

## Chapter 25

# Managing Aggression

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### Version

The table below shows the history of the document and the changes that were made at each version.

Version	Date	Summary of changes
1.0	16 <sup>th</sup> August 2012	Initial Issue
1.2	9 <sup>th</sup> August 2013	Review

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) identifies work-related Violence as: *'any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work'*. Verbal abuse and threats are the most common types of incident. Physical attacks are comparatively rare.
- 1.2 Examples of violence and aggression include:
- Verbal abuse,
  - Offensive language,
  - Racist or sexist remarks,
  - Stalking,
  - Physical attack including spitting and throwing objects
- 1.3 Employees who are most at risk from violence or aggression include:
- Special school staff
  - People handling of cash transactions
  - Reception staff or other staff providing a service

## 2. Finding out if there is a problem

- 2.1 Before progressing to assessing the risks of violence, it is necessary to establish if violence is a real problem or if it's perceived as a problem by staff. If violence is only perceived as a problem by staff, action is still needed to reduce the fear of violence, this can be done by:
- 2.2 Asking your staff** – this can be done informally through managers and supervisors, or through a questionnaire, or through team meetings and one to ones, to find if your employees ever feel threatened. It is important you let the staff know the results of any survey so they realize it is recognised as a problem.
- 2.3 Keeping detailed records** – records of all incidences will need to be completed to enable a clear picture of the problem. Things that will need to be recorded include, an account of what happened, victims details, any witness accounts, the location of the incident, the outcome including working time lost.
- 2.4 Find out about crime in the area being visited** - Statistics on local crime rates including violence can be found at <http://maps.police.uk>.

### 3. Risk Assessment

- 3.1 Once violence has been determined as a problem, do the risk assessment by:
- **Deciding who might be harmed and how** - Identify which employees are at risk, where appropriate, identify potentially violent people in advance so that the risks from them can be minimised.
  - **Evaluating the risk** - Check existing arrangements are the precautions already in place adequate or should more be done? Precautions include:
    - Training and information
    - Use of panic alarms
    - Design of the job
    - The environment
      - Design of location
      - Security cameras (CCTV)
      - Coded security locks
      - Lighting
- 3.2 **Record the Risk assessment.** Document the risk assessment using the risk assessment form in chapter 2 of this safety manual, insuring all affected staff are aware of the assessment and any procedures and precautions that will or have been implemented for their safety.
- a. **Take action.** Prepare and implement an action plan for violence if needed
- b. **Check what you have done**
- Review the action plan on a regular basis, any changes that occur must be consulted with employees and safety representatives.
  - Keep records of all incidents, as this will show how effective your action plan is.
  - If violence is still a problem, try something new, such as seeking external help, go back to the first step and restart the assessment.

### 4. Reporting an incident

- 4.1 Managers should encourage all staff members to report verbal and physical acts of violence, and make the time necessary to complete the accident report form in chapter 3 of this safety manual. These report forms may identify areas of high risk and identify the resources necessary to reduce those risks. Failure to report even a minor incident could lead to a more serious incident in the future.
- 4.2 When a report has been made by a staff member their manager must ensure that the injured party is made aware of the action that has been taken. Failure to keep staff informed could lower morale and reduce the number of incidents that are reported.

- 4.3 Acts of physical violence should be reported to the police as well as The Education Health and safety Team. A crime number will be acquired and should be noted on the accident form. All updates given by the police should be passed on to the line manager in order to aid with their investigation.

## 5. Actions, if an incident has occurred

- 5.1 **Immediate** – if physical violence has occurred where a person has been injured, the police and ambulance must be contacted and first aid must be given if needed. This should then be documented on the accident form in chapter 3 of this manual, and the accident book. If verbal violence has occurred find out how the injured party is, offer them time to recuperate, some people may take minutes others can take longer. If the victim feels threatened by the verbal violence this should be documented on the accident form as well. An investigation should be started as soon as it is known there has been an incident
- 5.2 **Short term** – Set up a meeting and a work plan in order to ease the victim back to the normal working routine, allowing them to regain confidence that they would have lost as a result of the incident. Have regular meetings with the victim and monitor their progress. Review the Risk assessment and provide training for other employees as well as the victim, and introduce panic alarms, mobile phones, and CCTV to areas such as reception as this could act as a deterrent.
- 5.3 **Long term** – If the victim is not showing any signs of improvement, redesigning of the role should be considered. Provide legal support where possible
- 5.4 **Counselling** – A confidential helpline has been set up for all employees, and is available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Please call **0800 243 458**. For further information and assistance please contact the Hackney Learning Trust's HR team. It is recommended that each school has a similar provision.

## 6. The Working Environment

- 6.1 The working environment plays an important part in preventing acts of violence. The working environment includes the physical aspects of the place in which work is carried out including Lighting, temperature, ventilation and the layout of the building. There are several factors, which increase the risk of violence in service or client care areas, which include:

- Waiting and queuing
  - Poorly laid out or unfriendly reception areas
  - Excessive waiting times
  - Lack of or poor seating

- Inaccurate or no information on waiting times
- No queuing systems
- No reading materials
- No children play areas
- No feeding or baby changing areas
  
- Time of day
  - Poor lighting when its dark
  
- Location
  - Working outside the office
  - Home visits
  - Inspection of properties
  - Walking or parking in low populated areas
  - Known high-risk areas
  
- Organisation
  - Poor staffing of reception desk
  - Staff not being briefed or regularly updated on systems, benefits and services
  - Failure on staff handovers and briefing of staff who tack over cases
  - Under staffing
  - No emergency control systems in place
  - Details of known offenders not being passed on to other sections
  
- Substance / alcohol abuse
  
- Lack of suitable training for staff in the skills required to avoid conflict and how to deal with aggression
  
  
- Interviews
  - Lack of privacy during conversation
  - Interruptions by other members of staff
  - Attitude and approach of the interviewer
  - Insufficient time allowed
  - Design and location of the interview room

## 7. Further advice and assistance

- 7.1 Further information, advice and help is available from the Education Health and Safety Team on 020 8356 2278.

## Preventative measures

### Interview Rooms

- An interview room should have two exit doors, each on opposite sides of the room.
- The room should be sufficiently large to avoid creating claustrophobic feels that raise clients' anxiety levels.
- Interview room furnishings should be limited. Clutter made up of furniture, boxes, extra chairs, etc., will create crowding and a low level of client comfort.
- Unnecessary pieces of furniture and equipment can potentially be used as weapons. Remove heavy ashtrays, framed pictures, which are not bolted to the wall, extra pencils and pens, hardback books, even telephones to maximize a safe environment.
- All staff should have equal knowledge of existing safety/security procedures. These procedures need to be in written form. Security procedures should be practiced, similar to fire drills.
- When the situation warrants it, internal and/or external security should be in place. Access numbers need to be posted prominently. Buzzer and/ or light systems may be necessary.

### Staff interview tips

- Attempt to behave in a non-threatening manner and avoid seeming confrontational. Talk clearly and quietly. Be alert to the body language of yourself and the client.
- Allow the client the opportunity to back down without losing face.
- Ensure communication is clear. Avoid the use of jargon in words or phrases, which the client may not understand or may find patronising. Make use of paraphrase and ensure understanding.
- Where interviews take place in rooms not designed primarily for interviewing, be aware of any potential hazards and seek to make the room comfortable and safe beforehand if possible.
- Seek to maintain a professional approach at all time during an interview.
- If you feel there is a potential, risk make colleagues aware of the situation. Before taking someone into an interview room you should decide whether or not it is safe to do so.
- If you feel unsafe, make a safe exit and warn colleagues and the appropriate team manager.
- Interviews should not take place before 9am or after 5pm unless arrangements have been made for the necessary number of staff to be present both to observe the interview and to respond should help be sought.
- Plan the interview

### Reception Area

- The reception area to be clean, well decorated, with a range of current reading materials. Chairs to be comfortable, clean and of good quality.
- Children's play areas should be available where relevant, with soft toys or toys which could not easily be used as weapons by an aggressive client.
- Care should be taken to reduce noise levels and provide privacy, perhaps by the use of good quality carpets, room dividers and insulating ceiling tiles.

- Reception areas, as resources permit, to contain a concealed security alarm. This should normally be of the 'silent' variety, received by a designated person, with a sound distinct from fire alarms, telephone tones and so on, and illicit and adequate and rehearsed procedural response from the staff concerned.
- Alarm systems must be regularly checked just as fire alarm systems are.
- Reception staff to be located where possible in an area separated from the waiting area by a lockable barrier. There must also be an escape route other than through the waiting area.
- Reception barriers to be sufficiently wide to reduce the possibility of staff being attacked.
- A one button 999 facility to be set up on reception telephone.
- Directions to Reception areas to be clearly sign posted on the outside of buildings. Areas that are restricted to 'staff only' to be clearly sign posted. If external doors are kept locked there should be explanatory notices and doorbells.
- Wherever possible there should be toilets available to those who are waiting, or notices saying where the nearest toilets are.

### Reception staff tips

- All staff required to work at anytime on reception to receive training in general reception duties.
- Reception staff to ensure that no office equipment, e.g. scissors are left out where they may be taken and used as a weapon by an aggressive client.
- Training to be given to reception staff in diffusing situations and in the procedures for summoning help.
- All reception staff to receive information on violent or potentially violent clients
- All staff should know what the alarm system sounds like and be aware of the response. Alternatively a coded message system should be devised which would communicate the need to other staff that assistance is required. An early interruption could defuse the situation or extricate the worker before the situation deteriorates to the point where the panic alarm needs to be sounded. If a predetermined message were received then other staff would be alerted to the situation.
- There should be a standard response when receiving a coded message or hearing the alarm but it is probably more important that specific responses are planned prior to a visit being received if it is known that the client may be aggressive or violent, or that the purpose of the visit may be unwanted or provocative.