

WHAT IS VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE?

When the “slap heard around the world” occurred between actors Will Smith and Chris Rock at the Academy Awards ceremony recently, it was indeed a case of something that we here in the City of Houston might call violence in the workplace.

[Executive Order 1-50](#) “Workplace Discrimination and Harassment,” and [Administrative Policy 3-21](#) “Violence in the Workplace” both address different aspects of uncivil behavior at work. They describe terms such as “intimidating communications,” “stalking,” and “threat,” that are or may be included in prohibited conduct for city employees.

As we may have learned from the ZIP module titled “Violence in the Workplace,” there are several aspects of workplace violence that fall well below the threshold of an active-shooter incident, which are, nevertheless, prohibited contact by city employees.

Here are some common-sense techniques for de-escalating a potentially violent incident, or for addressing alternatives for when de-escalation does not work:

DE-ESCALATION TECHNIQUES:

- **LISTEN** – Listening allows an irate person to purge angry energy and help them return to a state of equilibrium.
- **ACKNOWLEDGE** – Relaying that you understand what a person means or is feeling helps to validate their emotions.
- **AGREE** – When attempting to diffuse someone’s anger, it’s helpful to find some truth in what’s being said and agree with it.
- **APOLOGIES** – Never apologize for an imaginary wrong, but a sincere apology for anything in the situation that was unjust can build credibility in your attempt to de-escalate.

IF DE-ESCALATION DOESN’T WORK:

- **REMOVE YOURSELF** from the situation and get someplace safe.
- **CALL FOR HELP.** Dial 911 or 311 to report the incident or what is going on.
- **CALL YOUR SUPERVISOR OR MANAGER** to let them know what’s going on.
- **IF YOU ARE ON CALL AT NIGHT,** stop and assess the situation before exiting your vehicle.