

# **Health & Safety Working Safely Guides**

## **Reception and Interview Rooms**

### **RECEPTION AND INTERVIEW ROOMS**

## Reception

Offices should be provided with a reception where access to the public should be restricted to waiting areas and interview rooms, wherever possible, with systems in place to offer support if a visitor is known to present difficulties. Security codes should be restricted to staff working on the premises and unauthorised access to the remainder of the building should be restricted. Security codes should be changed when there has been a known breach or it is suspected that the code is known to unauthorised visitors.

Any staff working on reception must be aware of systems in operation to prevent access, procedures for greeting visitors and how to summon help when a situation appears to be developing into a potentially violent incident.

Issues to consider management of reception areas:

- Accessible, well sign posted, welcoming, well lit, clean, tidy, comfortable, low noise levels, comfortable temperature, supply a range of magazines and toys, if applicable
- Visitors should always be received courteously and professionally
- Procedure for dealing with visitors, signing in, wearing ID badges
- Know who is in the building and when they leave
- Know how to raise the alarm - numbers, location, checks to ensure full working order
- Procedure for dealing with contractors/deliveries
- Delays - keeping visitors informed
- Procedure for dealing with emergency evacuations - fire
- Removal of objects which could be used as a weapon
- Procedure for accepting money - receipting, banking, security
- Notices and information for assistance - no smoking, fire evacuation
- Clear procedure for dealing with unacceptable behaviour before situation escalates into something more serious
- Panic alarm systems must be checked regularly to ensure they are in full working order and have an agreed procedure in writing, known to all staff, about what action to take if an alarm is raised. Staff should practice their response procedure when alarms are activated to ensure they are familiar with what action to take and assess whether the procedures are still relevant.

## Safe Practice

Reception staff are often in the firing line as customers may not get the service they want or expect and they will often have to wait. It's easier to prevent major problems occurring by taking appropriate action early. Be aware that a customer may have physical, mental and personal problems which may affect their behaviour. Don't use jargon or abbreviations and don't make promises you cannot keep. Don't keep people waiting unnecessarily and advise them of any likely delay.

Warning signs that would indicate unpredictable behaviour: noisy, banging, restlessness and agitated, smell of alcohol. Ensure a protocol is in place for dealing with people who may be under the influence of alcohol/drugs. Be aware of your own body language, remain calm, keep an open stance, listen encouragingly by listening, look as though you are listening and let them know you are listening, and be aware of encroaching into their personal space.

An angry person will want your full attention, if a mistake has been made or there is a delay, apologise and explaining the reasons may stop annoyance escalating into verbal abuse. Don't be provoked into an argument and don't delay calling for assistance.

If asked for assistance, staff must respond as a matter of urgency. Staff should respond quickly and remain calm. Ensure that other visitors who may feel threatened are moved to a different area or receive re-assurance. Minimise the numbers of people looking on.

Build rapport and show understanding to the person's concerns; don't turn your back on an angry person. Encourage them to talk and listen carefully to each of their grievances, summarise to confirm you have listened to them and try to resolve at least one issue quickly to show you are willing to take action where possible. Make notes with regard to their grievance, this will confirm that you are taking their concerns seriously and taking note of what they are saying could also be used as evidence at a later date.

As a last resort, if events have escalated and the person has failed to heed warnings about threatening behaviour or they cause damage to property, don't attempt to restrain an assailant and while you may try and help a colleague in difficulty this shouldn't be done at the expense of your own safety. – call the police for assistance.

## **Telephone Calls**

If you receive a call from someone who is angry, hear the person out and don't interrupt, wait until they are ready to listen to you. If someone is abusive, let them know that you want to be helpful, but that you will not accept bad language or threats and if repeated you will end the call. When you respond, refer to the person by name, if known; acknowledge their feelings – 'you're obviously upset,...' If a caller is particularly abusive or threatening, say that there is a bad line and you cannot hear what is being said and ask them to call back. If the person doesn't respond to any requests to stop the abuse, end the call. Record all abusive or threatening incidents on the WCC Accident/Incident reporting System and share information with manager or supervisor and relevant colleagues if there is a likelihood that an abusive person may visit the office following an abusive or threatening telephone call.

## **Interview Rooms**

Rooms should be carefully arranged to put people at ease and ensure that the risk of aggression is minimised while maintaining the need for confidentiality. Staff should sit between the interviewee and door to ensure a swift exit. Interviews should take place in a designated interview room within a building, whenever possible. The room

should not be lockable from the inside and wherever possible there should be a vision panel to enable checks to be made by other staff, when necessary.

Issues to consider with interview rooms:

- Removal of objects which could be used as a weapon
- Install panic alarms in interview rooms, where appropriate
- All panic alarms/strips should be accessible and tested on a regular basis to ensure they work
- All staff should be aware of the location of alarms
- Be aware of all escape routes
- Escape routes must be kept clear of obstructions
- Have a clear procedure for immediate response if assistance is required, but be aware that large numbers of staff responding to a call for assistance may escalate the situation
- If you feel threatened suspend the interview and call for assistance
- Where difficulties are anticipated, staff should not interview the person alone or arrangements need to be agreed whereby checks are made by other members of staff
- Service users who are known to be violent should not be seen by a member of staff alone

## **Safe Practice**

- Let someone know that you are going to conduct an interview alone
- Check all information available before the meeting
- Always use language that the interviewee will understand, don't use jargon
- Think about taking notes, if appropriate
- Sit nearest the door
- Be honest, don't use your authority and don't make promises you cannot keep
- If a situation feels threatening stay calm and try to appear confident, speak slowly and clearly, don't get drawn into an argument
- Do not personalise any issue
- If the person becomes agitated, try and calm the situation, but find a reason to leave the room e.g. you need to seek further advice from a manager or colleague