

Loss Control Bulletin

Individuals working for social service organizations can be experience aggressive behavior from their clients. Such events present a crisis for all involved. This behavior can quickly evolve to a combative situation with potential for injury. Organizations that provide social services should protect their workers by developing plans and provide training to their staff on how to deal with aggression and prevent violence.

Research on the subject of aggressive behavior has led to the belief that the behavior tends to be associated with stress and inability to cope with events or circumstances beyond the individual's control. Also some individuals have difficulty controlling their emotions and have tendencies to react impulsively under stress and out of frustration.

Develop a plan to protect workers and clients

- Identify stressors or events that could trigger aggressive behavior by clients. Instruct staff to recognize behavioral and body language signs that can precede aggressive behavior and take pre-emptive action.
- Provide training to staff on how to appropriately respond to aggressive situations. Stress the importance of remaining calm to help prevent rapid escalation.
- Instruct staff to recognize how and when to summons help if a situation escalates.

The main goal in dealing with aggression is to calm and de-escalate the situation to allow for a peaceful resolution.

An Aggression Response Plan needs to consider the following:

1. Potential triggers of aggressive behavior –
 - Delay in receiving services;
 - Apprehension over losing a benefit;
 - Frustration over one or more events not under the control of the aggressor.
2. Precautions to take – If you notice signs of anger or frustration developing in someone and there is no need to interact with the individual, leave the area immediately;
3. Response to an aggressor should be planned in advance. The primary goal of calming the situation has the greatest chance of success when the designated responder's verbal and body language communicates that they are:
 - Calm, non-confrontational, not argumentative;
 - reasonable and respectful; non-judgmental;
 - sincere, a good listener, does not interrupt while the aggressor is speaking;
 - non-threatening, e.g., not holding any object that could be interpreted as a weapon; focused on de-escalation of the interaction;
 - giving undivided attention to the aggressor;

- be mindful of both your verbal and body language communications (stay relaxed);
 - in control of his/her own emotions (evidenced by speaking in low nonthreatening voice);
 - taking the matter seriously and not trying to diffuse the situation by smiling or joking.
4. Throughout the duration of the aggression, it is important for the responder to use the following effective communication skills as their reaction to the behavior is a key factor in how the situation will develop:
- maintain a safe distance from the aggressor;
 - allow time for venting to take place by the aggressor while carefully monitoring the situation for any signs that violence may erupt;
 - be mindful of both your verbal and body language communications (stay relaxed);
 - make eye contact but occasionally look away to avoid appearing intimidating;
 - establish yourself as the person responding to avoid the appearance of ganging up on the aggressor;
 - don't attempt to force solutions;
 - don't attempt to reason with an angry or enraged person until the anger subsides;
 - don't add fuel to the situation;
 - when the aggressive behavior calms down and the individual appears ready to discuss the problem, explain what can be done to address the situation.

Summary

Successful de-escalation of an aggressive situation requires planning for such events and having well-trained staff skilled in establishing control during moments of crisis. Identifying responders who possess the skills needed to deal with crisis situations is an important first step.

During a crisis, it is important for all staff to remain calm to allow a trained responder to try and establish control over the situation. Most importantly, if the aggressor is armed, you feel your life or those of others are in danger and escape is not possible, call 911.

The guidelines provided in this bulletin are only intended to provide an overview of some of the more important steps that can be taken by management to establish a safe workplace. The guidelines are not considered exhaustive of all measures and controls that can be implemented by management to address all potential loss or injury producing causes. Ultimately it is the responsibility of management to take the necessary steps to provide for employee and customer safety. It is not intended as an offer to write insurance for such conditions or exposures. The liability of Republic Indemnity Company of America and its affiliated insurers is limited to the terms, limits and conditions of the insurance policies underwritten by any of them. © 2022 Republic Indemnity of America, 4500 Park Granada, Suite 300, Calabasas, CA 91302.