



AGGRESSION-VIOLENCE

Violent Incident

Many workers may find themselves having to cope with a hostile or vindictive individual whose words, gestures or attitudes are disturbing. The following are some suggestions to help you remain safe while dealing with the situation.

THE PRIMARY OBJECTIVE: YOUR SAFETY

Pay attention to anyone who could be a risk: if the person seems uncomfortable, unstable, tense, dissatisfied, is exhibiting unusual behaviour, or has been violent in the past.

Whenever possible avoid physical contact with an individual who exhibits aggressive behaviour. Try to get them to cooperate with you by being respectful and presenting clear choices

MOST STAFF INJURIES

IN VIOLENT SITUATIONS OCCUR WHEN THEY TRY TO TOUCH THE AGGRESSIVE PERSON. THIS MAY OCCUR WHEN PROVIDING CARE, APPROACHING TOO QUICKLY, GETTING TOO CLOSE, TRYING TO EXERT PHYSICAL CONTROL, BEING AN ESCORT, ISOLATING A PERSON OR APPLYING RESTRAINTS

1. **BEFORE TRYING TO ESTABLISH CONTACT** with an aggressive person, assess the work situation. First, identify ways to help calm the person (negotiation, meeting their needs), and ways to protect yourself (presence of other team members, a security guard, a safe haven), as well as conditions favourable to managing the crisis (presence of those experienced in crisis management). Then, determine which elements are likely to cause problems and push the person into an emotional crisis (frustration, disappointment), jeopardize your safety (presence of a weapon), and limit your ability to manage the incident (being alone, team members who are not experienced in crisis management).
2. **COME TO AN UNDERSTANDING WITH YOUR TEAM MEMBERS** on how you will intervene and on each person's role. Only one team member speaks to the aggressive individual.
3. **PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO THE PERSON WHO POSES A RISK** and try to gauge how they will react to you. Does he or she look at you, speak, allow you to approach? Or, does the person object to your presence and threaten you? **WARNING!** If an aggressive person objects to your presence, don't allow yourself to become their target. Stay vigilant. Step back, and leave the location if necessary.
4. **TAKE THE TIME YOU NEED.**
5. **MAINTAIN A PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTANCE.** Don't take any verbal attacks or acts involving objects personally; if you feel you're losing your psychological distance, consider having a colleague lead the intervention in your place.

PHYSICAL POSITIONS OF THE WORKER WHEN IN CONTACT WITH AN AGGRESSIVE PERSON

Move slowly (unless you need to flee!).

Maintain a basic safe distance, about 2 to 2.5 metres or more.

Keep your hands open, in front of you, and at chest level.

Stand at an angle to the person in a balanced posture, on their non-dominant side (usually the left side); avoid being face to face.

VERBAL CONDUCT OF THE WORKER WHEN TRYING TO CALM AN AGGRESSIVE PERSON

Speak in a calm tone.

It may be necessary to attract the person's attention in order to establish contact (e.g., call out to them, place yourself in their field of vision, create a diversion).

Concentrate on the person and begin the de-escalation attempt with a simple respectful phrase: *How is it going?* Or *Is something wrong?*

Don't tell them to calm down, don't try to reason with them, don't comment on their behaviour and don't justify your own actions; speak very little.

Encourage the person to speak freely (even if what they're saying is upsetting); you will be perceived as a respectful witness of their distress, which will improve your personal safety.

IMPORTANT: The goal is to allow the person to release their tension through words. Once they have released most of the tension, then you can propose a solution, a compromise acceptable to all, or ask them something.

IF ATTEMPTS TO DE-ESCALATE DON'T WORK

You realize that the person is trying to take control, instead of experiencing a loss of control. Rather than express their emotions and resentment, the person wants to impose their demands or negotiate in a manipulative manner.

Re-assess the protection you require and, if possible, use more specific verbal interventions and set clear limits. Before engaging in more directive interventions yourself, fall back and consider other possibilities with your team.

PHYSICAL INTERVENTIONS WITH AN AGGRESSOR

Physical intervention is to be used only when absolutely necessary, because it poses its own risks.

De-escalation, a diversion, a clear request, and the arrival of the intervention team are often enough to stop an aggressor.

If you have been physically attacked you must protect yourself. Try to get out of the situation and flee.

If you absolutely must intervene physically, make sure that you have the training, the team members and the physical conditioning to properly lead a physical intervention with maximum safety. Use only the force required by the situation.

➔ **Don't risk** a physical intervention when the person is only being violent with objects or equipment. When this happens it is important to protect yourself and others who are present. If it is possible, useful and safe, prevent the aggressive person from destroying even more material by removing items and closing doors.

REFERENCES

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