

*Editor's Note: Safety Group Program Monthly Newsletter Article — March 2021  
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## **Preventing workplace violence: How to keep employees safe as they transition back to in-person work**

Last year, employers that adopted work-from-home models due to COVID-19 were forced to reshape the ways they addressed [workplace violence](#) concerns. Now, with [coronavirus cases and hospitalizations falling in Colorado](#) and the [vaccine rolling out](#), it's time for these employers to reassess their efforts to combat workplace violence as employees return to in-person work.

[More than half](#) of Coloradans worked from home last year, so tracking workplace violence incidents in 2020 proved difficult. Statewide statistics show a [rise in domestic violence](#) tied to the pandemic, which makes sense since [workplaces had traditionally served as safe havens](#) for abuse victims. And while [calls to the Colorado child abuse and neglect hotline decreased](#), primarily due to lack of in-person contact with mandated reporters, authorities say abuse is more likely to occur during stressful situations.

With many new stressors to navigate as Coloradans return to their workplaces, employers should create a strategy to stop the violence before it starts. That includes helping workers as they begin to socialize after months of isolation, and addressing psychological safety, too.

“A remote environment can contribute to an eroding social fabric. That’s a concern for me,” notes Todd Faubion, chief security and fraud prevention officer at Pinnacol. “We may become desensitized to appropriate behavior around others and lose our ability for face-to-face interaction.”

Businesses can start by implementing these nine tips.

1. **Educate employees on proper procedures.** Explain how to report concerns about other workers, customers and even home life. Designate one person to approach with those concerns.

2. **Create expectations for proper workplace contact.** After seeing the lines between home and work blur, employees will need a refresher on appropriate workplace conduct. Correct inappropriate behavior quickly.
3. **Review the employee handbook.** Discuss the entries on workplace violence and what, if anything, has changed. For instance, have any COVID-19-specific measures been added, such as prohibiting workers from purposely breathing on someone else?
4. **Take immediate action.** Dealing with workplace harassment or misconduct may have been postponed while everyone was virtual. Prioritize those issues that went on the back burner before reuniting everyone in the workplace.
5. **Advise caution on social media.** Employees may still be working at home part time during the transition to in-person work. Remind them not to share identifying details about their houses or apartments on social media. Anyone, including an angry customer threatening to hurt an employee, could see that post.
6. **Exercise caution after a termination.** If employees are still at home, send a courier to collect equipment or have the employee mail it back.
7. **Make plans outside work to encourage socialization.** Get employees comfortable with each other again by starting a virtual book club or holding Zoom happy hours on Fridays.
8. **Rebuild interpersonal skills.** Improve awareness of others and revive rusty communication skills by encouraging employees to ask each other questions and listen carefully to the responses.
9. **Be sensitive to varying levels of comfort with returning to work.** Remember that fear, which may include worries related to the virus, can trigger aggressive or hostile behavior.

Have questions? [Contact a Pinnacol safety consultant](#) to discuss how to keep your employees safe as they return to in-person work.

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