

VIOLENCE at work can affect anyone, so it is important to learn about the effects of this and the problems that can occur.

Any of the following can be a form of violence at work:

- verbal abuse such as threats, insults and shouting;
- all forms of harassment, bullying or discrimination;
- physical attacks which include pushing, hitting and kicking.

Every employee is entitled to work in an environment that is safe and healthy. When we are dealing with people in situations that are difficult or threatening there is a tendency to focus on ourselves because of how our body responds, but it can be really helpful if we try to think about the other person's feelings too.

If you work in an environment where you provide a service, assist with people's problems or have to enforce legislation then you may regularly have to deal with difficult inter-personal situations either by phone or during face to face discussions.

Key warning signs that someone is irritated or unhappy:

- they will behave irrationally, such as becoming upset easily over minor issues;
- they will usually avoid making eye contact;
- they will usually show a sign of nervousness;
- they will often display aggressive body language such as clenching fists, clenching teeth or pointing;
- their volume and tone of voice will change and increase; they will get louder and they may curse and swear, using repetitive statements or language.

When people are upset, annoyed or frustrated about an issue they do not behave as rationally as they would normally and in the worst scenarios they can lose control and become violent and abusive. If you are on the receiving end of this you are likely

to react emotionally too. This is normal, but how you choose to behave in response to this sort of situation is very important:

- *try not to respond with anger - this only further escalates the matter;*
- *try not to feel responsible or guilty for the other person's behaviour by acting defensively, they have chosen to behave in this manner;*
- *don't let rude remarks upset you, stay detached, but take care not to sound casual or patronising, you are a professional person qualified to do your job.*

Communication: You will not be able to communicate effectively with people until they are confident that you are taking their complaint seriously. You can do this by:

Acknowledgement: acknowledge how people are feeling by saying something like, "Tell me what happened" and give them your full attention.

Empathising: if you reassure people that you understand why they are upset or angry, they will respond more effectively to you, for example, "I can see how that would make you upset/angry" and offer a positive response such as "Let's see what we can do to sort this out for you". Use the person's name in conversation.

Taking control: every discussion has a beginning, middle and an end. Show that you are taking action to resolve the situation by using positive verbal and/or body language such as questioning. For example, "tell me about" and then confirming the information given to you is correct whilst taking notes and demonstrating that you are alert and interested by making suggestions on how the matter could be resolved. If you can, and it is warranted, offer to look into things further, by going the extra distance to seek out a workable solution for everyone concerned.

Most people will respond positively by becoming calmer and engaging in normal discussion with you if you can remember to follow these steps. However, there will be times when you will be required to deal with someone who is completely unreasonable or who may be under the influence of alcohol or drugs. In situations like this, you have the right to end the discussion. You do not have to put up with extremely abusive and threatening behaviour. In such circumstances you should:

- *Politely ask the person to stop behaving in this way or you will terminate the telephone call or interview;*
- *If they persist and are not responding to your request and you are dealing with them by telephone, hang up and advise your line manager;*
- *If it is a face to face situation, ask them politely to leave the office and advise your line manager of the situation. If the abusive person refuses to leave, you should call the police, asking that they attend to assist in escorting the abusive person from the premises.*

Your manager may want to consider writing to the abusive person reminding him/her that this type of abuse towards employees will not be tolerated and in extreme cases your manager may warn him/her that service delivery could be reduced or withdrawn as a result of their behaviour. You can have the abusive person formally charged by the police if you wish and you think it necessary.

If following an abusive or violent incident you are very upset, talk to your manager about this. Your manager should complete an Accident/Incident Reporting Form (HR14), with you as part of the de-briefing and support measures that they need to provide to you. For assistance in dealing with extreme situations you can contact the Counselling Service on 0141 332 9833. In addition, the Health, Safety & Care Team are available to provide advice and support on 506246/48 or Housing & Social Work Services have a trauma assistance team who can provide de-briefing for larger scale scenarios.

EMPLOYEE development If you would like to improve your skills in handling abusive situations you can attend relevant training.

Contact the Employee Development Team about this on 506244. If you would like information about general health, safety & care relating to your work, contact the Health, Safety & Care Team on 506246/506248. Information is also available on the intranet under Human Resouces, Health,Safety and Care Team. However, here are some tips on how you can deal with difficult situations at work.

Be friendly

Be pleasant when in the office, try not to let a bad mood affect anyone else, or anyone else’s bad mood affect you.

Be honest

Always apologise for mistakes and try your best to give reliable information but admit any mistakes you have made and don’t pass on the blame.

Be consistent

Treat everyone with the same respect and dignity.

Be fair

If service users feel they have been treated fairly they will be positive towards you and remember you for this.

Be efficient

If you show enthusiasm and commitment, people will respond positively and have confidence in you.



Violence at Work

Guidance and Advice for Employees

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Falkirk Council



Falkirk Council