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This Violence Prevention Curriculum was developed as a project of the Provincial Violence Prevention Steering Committee (PVPSC) to fill a need for effective, recommended and provincially-recognized violence prevention training for all British Columbia healthcare workers across a range of care settings, including affiliate organizations. The Curriculum includes eight online and five classroom modules.

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- Occupational Health and Safety
- Social work
- Healthcare Violence Prevention programs
- Geriatric care
- Nursing
- Psychiatry
- Physical strategies and team response training

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MODULE 6

RESPONDING TO PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

COURSE OVERVIEW

COURSE INTRODUCTION

As a healthcare worker, you may be exposed to physical violence while on the job. Knowing how to preventively protect yourself and how to respond when you are part of a physically violent incident can help keep you safe. This module provides you with an overview of how to respond appropriately to physically violent incidents.

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE IN HEALTHCARE – (VIDEO TRANSCRIPT)

A crowd is cheering in an arena. One woman in the stands states "I've been punched and knocked over". Another woman states "Family members have threatened me." Another woman says "One person had a gun."

A residential care aide says "We work really hard to take care of people."

A community health worker states "It’s not right that my family should worry about me when I go to work."

As Carsen Germyn from the Calgary Flames states, "Health care workers suffer ten times more violence related injuries than the general work force. Care for those who care for you."

Courtesy of the Campbell River Public Social Marketing Campaign

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Define physical violence
- Identify cues that indicate that someone may become violent
- Describe preventive strategies for protecting yourself
- Identify how to respond to a violent incident
- Describe how a team response can help you during a violent incident

In order to complete this course, you need the following materials:

- This participant guide
- Optional: a computer with internet access to look up additional resources (e.g., glossary, references)
Physical violence is defined as any force, or any threat of force, that has the potential to cause injury and is directed towards self, others, or property.
What are different types of physical violence?

There are different types of physical violence. These include:

- Violence directed against property (e.g., punching a hole in the wall or throwing objects)
- Verbal threats of physical violence (e.g., I'm going to kill you)
- Physically threatening postures (e.g., invading your personal space with a clenched fist and/or trying to tower over you)
- Inflicting physical harm to self or others (e.g., grabbing, choking, slapping, punching, pinching, spitting)
- Sexual assault
- Using and/or brandishing weapons (e.g., waving a pen or sharps with the intention of doing harm, throwing a chair)
- Hostage taking
HOW CAN I TELL IF SOMEONE IS ABOUT TO BECOME PHYSICALLY VIOLENT?

When two or more of the following cues are present, there is a high likelihood that the person may become physically violent:

- Change in activity level or personality
- Invasion of personal space
- Verbal violence

An important indicator of the transition from verbal to physical violence is the inability or unwillingness to follow a simple request. Other physical violence indicators include:

- A flush, pinched, and/or tense face
- Rapid and deep mouth breathing
- Staring
- Mumbling (e.g., criticizing staff just loudly enough to be heard)
- Pacing back and forth

You must always assess the patient and situation to determine if there is a risk of physical violence. Responding appropriately may prevent escalation and keep you safe.
**Test Your Knowledge #1**

Select all statements that are TRUE. Once you’ve completed the quiz, you can go to the end of this guide to check your answers.

1. Physical violence is ONLY a force that has the potential to cause injury and is directed towards self, others, or property.
2. Punching a hole in a wall is an example of physical violence.
3. Someone who shows a change in activity level or personality invades personal space and/or is verbally violent may become physically violent.
4. An important indicator of the transition from verbal to physical violence is the inability or unwillingness to follow a simple request.
Preventive Strategies for Protecting Yourself

Know who to call for help

The following are possible resources that may be available to help you:

- Team response
- Code White team
- Security
- Police/RCMP

Who you need to call depends on your organization's policy. Talk to your supervisor to find out what procedures you should follow. Knowing who and how to call for help before an incident takes place can help keep you safe in the moment.

If you witness or experience a violent incident, call for help.
Use safety strategies when caring for the patient

Using the following strategies can help keep you safe when caring for patients:

- Assess the patient for risk and check for a violence alert (e.g., patient care plan)
- Ask clinical staff for information about the patient
- Respect the patient’s personal space (i.e., stay at least a leg’s length away)
- Know where your exits are located
- Remove jewellery and lanyards
- Keep your hair tied up and back
- Keep your stethoscope in your pocket
- Maintain a ready posture by standing at a 45 degree angle to the patient with your hands visible, open and above your waist.
- Follow your organization’s policies and procedures (e.g., working alone and violence prevention)

Know where different types of incidents are more likely to occur

Knowing where different types of incidents are more likely to occur can help keep you safe when caring for patients. For example, hair pulling is more likely to occur when doing bedside care, whereas choking is more likely to occur if your back is turned to the patient.

Talk to your supervisor and colleagues to learn more about risks in your workplace.
As a health care worker, you may either experience and/or witness a violent incident. **What should I do if I experience physical violence?**

If you are experiencing a violent incident:

- Yell and call for help using whatever means available (e.g., personal alarms, cell phones, call bells, fire alarms, etc.)
- Remove yourself from the situation as quickly and as safely as possible

You may also need to use self-protection techniques. These are covered in a separate classroom module.

If the person has a weapon, do not try to disarm them. Instead, concentrate on getting out.

*Do not be a target for violence.*
**What are some other strategies that I can use during an incident?**

While you are experiencing an incident of physical violence, there are several strategies that you can use to help protect yourself. These are:

- Scan your physical environment and:
  - Look for hiding places, exits, and clear pathways that you can move through
  - Put something between yourself and the patient so that you have time to look for exits and plan your escape
  - Hide behind non-movable furniture
  - Identify potential weapons and move away from them
  - Identify areas that are difficult to monitor or farther away from a source of help and avoid them

![Plan A and Plan B](image)

**Trust your gut instinct and always have a Plan A and a Plan B. Plan A is your response plan whereas Plan B is your exit strategy.**

**What can I do if I need to defend myself?**

Sometimes, you won’t be able to run or call for help. While these situations are rare, you may need to defend yourself in order to run or call for help.

According to Canada’s Criminal Code, you can only use as much force as you reasonably need to protect yourself.
What should I do if I see a violent incident?

If you witness a violent incident:

- Do not intervene alone
- Call for help (e.g., colleagues, security, Code White, or call 911)

**Immediately** call 911 if either:

- There is a weapon
- The situation is beyond the site's response capability

While you are waiting for help, you can help your colleague by using distraction or other techniques *as long as you are not putting yourself in the way of harm.*

Your safety is the most important criteria. Get out and then get help.
Test Your Knowledge #2

Select all statements that are TRUE. Once you’ve completed the quiz, you can go to the end of this guide to check your answers.

1. Who you need to call for help depends on your organization’s policy.
2. You only need to call for help if you are involved in a violent incident.
3. Knowing where different types of incidents are more likely to occur can help keep you safe when caring for patients.
4. If you are involved in a violent incident with someone that has a weapon, you should try to disarm them.
5. According to Canada's Criminal Code, you can only use as much force as you reasonably need to protect yourself.
**Team Response**

**Introduction**

Using teams to respond to violent incidents can help de-escalate the situation.

**What does the term Code White mean?**

- Workers perceive themselves or others to be in danger of physical harm from someone who is violent
- Someone is acting out in a way that is dangerous to self, others, or the environment
- The situation is rapidly escalating out of control - the present staff does not have the capability to de-escalate the situation

Calling this code triggers an emergency response procedure that varies by facility, sector and/or workplace.

Some facilities use other words to call for an emergency response. Talk to your supervisor to find out what words and procedure your facility uses.

**What is a team response?**

There are a range of responses that workers can use in situations involving verbal or physical violence. These include:

- Two or more workers responding to a call to provide support
- A trained group of 3-5 workers who respond to Code White calls in a structured manner but do not intervene
- A highly trained group of 3-5 workers/security officers (also referred to as a Code White team) who respond to Code White calls and can provide every level of intervention from acting as a presence to physically containing the situation.

The most appropriate team response depends on the workplace violence risk assessment, situation and work site resources.

Your site may or may not have a designated trained team. Talk to your supervisor about your site’s team response procedure for violent incidents.
**WHAT DOES A TRAINED TEAM DO?**

A trained team:

- Assesses the situation
- Determines if there is a safe way to intervene
- Intervenes to help de-escalate the violent person

The focus of the team's response is to de-escalate a threatening situation before anyone is injured or property is damaged.

A team constantly needs to assess and know its limitations in order to intervene safely and appropriately. This means that if a situation escalates beyond the team’s capability, it must call the police.
**WHY USE A TEAM RESPONSE?**

A team response may allow for one or more of the following:

- Safety
- A show of presence which, by itself, may de-escalate the incident (i.e., physical presence of a group of workers to support the worker)
- Using a lower level of intervention with a much lower risk of injury to all who are involved in the situation
- A measure of protection for those involved in the incident (e.g., witnesses, support)
WHEN DOES THE TEAM CALL 911?

If not already called, the team calls 911 when one or more of the following conditions are present:

- There is a real or perceived threat that lives are in danger
- The initial staff or response team determines the situation is beyond their capability
- A weapon or firearm is involved
- The violent behaviour occurs outside the limits of pursuit established by the organization (e.g., outside the hospital)
- The violent person is not a patient
- Staff and patient safety are threatened, and other interventions are not available
**Authority and Decision-Making**

During the incident, only one person or group is in charge of the decision-making process. This allows for safe, effective, and efficient decisions and actions to be taken while providing the means for accountability.

Although you may be the one experiencing, witnessing or managing a violent incident, the moment a trained team or the police take(s) over, you must provide all required information. The team leader’s decisions and the interventions used must be based on clinical direction. You can also assist by following the trained team leader’s direction (i.e., to assist with moving other patients, assist with the team response if trained).

Talk to your supervisor to learn more about the procedures and policies at your facility.

![Important Reminder]

Regardless of your role, you must always follow the trained team’s lead.

1. RCMP/Police
2. Team response leader with clinical direction
Select all statements that are TRUE. Once you’ve completed the quiz, you can go to the end of this guide to check your answers.

1. The most appropriate team response depends on the workplace violence risk assessment, situation and work site resources.

2. A team response always includes a formal Code White team.

3. The focus of the team’s response is to de-escalate a threatening situation before anyone is injured or property is damaged.

4. A team should continue to manage a violent situation, even if it escalates beyond the team’s capability.

5. The main reason for using a team approach is safety for you, the patient, and anyone else involved in the situation.
Select all statements that are TRUE. Once you’ve completed the quiz, you can go to the end of this guide to check your answers.

1. Calling a Code White triggers a procedure that is the same for all facilities.
2. A Code White team is a highly trained group of three to five staff and/or security who respond to Code White calls and can provide every level of intervention.
3. Some facilities use other code words (besides Code White) to call for help.
4. Your facility always has a designated Code White team.
5. The moment a trained team or the police arrive during a violent incident, you must provide all required information (including any relevant clinical direction) and then follow the direction of the trained team leader or police.
In this module, you have learned the following key points:

- A person may become physically violent when the following cues are present: 1) a change in activity level or personality, 2) invasion of your personal space, and 3) verbal violence. Other indicators may also be present. Knowing where different types of attacks are more likely to occur can help keep you safe when caring for patients.

- If you are experiencing a violent incident: 1) yell and call for help using whatever means available and 2) remove yourself from the situation as quickly and as safely as possible. You may sometimes need to defend yourself in order to run or call for help. According to Canada's Criminal Code, you can only use as much force as you reasonably need to protect yourself.

- If you witness a violent incident do not intervene alone. Instead, call for help. You can help your colleague by using distraction or other techniques as long as you are not putting yourself in the way of harm.

- The main reason for using a team approach is safety for yourself, the patient, and anyone else involved in the situation.

- Code White is a term used to call for help when a violent incident occurs. There are a range of team responses that may be used to help de-escalate violent situations. A Code White team is a highly trained group of three to five staff and/or security who respond to Code White calls and can provide every level of intervention. Your site may or may not have a designated trained team.

- The moment a trained team or the police arrive, provide all required information (including any clinical direction) and then follow the direction of the trained team leader or the police.
Please complete the following quiz once you have finished this module. Circle the correct answer(s) for each question.

1) Physical violence is defined as any force, or threat of force, that has the potential to cause injury and is directed towards self, others or property.
   - True
   - False

2) Examples of physical violence include:
   A. Verbal threats of physical violence (e.g., "I’m going to kill you")
   B. Spitting
   C. Swearing
   D. Punching a hole in the wall
   E. Throwing a cane at someone but missing them
   F. All of the above

3) When someone is about to become physically violent, they may: have a change in activity level or personality; invade your personal space; and/or be verbally violent.
   - True
   - False

4) Who you need to call for help during a violence incident depends on your organization and may include: a team response, a Code White team, security or the police.
   - True
   - False

5) Safety strategies you can use when caring for a patient include:
   A. Checking for a violence alert
   B. Asking clinical staff for information about the patient
   C. Keeping your stethoscope and/or lanyard around your neck
   D. Following your organization’s working alone and violence prevention procedures
   E. Maintaining a ready posture by standing at a 45 degree angle to the patient with your hands behind your back

6) Knowing where different types of violent incidents are likely to occur will help keep you safe when caring for patients.
   - True
   - False
7) If a person has a weapon, you should:
   A. Try to disarm them
   B. Try to prevent the person from leaving
   C. Call for help and try to disarm them
   D. Leave and get help
   E. Try to protect patients and staff

8) According to Canada’s Criminal Code, you may use as much force as possible to protect yourself and others.
   o True
   o False

9) If you witness a violent incident, you should:
   A. Call for help
   B. Intervene by yourself
   C. Call 911 if there is a weapon
   D. Call 911 if the situation is beyond the site’s response capabilities
   E. Help your colleague with assistance from others after you’ve called for help

10) Every facility, sector and/or workplace has the same emergency response procedure for violent incidents that is initiated by calling a “Code White”.
    o True
    o False

11) A Code White should be called when:
    A. Workers perceive themselves or others to be in danger of harm from someone who is being violent
    B. Someone is acting out in a way that is dangerous to themselves, others or the environment
    C. The present staff has the capability to de-escalate the situation
    D. The situation is rapidly escalating out of control

12) A team response to a violent incident may include:
    A. 2 or more workers responding to a call for help
    B. A trained group of 3 to 5 workers who respond to Code White calls but do not intervene
    C. A highly trained group of 3 to 5 workers/security officers who respond to Code White calls that can provide every level of intervention
    D. All of the above

13) A team response should be used because:
    A. It can help keep you, the patient, and anyone else involved in the situation safe
    B. The presence of a group of people will escalate a situation
    C. It may allow for a higher level of intervention
    D. It can increase the risk of injury for everyone involved in the situation
    E. It can help protect those involved in the incident by providing witnesses and support
14) A team should continue to manage a violent situation if it escalates beyond the team’s capability.
   - True
   - False

15) The moment a trained team or the police arrive, you should provide all required information (including any clinical direction) and then follow the direction of the team response leader or the police.
   - True
   - False
**Test Your Knowledge – Answer Keys**

**Test Your Knowledge #1**

1. False - Physical violence is defined as any force, or any threat of force, that has the potential to cause injury and is directed towards self, others, or property.

2. True - Punching a hole in a wall is an example of physical violence.

3. True - Someone who shows a change in activity level or personality, invades personal space and/or is verbally violent may become physically violent.

4. True - An important indicator of the transition from verbal to physical violence is the inability or unwillingness to follow a simple request.

**Test Your Knowledge #2**

1. True - Who you need to call for help depends on your organization’s policy.

2. False - Regardless of whether or you are witnessing or experiencing a violent incident, you must always call for help as soon as it is safe to do so.

3. True - Knowing where different types of incidents are more likely to occur can help keep you safe when caring for patients.

4. False - If you are involved in a violent incident with someone that has a weapon, don’t try to disarm them. Instead, focus on getting away.

5. True - According to Canada’s Criminal Code, you can only use as much force as you reasonably need to protect yourself.

**Test Your Knowledge #3**

1. True - The most appropriate team response depends on the workplace violence risk assessment, situation and work site resources.

2. False - A team response may or may not include a formal Code White team.

3. True - The focus of the team’s response is to de-escalate a threatening situation before anyone is injured or property is damaged.

4. False - If a violent situation escalates beyond the team’s capability, they should call the police.

5. True - The main reason for using a team approach is safety for yourself, the patient, and anyone else involved in the situation.
TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE #4

1. False - Calling a Code White triggers an emergency response procedure that varies by facility, sector and/or workplace.

2. True - A Code White team is a highly trained group of three to five staff and/or security who respond to Code White calls and can provide every level of intervention.

3. True - Some facilities use other code words (besides Code White) to call for help.

4. False - Your site may or may not have a designated Code White team.

5. True - The moment a trained team or the police arrive during a violent incident, you must provide all required information (including any relevant clinical direction) and then follow the direction of the trained team leader or police.
Module 6 Quiz Answer Key

1) True
2) A, B, D, E
3) True
4) True
5) A, B, D
6) True
7) D
8) False
9) A, C, D, E
10) False
11) A, B, D
12) D
13) A, E
14) False
15) True