Awareness is the best tool in addressing individuals in distress and in helping to prevent violence at work.

The following behaviors indicate a person is in distress and may be moving toward violence as a solution to his/her situation.

It is critical that you consult with your supervisor, VCU Police, and VCU Human Resources if you observe a pattern of behavior including:

- history of violent behavior
- a pattern of escalating frustration accompanied by persistently blaming or criticizing others
- unexplained, persistent, and abrupt changes in mood
- increased social withdrawal or avoidance of usual workplace socialization
- unprovoked outbursts of anger or aggression inappropriate to circumstances
- significant and persistent changes in work habits (deterioration in performance, attendance, refusal to follow directives, disregard for safety and security policies)
- argumentative or combative behavior not characteristic for the employee
- any act of physical aggression, workplace disruption, or sexual harassment threatening the safety of others
- threatening or intimidating behavior directed toward others
- substance or alcohol abuse
- bizarre or outlandish behavior that induces discomfort or fear in others
- preoccupation with weapons and publicized incidents of workplace violence or homicide
- triggering events that increase instability — life/family stressors, change in support systems, loss, fired, or laid off.

This is not intended to be a comprehensive list of concerning behaviors. There is no way to know who will commit an act of violence. If you see something that makes you uncomfortable, contact the appropriate University official (supervisor, HR, VCU Police) so help can be offered to the individual in distress.
VCU’s Threat Assessment and Violence Prevention policy prohibits disruption, threats, and violence in the workplace.

- **Violent behavior** includes any physical assault with or without weapons; behavior that a reasonable person would interpret as being potentially violent (i.e., throwing things, pounding on a desk or door, destroying property), or specific threats to inflict physical harm; e.g., a threat to shoot a named individual.

- **Threatening behavior** includes physical actions, short of actual contact/injury (i.e., moving closer aggressively, waving arms or fists; general oral or written threats to people or property (e.g., “You better watch your back” or “I’ll get you”; “You’ll be sorry” or “This isn’t over”; stalking behavior; and hate speech).

- **Disruptive behavior** disturbs, interferes with, or prevents normal work functions or activities. Examples are yelling, using profanity, and verbal abuse.

Familiarize yourself with VCU’s Threat Assessment and Violence Prevention policy!*

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**How to respond to…**

**…violent and emergency situations:**
- Notify the VCU Police (828-1234) regarding any threat or act of violence.
- Don’t intervene if you will endanger yourself or others.
- Move yourself and others to safety.
- Use clear, direct communications.
- Keep a phone line open to police.

**…threatening behavior:**
- Intervene promptly.
- Talk in a calm voice and maintain eye contact.
- Set firm limits.
- Indicate consequences if disruption escalates, including discipline and police involvement.
- Document contact.

**…disruptive behavior:**
- Intervene promptly.
- Do not display anger, fear, or anxiety.
- Talk in a calm voice and maintain eye contact.
- Listen to the employee and ask clarifying questions.
- Remember, the employee’s perceptions are his/her reality — don’t engage in argument.
- Focus on inappropriate behavior and set appropriate behavioral expectations.
- Identify resources that may assist the employee — Human Resources, Employee Assistance Program (EAP), Employee Health — and refer if needed.
- Document your contact with the employee, including conversations and witnesses to each incident.
- Send the employee a written summary of your interaction with him/her to include behavioral and performance expectations.
- Familiarize yourself with VCU’s Threat Assessment and Violence Prevention Policy.*

*See VCU’s Threat Assessment and Violence Prevention policy at [http://www.hr.vcu.edu/policies/](http://www.hr.vcu.edu/policies/)
See also awareness training opportunities (as they become available) at [http://www.hr.vcu.edu/training/](http://www.hr.vcu.edu/training/)