

# **Health & Safety Working Safely Guides**

## **Managing Violence and Aggression**

## MANAGING VIOLENCE AND AGGRESSION

### 1. DEFINITION

Dealing with, or being subject to aggressive or violent behaviour is not considered to be a failure by a member of staff or viewed as a reflection on their performance. Violence and abuse are not part of the job.

For the purposes of this guidance the definition of violence is based upon the Health and Safety Executive's definition of work related violence:

***“Any incident, in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work”.***

Violence, threats and abuse to you, your family and property are unacceptable. Violent incidents do not necessarily cause physical harm but persistent verbal abuse or threats can cause anxiety. The following is not an exhaustive list and anyone who feels uneasy or feels that their safety is at risk must report or discuss the matter with their supervisor or manager.

**Physical violence** - assault involving injury; sexual assault or unwanted physical contact; minor assault including pushing, holding or spitting; use of a weapon

**Non-physical violence** - verbal abuse including that of a sexist or racist nature; threats of physical violence; bullying; harassment; intimidation; threatening postures and gestures; stalking; malicious phone calls, photographic images using phone or p.c., correspondence, including e-mail

### 2. RESPONSIBILITIES OF MANAGERS

In consultation with staff and other relevant people, as necessary, all managers and supervisors are responsible for ensuring that an assessment of risks to prevent violence and aggression is carried out in accordance with the County Council's Risk Assessment Procedure.

Each Directorate, in line with the needs of staff and job roles, will develop information and a framework of training and refresher training for managing violence and aggression and safe working practice. Staff should receive instruction as part of their induction, so they are made aware of procedures to be followed.

The risk assessment must be signed and dated, kept up-to-date and reviewed at least annually or in line with local procedures. If developments suggest that the current risk assessment is no longer valid, or that it can be improved, the assessment must be amended. Reviews should take place after an incident as soon as is reasonably practicable or within 10 working days, to see whether there is a need to change working procedures, implement new working practices, make changes to the working environment or provide additional training.

All significant risks must be recorded and include:

- Identifying activities/situations/environment which may cause problems
- Deciding what action/control measures to take
- Are existing precautions adequate?
- Recording the findings
- Monitoring actual practice and revise assessment if necessary

Model assessments may be created for guidance rather than develop a risk assessment for every task by every person and then must be tailored to different environments. The important point is to carry out the assessment systematically.

After an incident staff should be offered support; details of the incident reported; a review made of working practices to see whether changes need to be implemented; information updated and shared; and whether changes are needed to the working environment.

Managers should ensure that staff have access to this document, the personal safety policy, information and training where appropriate and adhere to procedures designed to protect their safety.

### **3. RESPONSIBILITIES OF EMPLOYEES**

- Take reasonable care of yourself and others
- Co-operate with managers in identifying foreseeable risks and following procedures and practices whether written or verbal, designed to protect your safety e.g. complete contact and trace procedures e.g. booking in and out procedure, electronic calendar, whiteboard
- Familiarise yourself with policies and risk assessments
- If you encounter any new hazards during the course of your work that have not been considered previously or circumstances have changed, speak with your manager or supervisor
- Never knowingly compromise your safety and if you feel uneasy, report any concerns to your manager
- Participate in any training designed to improve your safety at work
- Share information with colleagues and record if necessary
- Report any incidents of verbal and physical abuse including near misses, whether injury is sustained or not, to your manager or supervisor and complete appropriate forms as soon as possible after an incident has occurred
- Carry your identity card and report loss or theft immediately to your manager
- Carry phone card or loose change to use a telephone

### **4. PREVENTION**

We sometimes underestimate the degree of risk, particularly in situations we have handled successfully before, or perhaps in unusual situations where we think we can handle it, but we misjudge it. Violence may arise because the work involves contact with a wide range of people, in circumstances, which may be difficult. Some people may be anxious, worried, feeling under pressure or frustrated at feeling out of control

of their lives. The situation could be made worse because of the presence of alcohol, drugs, anger or having an audience.

If you are involved with confrontation from known customers outside work, report any incident to the police and report to your manager as soon as is reasonably practicable.

- Be alert
- Never assume it will not happen to you and never underestimate a threat
- Know when to withdraw and withdraw quickly
- Have a positive attitude and look confident
- Trust your intuition
- Proceed with care

## **Safe Working Practice**

- If working in the community, plan your route and always let someone know where you are going and expected time of return. Keep colleagues informed of any changes to your schedule
- Do not give out your telephone number or home address
- If using a mobile phone, ensure that it's fully charged and has sufficient credit. Record the telephone number of someone to contact In Case of Emergency under ICE in your mobile phone as the emergency services may check this in the event of an accident/incident
- Check all information available before meeting service users/customers. If there is a known history of aggression, a specific risk assessment must be completed which should consider whether interviews in own home can be avoided and should two members of staff attend.
- If a situation feels threatening stay calm and try to appear confident, speak slowly and clearly - do not be enticed into an argument
- Try to diffuse the situation by saying you will seek further advice from a manager or colleague and be honest, do not use your authority and don't make promises that you cannot keep
- Keep your distance, at least arms length if possible, never touch and never turn your back on someone who is angry
- Keep your eye on potential escape routes and position yourself between the aggressor and a door, but do not block their exit route. Particularly relevant during interview situations
- If you have any concerns for your safety suspend the interview/meeting and contact your supervisor for advice

## **Signs, which can alert you to the potential of aggression or violence:**

- Restless behaviour, including pushing and body language becoming threatening
- Noticeable behaviour change e.g. person becoming very quiet or subdued
- Verbal threats, raised voice or deliberate provocative conduct e.g. accusations
- Using pets as a means of intimidation
- Threats of throwing/using innocent objects as a weapon e.g. plant pots
- Influence of alcohol/drugs

**If you fear a physical attack is imminent:**

- Get away as fast as you can without looking back, move quickly to a place of safety
- If property or cash is the target give it away, it can always be replaced
- Shout or create a diversion to distract a person
- Have a plan of action if difficulties arise
- Ensure you know who to contact for advice in difficult situations
- Use a personal alarm to give yourself a few seconds to escape
- If you want assistance, ask someone directly and tell them what you want them to do e.g. call the police, don't just say 'help me'

**5. AFTER AN INCIDENT**

- Report any incident or near misses to your manager and ensure it is recorded on an Accident/Incident report form
- You have the right to report any violent incident of assault to the police
- Facts must be recorded accurately and as soon as reasonably practicable after the incident, including witness statements. It's important to record events leading up to the incident and whether any triggers can be identified which may alert staff to a similar incident in future
- Your manager, in consultation with you and your safety representative if required, will ensure that you receive support, which may include de-briefing or counselling, or time off work. A list of suggested actions are listed in paragraph 9 in the Personal Safety Policy
- Your manager will review the incident and determine whether any action to stop or minimise the risk of subsequent incidents could be taken
- The risk assessment will be reviewed with you and other team members or colleagues as necessary, to identify any necessary changes in practice or procedure
- It may not be possible, in all cases, to remove a service
- There is no automatic right of compensation for injury or damage to property
- Warwickshire County Council's Insurance and Risk Management and Legal Services can be approached for advice