention options, and they vary greatly depending upon the situation. Early intervention may defuse the initial situation and give the supervisor an opportunity to thoroughly review options for resolution. Intervention sets the tone for how the situation will be resolved so it must be handled deftly.

Workplace violence may occur in any workplace setting. Some settings or factors may pose a greater degree of workplace violence risk. Some situations that may pose higher risks include:

- Working in a public setting
- Working late at night or early morning hours
- Exchanging money with the public
- Working alone or in small numbers
- Working in a setting with uncontrolled access

## **VII. Take appropriate Action and Recognize the Levels of Violence and Response**

Supervisors must be willing to take action when necessary. All employees must know that violence in the workplace will not be tolerated and that appropriate action will be taken if threats of violence or violence occurs. Potential or actual violent situations among employees usually escalate if not defused. Violence and the warning signs that typically occur can usually be identified at three levels. It should be noted that anyone or combination of warning signs at the three levels may be indicative of a potentially violent situation. The following is an attempt to delineate warning signs and the appropriate response. There is no fail-safe way of presenting this information to employees. Employees will have to make a judgment call as to the appropriate action to take by discerning and evaluating the given situation.

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## Level One (Early Warning Signs)

The person is:

- intimidating/bullying;
- discourteous/disrespectful;
- uncooperative; and/or
- verbally abusive.

## Response When Early Warning Signs Occur at Level One

- Observe the behavior in question.
- **Report** concerns to your supervisor to seek help in assessing/responding to the situation. If the offending employee is the reporting employee's immediate supervisor, the employee should notify the next level of supervision. If the offending person is not an employee, the supervisor of the employee reporting the incident is still the appropriate individual to receive and provide initial response.
- **Document** the observed behavior in question.
- Supervisor should **Meet** with the offending individual to discuss concerns. Follow these procedures:
  - Schedule private time and place.
  - Coordinate any necessary union participation.
  - Get straight to the point.
  - Identify the performance and/or conduct problems that are of concern.
  - Ask the employee for his or her input.
  - Ask the employee what should be done about the behavior.
  - Ask how you can help.
  - Identify the steps you would like to see to correct problems.
  - Set limits on what is acceptable behavior and performance.
  - Establish time frames to make changes and subsequent consequences for failing to correct behavior and/or performance.

## Level Two (Escalation of the Situation)

The person:

- argues with public, co-workers, and management;
- refuses to obey agency policies and procedures;
- sabotages equipment and steals property for revenge;
- verbalizes wishes to hurt co-workers and/or management;

- sends threatening note(s) to co-worker(s) and/or management; and/or
- sees self as victimized by management (me against them).

### **Response When the Situation Has Escalated to Level Two**

- If warranted, **Call** 911 and other appropriate emergency contacts (such as Federal Protective Service) for that particular facility, particularly if the situation requires immediate medical and/or law enforcement personnel.
- Immediately **Contact** the supervisor and, if needed, the supervisor will contact other appropriate official(s) such as functional area experts to seek help in assessing/responding to the situation.
- If necessary, **Secure** your own safety and the safety of others, including contacting people who are in danger (make sure emergency numbers for employees are kept up-to-date and accessible).
- **Document** the observed behavior in question.
- Supervisor should **Meet** with the employee to discuss concerns and, if appropriate, begin or continue progressive discipline. The supervisor should follow these procedures:
  - Call for assistance in assessing/responding, if needed.
  - Avoid an audience when dealing with the employee.
  - Remain calm, speaking slowly, softly, and clearly.
  - Ask the employee to sit down; see if s/he is able to follow directions.
  - Ask questions relevant to the employee's complaint such as:
    - What can you do to try to regain control of yourself?
    - What can I do to help you regain control?
    - What do you hope to gain by committing violence?
    - Why do you believe you need to be violent to achieve that?
    - Try to direct the aggressive tendencies into another kind of behavior so that the employee sees s/he has choices about how to react.

### **Level Three (Further Escalation – Usually Resulting in an Emergency Response)**

The person displays intense anger resulting in:

- suicidal threats;
- physical fights;
- destruction of property;

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- display of extreme rage; and/or
- utilization of weapons to harm others.

## Response When Situation is a Level Three Emergency

Any individual observing violent or threatening behavior which poses an immediate danger to persons or property is expected to:

- Call 911 and other appropriate emergency contacts (such as Federal Protective Service) for that particular facility, particularly if the situation requires immediate medical and/or law enforcement personnel.
- **Remain Calm** and **Contact** supervisor.
- **Secure** your personal safety first.
- **Leave** the area if your safety is at risk.
- **Cooperate** with law enforcement personnel when they have responded to the situation.
- Document the observed behavior in question.

Once law enforcement personnel are on the scene, they will assume control of the situation. Witnesses should be prepared to provide a description of the violent or threatening individual, details of what was observed, and the exact location of the incident.

## VIII. Confidentiality.

The Town of Middlefield will maintain the confidentiality of investigations of workplace violence to the extent possible. Town officials will act on the basis of anonymous complaints where there is reasonable basis to believe that there has been a violation of policy and that the safety and well being of individuals would be served by such action.

## IX. Retaliation.

Retaliation against anyone acting in good faith who has made a complaint of workplace violence, who has witnessed workplace violence, or who has been involved in reporting, investigating, or responding to workplace violence is a violation of this policy. Anyone found responsible for retaliatory action will be subject to follow up address as circumstances permit.