

# Preventing and Dealing with Workplace Violence

*Beth Milanowski & RaeAnn Thomas*

Violence in the workplace is an increasingly pressing issue for employees. As the pace of our lives quickens and demands and pressures increase, we find that people are not always able to cope effectively. The increased stress and pressure can result in people becoming frustrated, angry and potentially violent. Even issues that have no connection to workplace stresses can erupt at work, requiring co-workers to respond. While the easiest solution may be to teach everyone appropriate ways to deal with stress and demands, we cannot realistically control that. Instead we must focus on what is in our control. Today we will spend some time talking about violence in the workplace. We will consider the definition of violence, who may become violent and why people become violent. After looking at these issues, we will focus on what we can do to minimize the risk of inappropriate behavior in the workplace.

Where does violence in the workplace come from? Are some environments more violent than others? Are some people more violent than others? Let's start with some numbers.

The US Department of Justice reports annual figures on workplace violence:

- 396,000 aggravated assaults
- 51,000 rapes and sexual assaults
- 84,000 robberies, and
- Over 1,000 homicides in the workplace each year.

Violence can come from a number of sources in the workplace. The first, most obvious source of violence is the public. Businesses that have a lot of contact with the public are at increased risk of experiencing a violent incident. The top five most dangerous industries are:

- Retail sales
- Law enforcement / security
- Medical
- Teaching
- Transportation

Think for a minute about these industries. What makes them most prone to violence? What do they have in common? The

