



Manual for Safety of People & Premises

During this module you will be asked some questions to simply provoke thought and test your current knowledge please have a note pad or supervision workbook to hand to make notes. Your performance will only be measured on the answers you select when completing the knowledge test at the end of the module.

Contents

Learning outcomes.....	5
Complementary Manuals.....	5
Chapter One.....	6
Identifying the Threats to Safety at Work.....	6
The Health and Safety at Work (etc.) Act (HSWA) 1974.....	6
Act and employer demand:.....	6
Instruction and Guideline:.....	7
Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.....	7
Reporting of Injuries Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) 1995.....	7
Equality Act 2010.....	7
The Human Rights Act 1998.....	8
Risk Assessment.....	9
Chapter Two.....	11
Safety Improvement.....	11
Care Premises Security.....	11
Lone Environment.....	11
Risks:.....	11
Harassment and Victimization Issue.....	12
Preventing Discrimination, Harassment and Victimization.....	13
Staff Workshop.....	13
Chapter Three.....	15
Self Protection.....	15
Identifying Harm.....	15
Strategic against harassment.....	17
Creating Strong Personality.....	18
Grounding.....	18
Self =Defense.....	19
Documentation.....	19
Chapter Four.....	20
Violence control.....	20
Communication.....	20
Swearing.....	21
Rapport-building.....	22
Dealing Tension.....	22
Strategy of Expectation-Dealing.....	23
Unexpected activities.....	23
Pressure-control.....	23
Leading and Pacing.....	23

Conclusion	24
References	24

Learning outcomes

- Understand the importance of reporting and recording
- Know how to control situations through non-physical intervention
- Understand how to implement security measures at work
- Know basic procedures for keeping safe

Complementary Manuals

- Health and Safety
- Risk Assessment
- Safeguarding of Vulnerable Adults
- Equality, Diversity and Equal Opportunities

Chapter One

Identifying the Threats to Safety at Work

While client safeguarding issues are usually a high priority for care providers (and rightly so); threats to the safety of employees can be overlooked. The aim of this manual is to identify ways in which you could be at risk and to look at methods of self-protection.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) define workplace violence as ‘Any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work .

In 2006 / 2007 there were 6404 injuries caused by violence at work reported under RIDDOR; these resulted in 4 fatalities, 932 major injuries and 5468 minor injuries which resulted in more than 3 days off work.

In an attempt to tackle and reduce incidences of violence at work European employers and trade union organizations came together to highlight the importance of taking action and to issue guidance as to how this might be done.

This guidance suggests that violence and harassment at work might:

- Be physical, psychological, and/or sexual;
- Be one off incidents or more systematic patterns of behavior;
- Be amongst colleagues, between superiors and subordinates or by third parties such as clients, customers, patients, pupils, etc.
- Range from minor cases of disrespect to more serious acts, including criminal offences, which require the intervention of public authorities. (Preventing Workplace Harassment and Violence; HSE et al)

You should take note of the fact that workplace violence does not need to cause physical harm to be taken seriously. The HSE definition includes threats; the legal framework outlined below covers areas such as discrimination, harassment and psychological abuse as well as assaults and aggressive acts.

The Health and Safety at Work (etc.) Act (HSWA) 1974

The Health and Safety at Work Act was the first piece of legislation designed to cover *all* types of work and working environments. It is described as a framework, or skeleton, act because it gives general guidance on many issues, but further legislation was required to add detail and give specific responsibilities for controlling risks.

Act and employer demand:

- Provide you with written policies and procedures for safe working
- Ensure that the environment you work in and the equipment you use are safe and well maintained
- Handle substances safely

- Provide you with information, instruction, training and supervision
- Ensure that you have appropriate welfare facilities e.g. toilets and drinking water

Instruction and Guideline:

- Use equipment and carry out tasks following your employer's safe working procedures and any training and information you have been given
- Work in a way that reasonably protects your health and safety and that of other people
- Co-operate with your employer on health and safety issues
- Report health and safety concerns to an appropriate person

Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999

These regulations give specific responsibilities to employers, managers and supervisors for carrying out risk assessments and implementing appropriate control measures. The risk assessments must protect employees and **anyone who might be affected by work practices**; this could mean your clients or visitors to your premises.

Control measures should include:

- Appropriate communication of risks to employees
- Emergency procedures
- The appointment of a competent person to assist with health and safety
- Monitoring of occupational health

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

The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations enable enforcement agencies to monitor workplace accidents and ill health. Among other things, they can then identify common types of accident; see which types of workplace experience which types of illness and injury; and track the spread of infections.

Employers and managers have a duty to report certain incidents either by telephone (fatalities and major incidents only) or online (www.hse.gov.uk/riddor); **reportable events include:**

- Accidental death
- Accident resulting in more than 7 days absence from work
- Certain diseases / illnesses (a full list is accessible from the RIDDOR website)
- Injuries to non-employees requiring immediate medical attention
- Near misses (incidents that could have caused serious injury but didn't e.g. a hoist sling tearing while in use)
- Events such as fires or collapse of buildings
- Assaults causing reportable injuries

Equality Act 2010

This Act was intended to both simplify and strengthen existing legislation and to go further towards eliminating discrimination in British society.

Discrimination occurs when someone is treated less favourably because of a protected characteristic; or when conditions are imposed which result in less favourable treatment for people with a protected characteristic

There are now 9 ‘protected characteristics’ which are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender Reassignment
- Race
- Pregnancy or maternity
- Religion / Belief
- Marriage or civil partnership
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

The Act not only makes it illegal to discriminate against individuals it also makes it a legal requirement for employers and the owners of premises to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ to support equal access for all to education, jobs, services and opportunities.

‘Reasonable adjustments’ might include widening doors to accommodate wheelchairs; improving rest areas to meet the needs of pregnant women or breast feeding mothers; or providing advocacy services for people with communication difficulties.

Discrimination occurs when someone is treated less favourably because of a protected characteristic; or when conditions are imposed which result in less favourable treatment for people with a protected characteristic.

The Human Rights Act 1998

Human rights legislation exists to protect all of us from the actions of public bodies like councils and NHS trusts. There are some rights which are particularly relevant and they are summarised below:

- Article 2 – right to life
- Article 3 – protection from torture or inhuman or degrading treatment
- Article 5 – the right to liberty and security of person
- Article 6 – the right to a fair trial
- Article 8 - the protection of private and family life
- Article 9 – freedom of thought, conscience and religion
- Article 10 – freedom of expression
- Article 14 – freedom from discrimination

Collectively these rights mean that people should be protected from abuse and undignified treatment; they should not be unnecessarily restrained or have their freedom of movement restricted. They must be able to complain about the treatment they receive and be supported to understand and defend their rights.

People have the right to maintain a family life and have their privacy respected and they must be allowed to practice and express their religious beliefs.

Health and Social Care Act 2008 as regulated by the Care Quality Commission in their essential standards of quality and safety

The guidance for meeting outcome 10 (regulation 15) includes a requirement for care providers to ensure that people who work, visit or use services can be confident that, in relation to security of premises and grounds:

- There is a risk assessment of unauthorized access relevant to the type of premises, the services provided and the nature of people who use those services, and they implement and review procedures to take account of the risk assessment.
- Security arrangements are in place to protect people who use services and others who have access to the premises and any associated grounds.
- Measures are in place to protect the personal possessions of people who use services.

Outcome 20 requires incidents such as assaults to be reported to the CQC.

Risk Assessment

As with other issues affecting your health and safety at work, the key to identifying and solving problems is risk assessment. The starting point for your employers should be to talk to you; **areas of concern may include:**

- Security of the premises
- Working alone
- Potentially aggressive clients / visitors
- Times of crisis e.g. when family members are unhappy with care standards
- Harassment / bullying between staff members

Write in your note pad some examples of times when you have felt vulnerable while working; explain what the situation was and why you felt at risk.

By talking to workers employers can find out whether they have a problem with security at work; whether employees feel safe at all times while working, and whether they need to take action to improve safety and security.

Risk assessments are a 5 step process:

1. Identify the hazards – by talking to staff, inspecting premises and identifying areas of risk e.g. lone working
2. Decide who might be harmed and how – the main concern here are workers, but clients and visitors may also be affected
3. Evaluate the risks and decide on precautions – the higher the risk the more quickly action should be taken to reduce it
4. Record findings and implement them – control measures must be put in place and communicated to anyone who needs to know

5. Review your assessment and update if necessary – regularly check that control measures are still sufficient

It is important that you are honest with your employer about concerns that you may have regarding your safety at work; worry about personal safety can cause stress which is one of the major causes of work related illness. Your fears may be unfounded but still need to be addressed by your employer.

For example; there may be times that you have to go out in the dark; perhaps your bins are outside or you have a laundry in a separate building. The risk of someone attacking you may be very small but you may still feel very vulnerable as you move around at night. To reduce this fear your employer could install a security light; this is a simple and relatively cheap measure that can give you peace of mind and increase your sense of security.

Chapter Two

Safety Improvement

There are many different ways in which employers can improve your safety at work, the actual control measures they introduce will depend on the type of work you are doing, the environment you work in and the people you work with; but all employers will have to give consideration to the following issues:

- Security of premises
- Lone working
- Discrimination and harassment
- Staff training

Care Premises Security

It is a requirement of the Care Quality Commission's essential standards of quality and safety that security measures are in place to prevent unauthorised people from gaining access to care premises. There are a variety of reasons for being vigilant about strangers:

- Medication and client possessions have value and may attract thieves
- You may be attacked if you confront intruders
- Clients may be vulnerable and some individuals may deliberately target them for assault
- Arson is the most common cause of fires on work premises

Your employer must have in place policies for the identification of visitors; all staff must be aware of these and should know what to do if they are asked for entry by someone they don't know. While ease of access is important for friends and relatives of clients, it is also necessary to maintain security.

Control measures may depend on whether you are in an urban or rural location; the type of premises you have around you and the size of your workplace. Security measures may include cameras; intercom or keypad entry systems and gate entry systems to manage vehicle access to the site.

Lone Environment

Care workers are frequently physically isolated by their work requirements; if they are providing care in the community, working alone in a client's room or covering small premises during the night, they may be separated from colleagues and this can be a risk if an incident occurs.

Risks:

- Accidents or medical emergencies that cause serious harm to the care provider
- Being alone with individuals who are under the influence of alcohol or drugs

- Being alone with people who may exhibit challenging or unpredictable behavior
- Coming into contact with individuals other than clients who may act violently
- Encountering emergency situations such as a fallen person or a fire

Where care providers are placed at risk employers must have policies to protect them and employees must understand the importance of following them and of being vigilant to the possibility of dangers.

Safe working practices should be introduced as follows:

- The whereabouts of staff should be known at all times – if people are not where they are supposed to be there should be procedures in place for realising this and checking on their safety
- Keep in contact – if you are going somewhere on your own, someone must know where you're going, how long you will be and what to do if you don't return as expected
- If you are going to be longer than expected let someone know
- Have alarm call bells accessible in all parts of work premises; if you are working outside the premises carry a mobile phone and a personal alarm to alert people if you are in danger
- Communicate – if care providers have to work alone with clients they need to know if there are circumstances which might put them at risk e.g. if the client has been drinking or if a family member has been aggressive on previous visits
- Care providers should receive training in self-protection

Important:

It's easy to take an 'it couldn't happen here' attitude to violence at work, unfortunately it's also easy to find examples of care providers being killed by individuals they came into contact with at work.

In 2006 a charity was prosecuted when a care worker was stabbed to death by a client she was visiting at home. The investigation found poor sharing of information meant that the care provider was unaware that the client was drinking regularly and that his behavior had become erratic.

In 2012 a worker was stabbed to death in a residential care home. Her employers were prosecuted for failing to provide training on challenging behavior or for understanding the mental condition that the client suffered from.

Harassment and Victimization Issue

In addition to eliminating discrimination the Equality Act also covers the issues of harassment and victimization.

Harassment can be described as bullying or discriminatory abuse arising from one of the protected conditions (see Chapter one); it may be done in writing or verbally and can affect both employees and clients.

Some people make offensive comments or jokes and, when challenged, say they meant no offence and that they were ‘just joking’. Under the law the intention is not important, if people could reasonably find the behavior to be offensive then it is.

Victimization may occur when someone makes a complaint, or supports someone else to do so, and is then ignored or ‘picked on’ by colleagues or care providers.

Preventing Discrimination, Harassment and Victimization

Unless you work for a very small business your employer should have written equality policies and procedures; these will outline their commitment to equality and inclusion and will detail how they will deal with discriminatory behavior, harassment and victimisation.

Staff and clients must be protected from being harassed, victimised or discriminated against; **the following are examples of good practice:**

- Offensive language and behavior is challenged immediately and effectively
- Staff and clients are given information and education to improve understanding of equality issues
- Complaints procedures are clear, well communicated and maintain anonymity to prevent victimisation
- Employers must check that their job application processes and terms of employment are not directly or indirectly discriminatory
- Diversity, equality and inclusion are positive ideals to be promoted and celebrated

Staff Workshop

To protect staff safety employers must give them the skills necessary to:

- a. Enable them to protect themselves, and:
- b. Meet client needs in an appropriate way

The rest of the manual will look at ways in which you can protect yourself by recognizing dangers and having strategies to deal with other people.

Risks from clients and their visitors are significantly increased if they are not being cared for appropriately. Poor care can provoke aggressive behaviors.

Poor care practices include:

- Lack of respect, treating people without dignity and compassion
- Acting in ways which are discriminatory
- Causing clients to feel excluded
- Abuse and neglect
- Infantilisation – treating clients like children
- Careless manual handling
- Lack of communication
- Unprofessional behaviors
- Lack of care for people’s personal property

All employees should be able to provide person-centred care competently and in a way that promotes respect, equality and dignity. Clients who feel valued and supported are less likely to exhibit challenging behaviors, while their loved ones are unlikely to act aggressively if they see that good care is being provided.

When someone feels unable to meet their partners or parents care needs they may have a sense of failure and guilt. These feelings can then cause them to be sensitive to any perceived failings in the care that their loved one receives from people who are paid to look after them.

A good care provider will relieve these negative feelings by proving that paid care is the right choice. To do this they must understand client needs and have the skills to meet them.

Chapter Three

Self Protection

When you are working you have a right to be safe; your employer has to take suitable and sufficient action to reduce risk to reasonable levels. However, 'reasonable levels' means some risk still exists and control measures include giving you the knowledge and skills to protect your own health and safety.

You must be vigilant at work and trust your instincts; if you feel unsafe be extra cautious and report your fears to protect others. All too often, after a violent incident, people say things like 'I thought he was a bit odd today' or there are reports of erratic behavior in the previous days.

The rest of this manual is about you, and what you can do to keep yourself safe. It includes tips on improving your communication, building confidence, recognising when people might become aggressive, being assertive, and knowing when to report and record incidents.

Identifying Harm

If people in your workplace become aggressive there is potential for them to become verbally or physically violent. There are 3 key ways in which we can avoid harm:

1. We recognise that a person is becoming aggressive and remove ourselves and others from the situation
2. We are able to deescalate the situation (see Chapter 4)
3. We can defend ourselves when violence occurs

There is no victory to be had if violence occurs at work; 'winning' means both parties walk away uninjured. If, for example, you are attacked by a client, you don't want to hurt them but you do want to deal with the situation in a way which keeps everyone safe.

Aggression is an inappropriate way of expressing anger; anger itself is an emotion which should be recognised and validated. Clients may be angry because they are experiencing poor care, do not feel respected or have been treated in an undignified manner. Visitors may be angry because they have seen evidence of poor care standards, or they have made a complaint which has been ignored, or because they are having a bad day.

People act aggressively because they feel that it is the best or only way to deal with the situation they are in. **Aggression can be:**

- Sudden – someone lashes out when being moved because rough handling has caused them pain
- Irrational – a person loses self-control, perhaps because they feel frustrated at a lack of action, or because their inhibitions and judgement have been affected by alcohol or drugs
- Deliberate – if the person has found that aggression gets them what they want they will use it tactically

Unless aggression is a sudden reaction to pain or surprise there are likely to be warning signs that you can identify and act upon. These signs may start off as irritation and grow in intensity becoming increasingly noticeable and uncontrollable. While many people will manage to restrain themselves from verbal abuse or physical violence, those who can't may 'lash out' as their aggression reaches a peak.

If you are going into a situation where someone may become violent **take the following precautions:**

- Check your exits – make sure you have an escape route; do not get yourself into a position where the person you are with can block your exits
- Tell a colleague who you will be with, and where you will be – ask them to check on you if necessary
- Maintain personal boundaries – people like their own personal space; the amount of space they want is affected by personality, culture and situation; keeping at least an arm's length away should keep everyone happy

The following signs may indicate that someone is irritated:

- Tapping fingers
- Sighing
- Fiddling with hair
- Fidgeting
- Tutting
- Speaking loudly

Be on your guard; take care not to increase the person's anger. Maintain a professional manner and make good use of active listening skills (see Chapter 4).

As a person's irritation increases and turns to anger, their physical and verbal signals become stronger and more noticeable. **They may:**

- Speak more loudly
- Stand up
- Point their finger
- Maintain fixed eye contact
- Pace up and down
- Swear
- Use sarcasm or mimicking

These actions can make it feel as if you are being attacked and they may be intended to draw a response from you. Make sure you have a safe exit, try to ignore the way the person is acting and identify why they are acting in such a way.

Some people are naturally more demonstrative than others; take care to allow for cultural and personal differences when you interact with people.

These early signs of aggression can be very deliberate, the person is aware of what they are doing and they are making conscious decisions. As people become more aggressive they lose control; actions become more instinctive and animalistic and the risk of violence peaks.

Danger signs include:

- Reddening of the face
- Shaking
- Shallow breathing
- Facial tics
- Shouting (or menacingly lowered tone)
- Clenching fists
- Tensing of muscles

At this point it may be necessary to get to a place of safety and to take action to protect others on the premises. If the person becomes abusive or violent you may have to involve the police; otherwise you may need to allow them time to calm down before re-establishing communication.

Strategic against harassment

Violence at work is never acceptable – if you are assaulted by a client the consequences may be serious. All incidents must be investigated; this protects everyone.

You have to be confident about your rights at work and take action to stand up for yourself. If you feel that you are the victim of bullying or harassment you may be able to deal with the situation without involving your employer. Decide what you are unhappy about and what you want to change; approach the person you believe is treating you unfairly and, calmly but firmly, tell them how you feel.

If this does not resolve the situation, or you don't feel able to take action, your employer must have policies in place for staff to raise concerns. Find out what your employer's policies are and follow them. Remember that your employer has to treat everyone fairly and that they will need time to investigate and act. Your employer should confirm that they have received your complaint and give you a timescale for response, usually around 28 days.

Your employer's complaints procedure may take a similar form to the following:

- Discuss your concerns with an appropriate individual e.g. the manager
- If concerns are not resolved ask for a copy of the complaints procedure
- Write down your concerns clearly and concisely
- Address your complaint to the appropriate person and keep a copy for yourself
- Allow reasonable time for a response
- Record details of any meetings

There are techniques which you can learn to make you look and feel more confident; we will briefly look at two of them here but it may be helpful to seek out further information or specialist training.

Please bear in mind that assertive does not mean aggressive; if, for example, a client's relative approaches you to make a complaint and you know that they have misunderstood a situation that you are fully informed about, don't be patronising or smug about the fact that you know more than they do.

Forget about who is right or wrong and consider the best outcome *for all concerned*. In this case the best outcome is to communicate the truth of the situation to the client's relative without belittling them or creating an argument.

Particular care should be taken when you encounter a colleague being confronted aggressively; you don't want to undermine them or make the aggressor feel cornered. In this case the aggressor may feel under attack and feel that their only way of escaping the situation is to act violently.

It would perhaps be best to make your presence known in an unobtrusive way; perhaps by tidying the room; or you could even try to defuse the tension by offering a drink or ignoring the aggression and saying a cheerful 'hello'.

Creating Strong Personality

People are less likely to abuse you if you appear to be in control of the situation. The technique of creating a persona is about identifying how you look and feel when you are confident and artificially recreating this in challenging situations.

So, for example, you deal with your children confidently because you know you are in charge and they will listen to you, **think about:**

- The tone of voice you use when you speak to your children
- How you stand
- How you look to others
- How you feel in yourself

Next time you're in a situation that makes you nervous, for example a meeting, you imagine that you are speaking to your children and adopt the appropriate tone of voice, stance, look and feeling.

To be effective this takes regular work, it's not a technique that works for everyone but it is useful for some. You would need to spend a little time each day practicing to prepare for a challenge such as speaking in public or going to an interview.

Grounding

Grounding is a way of calming yourself down when you are nervous or scared; it is a simple technique that helps you to look and feel more confident.

If you are beginning to panic, ground yourself by increasing your awareness of your contact with the floor and slowing your breathing. Take deep breaths and either spread your toes and grip the floor, or lean against a solid piece of furniture.

This may sound a little strange but no one else will know what you're doing and it's very effective.

Self =Defense

The law on self-defense can be confusing, in simple terms you are allowed to use force as long as it is 'reasonable and proportionate' and is taken in the heat of the moment and not as revenge. The problem is that 'reasonable and proportionate' has no accurate legal definition and you may have to make split second decisions when you are in danger.

In general, running away should be your first line of defence, remember we are trying to maintain safety not 'win'. However, there may be times when violence is sudden, or other people are at risk, and you have to act.

If you act instinctively, and do no more than is necessary to get away or protect someone from harm, you are unlikely to be found guilty of any offence. You may be investigated and this can be stressful, but it will hopefully be decided that the force used was reasonable.

If you attempt to inflict harm, to punish the other person, you are committing an offence.

You are allowed to use reasonable force to protect:

- Yourself
- Another person
- Property

Documentation

All violent incidents must be recorded and, if necessary reported to the appropriate authorities i.e. the police, HSE and CQC. Your employer should have in place incident report forms for you to complete. These reports can be used to inform risk assessments and reduce the likelihood of further violence.

Incidents may seem insignificant in themselves, particular if they involve insults or threats without actual physical harm. However, each event can form part of a bigger picture and it is important that records are made. Individuals who are regular victims of verbal abuse can experience stress which is an increasingly common cause of workplace ill health; alternatively, repeated incidents of abusive behavior involving different individuals can be a sign of failings with the way care is provided.

Care providers often feel conflict about reporting attacks by clients but it may be necessary to do so. Sometimes people require care that can't be provided where they are living; or their condition deteriorates and they need medical or psychiatric intervention. Appropriate reporting helps to identify and correct unmet needs

Chapter Four

Violence control

If someone attacks you without warning then you have few options other than to run away or fight back. However, if you are in a work situation it is more likely that good communication techniques can avoid violence altogether, either by:

- a. not causing the person to become angry in the first place, or
- b. talking the person back to rationality when they show signs of aggression

Poor communication leads to misunderstandings and can be a factor in provoking violent behavior; you need the skills to make yourself understood and to show that you understand. Communication is about listening as well as talking.

Communication

Communication is only partly about the words we use; body language and tone of voice are very important for conveying feeling and they can contradict what we are saying. **For example:**

- a. You say : ‘I’m really looking forward to working with you’

Your tone of voice: bright and cheerful

Your body language: open and relaxed

The message given: ‘I’m really looking forward to working with you.’

- b. You say: ‘I’m really looking forward to working with you.’

Your tone of voice: dull and bored

Your body language: no eye contact; arms folded

The message given: ‘I’ve got to work with you but I don’t really want to.’

When you are working you need to have a professional manner at all times. Clients have to feel respected, you must communicate with them in a way that maintains their dignity, no baby talk or sarcasm, and they must trust you and feel comfortable enough to allow you to provide personal care.

Visitors should experience bright and cheerful care providers who appear interested in their loved ones and take time to talk to them. They need to feel that staff are knowledgeable and empathetic.

Clients who do not trust their care providers are likely to exhibit challenging behavior, including aggressive language and actions. Visitors who experience uncaring staff, and

indifference when they raise concerns, may feel that acting aggressively is a way of getting their loved one's needs met.

When you are interacting with other people at work, including colleagues, give them your full attention. General conversation can be carried on while you complete tasks, but if you have information that you need to pass on, or if the person you are with wants to tell you something significant, you need to follow the tips below:

- Minimize background noise – television, radios and general chatter and clatter will make speech more difficult to hear
- Position yourself in a way that makes the other person feel comfortable – where they can see you, at arm's length to give them space, on the same level i.e. if they are sitting, sit or crouch, if they are standing, stand with them
- Move closer and use touch only when you know it is appropriate – if you need to provide comfort and the person is at ease with you, you may move closer and gently place your hand on their shoulder or forearm (avoid touching legs or any part of the body that might be considered 'intimate')
- Make sure that your facial expressions and posture are open and friendly; avoid using gestures which may be offensive to some people e.g. shrugs or hand signals
- Speak clearly without slang, swearing or jargon
- Use active listening skills to show you are interested – use encouraging words and noises 'go on', 'I hear you'; take notes if appropriate e.g. if you need to pass on a message; maintain regular, not constant, eye contact; occasionally ask questions to check that you have understood

If you are talking to someone who is irritated or angry it is particularly important to take care with what you are saying and how you say it. You want to make the person feel that you are sensitive to their annoyance and that they don't need to become aggressive.

For example, imagine that you are confronted by a man who is shouting at you about his mother; if you shout back or react defensively he is likely to become more angry; if, on the other hand, you make it clear that you want to listen to him and are interested in his reasons for shouting, he is more likely to calm down.

Good communication can keep you safe; remember that we are looking for a solution that allows everyone to walk away unharmed, we are not trying to win an argument.

Swearing

It's a common belief that if we are arguing with someone and they swear we should ask them to stop immediately; some people think that the best way to approach swearing is to issue an ultimatum and tell the person that we are not going to talk to them if they swear.

In fact, reacting to swearing in this way may inflame the situation; reasons for this include:

- This may be the person's preferred way of expressing themselves; by asking them to stop you are saying 'I am better than you'

- They may be swearing to provoke a reaction
- If you make an ultimatum what are you going to do if they keep swearing?

If you can, the best approach to swearing is to ignore it and to concentrate on what the person is trying to say; the quickest way to stop them swearing may be to deal with the cause of their anger.

However, if the person starts to swear at you, then it becomes a form of abuse and you need to deal with it in an assertive manner. Calmly but firmly let the person know that swearing at you is unacceptable; try not to threaten to end the conversation but do make it clear that you will not put up with their abuse

Rapport-building

Individuals are less likely to become aggressive if they feel comfortable with the person they are talking to. One way of preventing aggression is to create a connection between yourself and the potential aggressor; to make them feel that you understand them and you are on their side.

This is called gaining rapport; salesmen use it to make more money; we will use it to keep ourselves safe.

To gain rapport use subtle mirroring techniques and active listening skills. Mirroring, copying aspects of the person's posture or tone, helps them to feel at ease; they won't know why but will pick up subconscious signals. Through active listening you can demonstrate sympathy with their situation or point of view.

Two major points to remember here are:

1. Mirroring must be subtle and unnoticeable – don't change position every time they do, just take general cues from them e.g. if they speak and act in a stiff and formal manner adopt a stiff and formal attitude
2. You don't have to be sympathetic with them; you just have to seem it

Dealing Tension

When individuals become angry the actions of people around them can either inflame or improve their mood. There are techniques you can use to help you to defuse situations and allow calm and rational discussion.

First of all you need to depersonalize your language and avoid throwing fuel on the fire by making the person feel as if they are being attacked. Neutralize your speech, this is not about determining who is right or wrong but is about reaching a positive conclusion together.

Techniques you can use to reduce the likelihood of violence include:

- invalidating expectation
- doing the unexpected

- releasing pressure
- pacing and leading

When people are aggressive they are in danger of losing control and acting irrationally; these techniques aim to keep people rational and make them think about what they are doing.

Strategy of Expectation-Dealing

An aggressive person may be used to getting a certain type of response when they become angry; if you look confident instead of nervous or intimidated they have to reassess their expectation.

The key to this technique is to decide what the person expects you to do and not do it; you may follow this up by:

Unexpected activities

This challenges the person's preconceptions about how they thought the confrontation would go. Doing something simple, like agreeing when the person tells you that you are rubbish at your job, can stop them in their tracks.

Distraction techniques can also be used; for example you could drop something, suggest a walk or suddenly decide to make coffees. Don't do anything ridiculous but do try and think of creative ways to remove tension and change the course of the confrontation.

Pressure-control

Often when people are angry they just want someone to take them seriously and listen to them. If you encourage them to vent their anger they are unlikely to be able to rant for long; they should become calmer and more receptive to other points of view.

Use active listening skills; take notes, allow them to speak uninterrupted at first then after a couple of minutes ask questions and show interest in the issues raised.

Leading and Pacing

To be successful with this technique you need to first of all gain rapport; so, if the person is shouting and pacing about your voice will be loud and you will be on your feet. When you feel you have a connection start to quieten your voice and, after a moment or two, sit down. If the person sits too, you have succeeded; if they don't you need to work harder to establish rapport.

None of these techniques will work for everybody in every situation; you have to find ways of dealing with aggressive people that work for you, and you may have to react instinctively if there is a sudden confrontation.

If you work with people who are likely to be physically violent you would probably benefit from further training on communication techniques and self-defence.

Conclusion

Personal safety at work is assured by employer's risk assessment and staff awareness. Your employer should have in place policies and procedures, security systems and training to protect staff, clients and visitors from violent, aggressive or criminal behavior.

The staff team must work together to create an environment where clients are treated with dignity and respect and there is an awareness of issues related to equality, diversity and inclusion.

Individual members of staff should be vigilant to threats at work and to the possibility of people becoming aggressive. They should maintain a professional manner at all times and work on their communication skills to develop positive relationships.

Always remember, it's not about being right, it's about being safe.

References

Preventing Workplace Harassment and Violence: Joint guidance implementing a European social partner agreement

Available from www.hse.gov.uk