



# RECOGNIZE

How You Can Notice the Warning Signs of Violence

Co-workers, friends, and family are often best positioned to **recognize the warning signs** in someone who may be on a path to violence.



People who resort to violence are often driven by a combination of predispositions, personal or professional stressors, and assorted resentments.

## KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER



- A person's behaviors and communications are often disclosed through nonverbal means. Pay attention to what people are saying through facial expressions, emotions, and body language.
- Individuals are unique and will likely not discuss intentions or needs in a uniform manner. Behaviors that some people find troubling or threatening may very well be someone's way of asking for help.
- People have bad days. They can become sad, argumentative, or angry; this does not mean there is intent to cause harm.
- Confirmation of a threat requires a solid understanding of context and a holistic assessment of the person's circumstances and stressors.
- When you report, you create an opportunity to prevent potentially violent situations.

**When you notice the warning signs, you can help prevent violence in two primary ways. One applies to urgent situations when violence may be occurring or is imminent. The other enables you to help people by reporting your observations.**

### Clearly communicate the threat while seeking safety

If you recognize that a hostile act is occurring or is imminent, remove yourself from the situation and seek safety while communicating the threat and suggested response in a loud, clear voice (e.g., "Gun!" "Run!" "Bomb!" "Get Out!").

### Inform others

If you recognize a warning sign and there is no imminent threat, inform others of what you have seen or know. Tell a supervisor, manager, security guard, or other employee or team member.

*This document describes activities and behaviors that may be concerning or indicative of impending violence. Some of these activities while concerning, may be constitutionally protected and should be reported only when there are sufficient facts to support a rational conclusion that the behavior represents a potential threat of violence. Do not report based solely on protected activities, or on the basis of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, or a combination of only such factors. In addition, be aware that critical infrastructure owners and their operations may also be targeted based on these factors.*



## STRESSORS

### Situations that cause strain or tension.

These can be positive or negative developments in a person's personal or professional life.

Examples include:

- Financial strain
- Illness or death among family or friends
- Addiction (drugs, alcohol, gambling, etc.)
- Break-up or divorce
- Employment actions (promotion, demotion, termination, etc.)
- Conflict with peers, co-workers, or managers
- Legal problems
- Transfer or relocation



## CHANGES

### Variation in baseline behavior.

Baseline behavior is an individual's normal mood and typical responses to everyday activities. Those most familiar with an individual will be able to notice a change in baseline behaviors.

Examples include:

- A person who is usually moody or socially isolated becoming excessively outgoing
- An outgoing person suddenly becoming socially isolated
- A normally hard worker that no longer cares about work performance
- Someone who develops beliefs or ideas that promote violence



## BEHAVIORAL INDICATORS

### Observable behaviors by peers.

Organizational members typically have some degree of familiarity with each other and are frequently able to spot changes in a peer's behavior.

Examples include:

- Disgruntlement toward peers
- Unwillingness to comply with established rules or policies
- Stalking, harassing, or bullying
- Making inappropriate statements or jokes
- Threats of violence, either verbally or written
- Fascination with previous incidents of workplace violence
- New or increased interest in weapons
- Asking about security outside of assigned roles and responsibilities

### Observable physical behaviors.

It is difficult to determine a stranger's intent due to lack of familiarity. Individuals will have to rely on physical indicators of aggression to determine if a stranger is potentially hostile.

Examples include:

- Argumentative or uncooperative behaviors
- Clenched jaw and/or balled fists
- Pacing or restlessness
- Trembling or shaking
- Violating others' personal space
- Making specific threats to inflict harm to themselves or others
- Displaying or making threats to use a weapon



## HELPFUL LINKS

### Power of Hello:

[cisa.gov/employee-vigilance-power-hello](https://cisa.gov/employee-vigilance-power-hello)

### CISA Insider Threat Mitigation Guide:

[cisa.gov/publication/insider-threat-mitigation-resources](https://cisa.gov/publication/insider-threat-mitigation-resources)

 [cisa.gov](https://cisa.gov)  [Central@cisa.gov](mailto:Central@cisa.gov)



 **RECOGNIZE**  
 **ASSESS**  
 **DE-ESCALATE**  
 **REPORT**

These recognition approaches are options for consideration. This is not intended to mandate policy or direct any action.