

## AAT (Achievement Awareness Training) Course in Managing Aggressive Behaviour and Personal Safety (Threatening Situations)

### Definition of Aggressive, Threatening and Potentially Violent Behaviour

Aggressive behaviour is defined as any behaviour that creates a stressful, intimidating, frightening or offensive situation. This may cover a wide range of unacceptable or hostile behaviours directed towards staff. This behaviour may occur anywhere in or outside working hours and on or off the organisation's premises. It may be face to face, over the phone, text, email or by written correspondence. **Staff do not have to "feel" threatened for the behaviour to be aggressive or unacceptable.**

#### AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR MAY TAKE SUCH FORMS AS:

- Vulgar noises, expressions or gestures
- Threatening or offensive behaviour
- Bullying or harassment
- Verbal abuse of either a personal or general nature by means of innuendo, raised voice or obscenities, including racist and sexist comments
- Threatening self-harm or harm to others
- Physical violence against a person such as hitting, kicking, grabbing, punching or through the use of weapons
- Physical violence against objects such as kicking, defacing or destroying property
- Stalking
- Unwelcome Actions including the exhibiting of offensive material, or
- Block exits or unlawfully detaining

**Angry behaviour** is issue focused.

**Aggressive behaviour** is directed away from the issues, either towards others, the environment or towards themselves.

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## 1, 2, 3 System & Personal Safety

### STEP 1 - Defuse and Redirect Behaviour

Informal (*Soft*) warning with a redirecting question or statement

**C**lear, Calm, Communication

**E**xpand your distance and broaden your vision

### STEP 2 - Controlling Behaviour

Formal (*Firm*) warning with an appropriate consequence

**N**egotiate assertively and take verbal control

**T**ake extra safety steps and be aware of exits

### STEP 3 - Stop the Interaction

Leave, hang up or ask the person to leave

**R**emove yourself and get assistance

**E**vade injury and step away

**D**efend yourself as a last resort to get away

Staying **CENTRED** and in **CONTROL** is one of the most important steps in dealing with aggressive and potentially violent behaviour.  
Competing and "buying into it" with people will only escalate the situation

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# **Managing Angry and Aggressive Behaviour**

### **STEP ONE: DEFUSE AND REDIRECT BEHAVIOUR**

Attempt to defuse the situation by using an informal (soft) warning. Finish on the issue you need to discuss with a redirecting question or statement.eg.: **"I can see you are angry, but having a go at me isn't going to help, let's focus in the issue. Tell me more about.....?"**

#### **PROFESSIONAL RESPECT - TREAT PEOPLE AS YOU WOULD LIKE TO BE TREATED.**

- Always introduce yourself in a polite and courteous manner.
- Clearly clarify your job role and get assistance early if needed
- Keep things simple and straightforward. Use simple language.
- Voice tone should be calm, confident and speak a little slower
- Use open neutral body language to show you are paying attention

#### **LISTEN, CALM AND CLARIFY - FIND OUT THE OTHER PERSONS VIEW FIRST. "EMPATHY"**

- Use questioning techniques to find out what is happening, clarify or redirect.
- If appropriate, it may be useful to let angry people ventilate their feelings and issues, as long as they are not aggressive.
- Be patient; allow people time to tell their story. Have attentive body language.
- Follow the conversation by using verbal and non-verbal indicators.
- Clarify the situation by repeating a little bit back to the person of what they have said. Repeat key issues, main themes and acknowledge obvious feelings.
- On the phone be aware of background noise and remember your voice tone is extremely important. Talk to people as you would face to face.
- If appropriate take notes to help clarify issues and understanding

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## ASSESS AND EXPLAIN OPTIONS - CONCENTRATE ON WHAT YOU CAN DO.

- Assess whether you need any help after hearing the person's situation
- Decide if this should be referred to someone more senior.
- Avoid any blaming statements that may escalate behaviour e.g. "You're wrong"
- Use neutral words e.g. "I can see there has been some miscommunication".
- Offer to take a break to help defuse the emotions
- Get a colleague to reinforce the information or get a second opinion.

## NEGOTIATE SOLUTIONS - FOCUS ON ISSUES, NOT PERSONALITIES

- Explain what you can do and all the options available in a confident manner
- Work out a plan for what happens next, and who will do what by when

## STEP TWO: CONTROLLING BEHAVIOUR

Take verbal control by using a Formal (firm) warning with an appropriate consequence that you can apply. eg.: **"If you continue to abuse me I will have to ask you to leave, I don't want to do that. Do you want to continue?"**

- Staying calm and looking confident is the key
- Use a calm firm voice tone, sound like you mean what you are saying
- Have a neutral non-aggressive body language, you need to look confident
- Gestures can help to strengthen the message where appropriate
- Use simple clear messages that focus on the outcome you want

**At any stage get help from a colleague or manager if required**

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# **1, 2, 3 Managing Behaviour**

### **STEP THREE: STOP THE INTERACTION**

**Leave, Hang up or ask the person to leave.** Use simple directive statements

#### **STRATEGIES THAT CAN HELP WHEN ASKING SOMEONE TO LEAVE**

- Get help early if you might need it
- If you feel safe you will act more confidently, move away from the person and if seated, stand up
- Leave clear exits for the person to leave and use open handed gestures to direct
- Keep a confident voice tone and look like you mean what you are saying.
- In the office get a colleague or manager to repeat the same message to the person if they will not respond to you
- Mentioning the Police should be used as the last option. When advising someone about possible Police involvement, think about your wording. e.g. "I don't want to have to call the Police, please leave."

#### **LEAVING A THREATENING AND POTENTIALLY VIOLENT SITUATION**

- Talk about when you would leave with your partner before you deal with people.  
"When one feels it's time to leave, you both leave". Have a plan.
- Identify the exits before you start moving
- Create a safety zone of a couple of metre if possible before you turn your back.  
Always turn side on first before turning your back and only if it is safe to do so.
- When you decide to back off do so without delay. Create extra space by stepping away from the person and then tell them you are leaving.
- If you believe someone may be violent, adopt personal safety postures as shown to help control risk as you leave.

## Signs of Violence

**Although there is no 100% guaranteed way to predict when someone is going to become violent, there are some clues that may indicate an increased possibility of it. Some signs to look for are:**

Raised voice; threats; clenched fists; verbal abuse; withdrawal; shaking arms; face expressing rage; spitting; loud breathing; skin flushed; pacing; body pumped; threatening gestures; eye to eye staring; teeth clenched; pacing; invading your personal space - intimidating; banging furniture; rapid speech; rapid breathing; content of speech, "I could punch you out"; adopting a fighting stance; dramatic behavioural change; loss of colour from face; look away from you while being threatening; block exits.

**The key is to focus on the actual behaviour, not what people look like!**

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** It is recommended that you listen to your "gut feeling" and remove yourself or get help when you feel unsafe.

## Post Incident Management:

**Although there is no 100% guaranteed way to predict when someone is going to become violent, there are some clues that may indicate an increased possibility of it. Some signs to look for are:**

### INCIDENT MANAGEMENT PROVIDES:

- An opportunity which may identify "flagging" of clients/customers who are potentially violent.
- A record of all events relating to angry/aggressive/violent clients/customers and situations which may affect a staff members ability to function effectively.
- An opportunity for the organisation to take action in response to the continuing unacceptable behaviour of a particular client/customer.
- Documented evidence of the incidents that may be required to assist in legal proceedings.
- Documented evidence of the incidents which may have a cumulative effect on an individual staff member.
- An opportunity for a staff member to debrief following an aggressive incident.

The recording of aggressive incidents should be based on what the organisation regards as unacceptable behaviour of its clients/customers. This may occur in or outside of working hours, and on or off the organisations premises. This would include incidents in person, on the phone, by mail or aggressive behaviour directed at a staff member's family.