



VIOLENCE AND AGGRESSION POLICY SITE MANAGERS GUIDE

Although it is an extremely rare occurrence at Bedlam, people who deal directly with the public may face aggressive or violent behaviour. They may be sworn at, threatened or even attacked. This policy is to assist you in managing any such occurrence and is to assist in the protection of yourself, your staff and members of the public.

VIOLENCE IS ...

The Health and Safety Executive's definition of work-related violence is:

'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.

WHO IS AT RISK?

Employees whose job requires them to deal with the public can be at risk from violence.

IS IT MY CONCERN?

Both employer and employees have an interest in reducing violence at work. For employers, violence can lead to poor morale and a poor image for the organisation. It can also mean increased operating costs such as absenteeism and higher insurance premiums. For employees, physical attacks are obviously dangerous and can cause pain and distress.

WHAT THE LAW REQUIRES

There are five main pieces of health and safety law which are relevant to violence at work. These are:

The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 (HSW Act)

Employers have a legal duty under this Act to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of their employees.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999

Employers must assess the risks to employees and make arrangements for their health and safety by effective:

- planning;
- organisation;
- control;
- monitoring and review.

The risks covered should, where appropriate, include the need to protect employees from exposure to reasonably foreseeable violence.

The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 (RIDDOR)

Employers must notify their enforcing authority in the event of an accident at work to any employee resulting in death, major injury or incapacity for normal work for three or more days. This includes any act of non-consensual physical violence done to a person at work.

Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 (a) and The Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations 1996 (b)

Employers must inform, and consult with, employees in good time on matters relating to their health and safety. Employee representatives, either appointed by recognised trade unions under (a) or elected under (b) may make representations to their employer on matters affecting the health and safety of those they represent.

EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF VIOLENCE

A straightforward four stage management process is set out below:

STAGE 1 Finding out if you have a problem

STAGE 2 Deciding what action to take

STAGE 3 Take action

STAGE 4 Check what you have done

STAGE 1 FINDING OUT IF YOU HAVE A PROBLEM

The first step in risk assessment is to identify the hazard. You may think violence is not a problem at your workplace or that incidents are rare. However, your employees' view may be very different.

Ask your staff - do this informally through managers, supervisors and safety representatives or use a short questionnaire to find out whether your employees ever feel threatened. Tell them the results of your survey so they realise that you recognise the problem.

Keep detailed records - it is a good idea to record incidents, including verbal abuse and threats. You may find it useful to record the following information:

- an account of what happened;
- details of the victim(s), the assailant(s) and any witnesses;
- the outcome, including working time lost to both the individual(s) affected and to the organisation as a whole;
- details of the location of the incident.

For a variety of reasons some employees may be reluctant to report incidents of aggressive behaviour which make them feel threatened or worried. They may for instance feel that accepting abuse is part of the job. You will need a record of all incidents to enable you to build up a complete picture of the problem. Encourage employees to report incidents promptly and fully and let them know that this is what you expect.

Classify all incidents - use headings such as place, time, type of incident, potential severity, who was involved and possible causes. It is important that you examine each incident report to establish whether there could have been a more serious outcome. Here is an example of a simple classification to help you decide how serious incidents are:

- fatal injury;
- major injury;
- injury or emotional shock requiring first aid, out-patient treatment, counselling, absence from work (record number of days); feeling of being at risk or distressed.

It should be easy to classify 'major injuries' but you will have to decide how to classify 'serious or persistent verbal abuse' for your organisation, so as to cover all incidents that worry staff.

You can use the details from your incident records along with the classifications to check for patterns. Look for common causes, areas or times. The steps you take can then be targeted where they are needed most.

STAGE 2 DECIDING WHAT ACTION TO TAKE

If you establish that violence could be a problem for your employees you need to decide what needs to be done. Continue the risk assessment by taking the following steps to help you decide what action you need to take.

Decide who might be harmed, and how

Identify which employees are at risk - those who have face-to-face contact with the public are normally the most vulnerable. Where appropriate, identify potentially violent people in advance so that the risks from them can be minimised.

Evaluate the risk

Check existing arrangements, are the precautions already in place, adequate or should more be done? Remember it is usually a combination of factors that give rise to violence. Factors which you can influence include:

- the level of training and information provided;
- the environment;
- the design of the job.

Consider the way these factors work together to influence the risk of violence.

Training and information

Train your employees so that they can spot the early signs of aggression and either avoid it or cope with it. Make sure they fully understand any system you have set up for their protection. Provide employees with any information they might need to identify clients with a history of violence or to anticipate factors which might make violence more likely.

The Environment and Design of the Job

Use cheques, credit cards or tokens instead of cash to make robbery less attractive. Maintain numbers of staff at the workplace to avoid a lone worker situation developing. Try to take an overall view and balance the risks to your employees against any possible reaction of the public. Remember that an atmosphere that suggests employees are worried about violence can sometimes increase its likelihood.

Record your findings

If a violent incident occurs, record it, review any previous assessments, evaluate it and make any necessary changes to policy.

STAGE 3 TAKE ACTION

This is Bedlam's policy for dealing with violence and is issued to Site Managers, although all staff should be made aware we have a violence and aggression policy. This help employees to co-operate with you, follow procedures properly and report any further incidents.

STAGE 4 CHECK WHAT YOU HAVE DONE

Check on a regular basis how well your arrangements are working, consulting employees or their representatives as you do so. Consider setting up joint management and safety representative committees to do this. Keep records of incidents and examine them regularly; they will show what progress you are making and if the problem is changing. If your measures are working well, keep them up. If violence is still a problem, try something else. Go back to Stages 1 and 2 and identify other preventive measures that could work.

WHAT ABOUT THE VICTIMS?

If there is a violent incident involving your workforce you will need to respond quickly to avoid any long-term distress to employees. It is essential to plan how you are going to provide them with support, before any incidents. You may want to consider the following:

- debriefing** - victims will need to talk through their experience as soon as possible after the event. Remember that verbal abuse can be just as upsetting as a physical attack;
- time off work** - individuals will react differently and may need differing amounts of time to recover. In some circumstances they might need specialist counselling;
- legal help** - in serious cases legal help may be appropriate;
- other employees** - may need guidance and/or training to help them to react appropriately.

The Home Office leaflet *Victims of crime* gives more useful advice if one of your employees suffers an injury, loss or damage from a crime, including how to apply for compensation. It should be available from libraries, police stations, Citizens Advice Bureaux and victim support schemes.

Further help may be available from victim support schemes that operate in many areas. Your local police station can direct you to your nearest one. Alternatively you can contact them yourself at the addresses below:

Victim Support Scotland
15/23 Hardwell Close
Edinburgh
EH8 9RX
Tel: 0131 668 4486
Fax: 0131 662 5400
E-mail: info@victimssupportsco.demon.co.uk

This guidance is issued by the Health and Safety Executive.