

## *GUIDELINES FOR THE PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE*

### **General Guidelines-Best Practices:**

The following guidelines are applicable to all members of McMaster University including but not limited to faculty and staff, students, contractors, and volunteers. Each worksite and location is unique, and developing standardized operating procedures (SOPs) for the environment in which one works is required under Risk Management Manual (RMM) # 324: Job Hazards Analysis Program.

### **What is Workplace Violence?**

Workplace violence includes any act in which a person is abused, threatened, intimidated or assaulted in his or her employment through physical, verbal and written means. Examples include:

- Threatening behaviour (e.g. shaking fists, destroying property)
- Physical attacks (e.g. hitting, shoving, pushing)
- Written or verbal threats (e.g. direct, conditional and veiled/subtle)
- Verbal abuse (e.g. intimidation, swearing, insults, condescending, hate language)
- Sexual harassment
- Psychological harassment (e.g. any behaviour designed to trouble or worry the victim)
- Bullying (physical, verbal, written)

### **Sources of Workplace Violence:**

Workplace violence, including bullying and harassment, can occur from:

- Peers/colleagues
- Supervisors/managers
- Customers/clients/patrons/patients/students
- Members of the public
- Unauthorized intruders
- Outside contacts including current and former spouses/partners

### **Factors That Increase the Risk of Workplace Violence:**

Awareness and training can help to eliminate workplace violence, bullying and harassment. However, certain work processes, situations and interactions can put people at risk. These include:

- Working with the public
- Providing service, care, advice or education
- Handling money, valuables or prescriptions drugs
- Working in premises where alcohol is served
- Working alone or in small numbers
- Working in community based settings (e.g. home visitors)
- Working during periods of intense organizational change

## **Plan and Prepare:**

Planning and preparing can help eliminate workplace violence, bullying and harassment. Some considerations include:

- Knowing the location of emergency exits and procedures, including safe places or rooms
- Knowing where to access telephones, including local pay phones and 'red rockets' available throughout main campus
- Installing panic buttons in your work area
- Comparing procedures with your coworkers or people with similar occupations
- Imagining appropriate responses to various situations you may find yourself in
- Deciding ahead of time how you will respond to various situations
- Inventorying your property. Record all serial numbers.
- Not loaning keys or access cards to anyone. Report lost or stolen cards or keys immediately to Security
- If you are a Supervisor, you have a responsibility to ensure your staff knows the hazards associated with their job tasks. All staff should know emergency exits and procedures
- As employees we have a responsibility to know hazards associated with our jobs. All employees should know emergency exits and procedures
- If you feel that there is a potential for home violence to carryover to the workplace, inform your supervisor and Security. Other internal resources such as Human Rights and Equity Services (HRES) will provide confidential support and can assist in identifying external resources. For example, women's shelters can provide advice on developing a safety plan
- CAW Local 555's Women's Advocate provides confidential information, support and resources
- Other resources for planning and preparing are listed in the Resource Section of this document

## **Trusting Your Instincts**

Certain comments and/or conduct may not be welcomed. For example, this could include someone taking pictures of you without your consent. Consider:

- Keeping personal information at a minimum when talking with anyone who makes you feel uncomfortable
- Not engaging in conversations that make you feel uncomfortable. Excuse yourself and walk away
- Being firm and confident and do not permit any kind of harassment, sexual, racial or otherwise
- Being alert for anger and hostility. De-escalate arguments whenever this is possible
- If you feel you are being harassed, threatened or intimidated: tell the person to stop, document the incident and inform your supervisor. Know what resources are available to you including security, representation from your bargaining unit, employee relations, etc.

### **Dealing with Strangers**

- Adopt a non threatening attitude toward visitors in your office or building by asking “May I help you?” as this is really asking “What are you doing here?”
- Escort strangers to the location or person they identify as their destination if you are comfortable in doing so
- Strangers acting suspiciously should be reported to Security
- Build a rapport with customers so that you can distinguish strangers from repeat customers
- Do not open doors to strangers before or after regular business hours

### **Preparing for a Potentially Violent Meeting:**

No one should enter a situation, including a meeting that is known to be violent or with the potential to end in violence. If you have reason to believe a meeting could potentially escalate, take the following steps:

- Do not enter any situation or location where you feel threatened or unsafe
- Conduct a background check, including reports from fellow employees; keeping in mind individual confidentiality
- Consider having two employees meet with the client/customer/patron/student
- Arrange to have Security nearby, but not visible
- Notify other staff that trouble is anticipated
- Set up a communication system to use on the interaction. For example, use a yes/no technique with a co-worker who calls and asks the following questions at a pre arranged time: (are you alright? Do you want me to come to your office? Do you want me to call Security/police?)
- Be prepared and on time for the meeting
- Evaluate the physical design of the meeting area which should include:
  - A review of general environment to minimize /eliminate potential weapons/blockage of exits
  - Set up meeting so that you are closest to the exit
  - Remove unnecessary papers, equipment from the desk that could be used as a weapon
  - Install panic buttons and test periodically to ensure they are in good working order

## **Conflict Resolution:**

Effective interpersonal communication consists of:

- Awareness of our body language and facial expressions, eye contact and personal distance
- Active, empathetic listening. Focus on the speaker to show that you are interested in what they are saying
- Clear organization of our thoughts before we speak
- Our words and tone of voice should be respectful

If effective communication breaks down, some tips to consider:

- Project calmness, move and speak more slowly, quietly and confidently
- Acknowledge the other person's feelings, such as "I can see that you are upset"
- Set ground rules. Example. "I am here to help you but I need you to stop yelling"
- Be reassuring. Break the problem down into smaller, more manageable ones. Point out choices. Ask the person what they can do to assist in resolving the situation
- Accept criticism positively and acknowledge your mistakes. Be honest. Tell the person what you are able to do for them and when you will do it for them.
- Each situation is unique. Consider common or potential situations that can occur in your work area and practice responses

## **Dealing with a Potentially Violent Person: Tips for Verbal Communication:**

Do NOT confront, antagonize, criticize, challenge, threaten or belittle.

DO:

- Maintain a relaxed posture. Stand 2-4 feet away from the person
- Position yourself closest to an exit
- Focus on the person to let them know you are interested in what they have to say
- Remain calm. Use your silence as a calming tool.
- Do NOT tell the person to calm down or relax
- Acknowledge the person's feelings. Indicate that you can see he/she is upset
- Ask the person to help you understand why they are upset
- Listen. Do NOT interrupt or offer unsolicited advice or criticism
- Delay tactics can be used to give time for people to calm down. E.g. offering a drink of water (use a disposable paper cup)
- Speak simply, slowly, quietly and confidently

## **Working off Site**

The following procedures are outlined to help minimize or prevent risks associated with working off-site:

- Do not enter any situation or location where you feel threatened or unsafe
- Have access to a cell phone or car radio at all times
- Use an established check in procedure which allows you to manage typical situations you may encounter off site
- Always wear your identification badge. This will signal that you are working in some official capacity
- Wear comfortable, professional clothing and practical shoes which will enable you to leave quickly if necessary
- Only carry what is absolutely necessary to conduct your business. Heavy purses and large briefcases may be cumbersome and slow your exit
- Document your visit. Do not leave out any incidents that make you feel apprehensive
- Keep client record and indicate if the client or patient is known to be aggressive, hostile or potentially violent
- Do not carry any weapon, including pepper spray. Weapons can just as easily be used against you and are illegal in some jurisdictions

## **Elevator Safety**

- Do not get onto an elevator with anyone who makes you feel uneasy. Wait for the next elevator
- Get off the elevator if a stranger acting suspiciously gets on with you
- Stand near the control panel when entering an elevator
- If something or someone makes you uncomfortable, push the button for the next floor or push the alarm
- On Campus, picking up the elevator telephone receiver will connect you to Security Services

## **Driving Safety:**

- Keep your vehicle in good repair
- Keep your gas tank at least ½ full
- Always check your tires
- Plan your route and avoid known dangerous areas
- Go to a service station or store to ask for directions if you get lost. Do not stop on the side of the road
- Carry a cell phone and keep it handy.
- Carry a personal safety alarm on your key chain. Use to attract attention if necessary
- Always lock your car, even while you are in it
- Make sure someone knows your plans, your route and your estimated arrival time

### **Travel Safety:**

- If you use a mobility device, be aware of accessibility issues, including emergency routes and exits
- Travel light and wear comfortable footwear that allow you to move quickly
- Read or work while you travel but remain aware of your surroundings. You look less vulnerable when you are busy
- Use crowds as a camouflage. Stand among a group of people waiting for a bus, cab, or subway
- Where possible make arrangements to arrive and leave during daylight hours
- Plan ahead: know your route, how you are going to get where you need to go
- Keep some money in an outside pocket to avoid fumbling through your purse or wallet
- Make sure your contacts at home and office know your schedule, and telephone number. Contact them when you have arrived
- Have your travel agent select hotels that take extra measures to ensure your safety, recommend a safe taxi company, tell you about customs and culture if you are traveling to a foreign country: simple gestures can be considered rude or aggressive
- Do NOT draw attention to yourself by displaying large amounts of cash or expensive jewellery
- Do NOT allow your travel plans to be given out to strangers

## **McMaster University Resources:**

- On Campus Security Services operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week and is responsible for the protection of persons and property within the community. Visit [www.mcmaster.ca/security/](http://www.mcmaster.ca/security/)
- All on campus payphones connect to Security. Pushing the blue button will immediately connect you to Security
- Emergency telephones are located across campus. Also identified as ‘red rockets’, these telephones are red poles with blue lights. Once the telephone is activated, it rings directly to Security and the blue light begins to flash.
- Security Services Prevention Division provides educational opportunities and advice. Visit [www.mcmaster.ca/security/cp.html](http://www.mcmaster.ca/security/cp.html)
- On Campus Health and Safety Office [Environmental and Occupational Health Support Services (EOHSS)] offers health and safety training, including Property Protection Training and Violence in the Workplace: Know Your Risks, Rights and Responsibilities. Visit [www.workingatmcmaster.ca/eohss/](http://www.workingatmcmaster.ca/eohss/)
- Faculty of Health Sciences (FHSc) Safety office provides health and safety training for off campus sites. Visit <http://fhs.mcmaster.ca/safetyoffice/>
- Human Rights and Equity Services (HRES) is a confidential service for all employees groups and students. They provide advice on human-rights related issues such as sexual harassment and discrimination. Visit [www.mcmaster.ca/hres](http://www.mcmaster.ca/hres)
- Student Code of Conduct. Visit [www.mcmaster.ca/univsec/policy/StudentCode.pdf](http://www.mcmaster.ca/univsec/policy/StudentCode.pdf)
- SWHAT (Student Walk Alone Attendant Team)
- Risk Management Manual (RMM# 304) Persons Working Alone Program. Visit [www.workingatmcmaster.ca/eohss/](http://www.workingatmcmaster.ca/eohss/) and follow link on health and safety to Risk Management Manual
- Resource File, available through Centre for Student Development (CSD)
- Faculty Support: <http://csd.mcmaster.ca/faculty>
- Ombuds Office provides confidential service to assist students, faculty and staff in the just, fair, and equitable resolution of University related complaints and concerns: <http://www.mcmaster.ca/ombuds/>
- Collective Agreements
- CAW Local 555 Women’s Advocate, Karen Sutton at [karen.sutton@local555.ca](mailto:karen.sutton@local555.ca). See Article 29 of the CAW collective agreement.

## **In case of an Emergency:**

**On McMaster University campus, call Security at 88 for assistance or if medical aid is required. Alternate emergency numbers are listed below:**

## TELEPHONE NUMBERS

The main campus number is (905) 525-9140.

On Campus McMaster University Emergency/Security	88
On Campus McMaster University Security: (Inquiries/Non Emergency)	24281
Security Services (calling off campus)	905-522-4135
McMaster University Medical Centre *	5555
Henderson Hospital and Juravinski Cancer Centre *	5555
Chedoke Hospital *	5555
Hamilton General Hospital *	5555
St. Joseph Hospital and its affiliates, including St. Peters *	7777
All other offsite locations	911
Environmental & Occupational Health Support Services (EOHSS): Health & Safety, Main Campus	24352
Faculty of Health Science, Health & Safety Office, Hamilton Hosted Sites	24956

**\* McMaster staff in hospital hosted buildings is to follow the emergency protocols of their host buildings. In general, this refers to the colour code system of identifying emergency situations.**

### Additional Resource Numbers

McMaster University's Crime Prevention and Educational Services	26060
McMaster University's Human Rights and Equity Services (HRES)	27581
McMaster University Student Health Services , MUSC B101	27700
McMaster University's Centre for Student Development, MUSC B107	24711

Employee and Family Assistance Program (Human Solutions)	1-800-663-1142
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**Report all incidents to your Supervisor and to Human Resources, Environmental and Occupational Health Support Services (EOHSS) and/or Faculty of Health Science Safety Office (FHSc Safety Office) as quickly as possible. Completed Injury/Incident Reports must be submitted to EOHSS and where applicable to FHSc within 24 hours of its occurrence.**