



Personal Safety of Staff Guidance Policy

March 2017

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1. Introduction

The London Borough of Redbridge recognises it has a duty under section 2(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 to ensure as far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of its employees, and this duty includes protecting employees from assaults, threats and verbal abuse.

Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, the Council has a statutory duty to make “suitable and sufficient” assessment of “... *the risks to the health and safety of its employees whilst they are at work for the purpose of identifying and implementing the measures to be taken to comply with statutory requirements*”. This includes the risk of reasonably foreseeable violence. The Council’s Health, Safety and Welfare Policy statement delegates this role to managers who are ideally placed to carry out risk assessments of work activities under their control.

Additionally, the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 (RIDDOR) require employers to notify their enforcing authority in the event of an accident at work to any employee resulting in death, major injury, or incapacity to work three or more days. This includes accidents and injuries that occur as a result of any non-consensual physical violence done to a person at work.

Violence, threats or verbal abuse to employees of the Council are not acceptable and should not be regarded as being “part of the job”. The Council confirms that any person who assaults one of its employees in the course of his/her official duties or arising there from will be liable to prosecution. Employees will be informed what action the Council will take against individuals who are identified as committing acts of violence, threatening behaviour and/or verbal abuse.

A report from the HSE based on the 2009/10 British Crime Survey (BCS) states that

- 1.4% of working adults were the victims of one or more violent incidents at work
- approximately 318,000 workers had experienced at least one incident of violence at work in the 2009/10 BCS (compared with an estimated 327,000 workers in 2008/09)
- there were an estimated 677,000 incidents of violence at work, comprising 310,000 assaults and 366,000 threats
- respondents in the protective service occupations, eg police officers, were most at risk of violence at work, with 9% having experienced one or more incidents in the year prior to interview
- others workers at risk of violence at work included health professionals, at 3.8%, and health and social welfare associate professionals, with 2.6%
- science and technology professionals, and workers in textiles, printing and other skilled trades, were least at risk.

Other noteworthy facts about violence at work are as follows.

- It is estimated that 43% of all people assaulted or threatened at work were repeat victims.
- Strangers were the offenders in 65% of cases of workplace violence.
- Victims reported that the offender was under the influence of alcohol in 38% of incidents, and that the offender was under the influence of drugs in 19% of incidents.

Personal safety of staff guidance is available on the LBR Intranet site to all employees. New employees are recommended to read the guidance when they take up employment and as part of their induction process.

2. Scope of the Guidance

This guidance applies to all employees irrespective of grade, status or length of service including temporary employees and work experience placements. It also covers agency staff and other external users, as applicable.

The guidance should be read in conjunction with the Council's "Lone Working Guidance".

For employees in Educational Establishments, the procedures in this guidance are not meant to cut across normal classroom management and school internal discipline arrangements, both of which are seen as part of the professional relationship between the teacher and the taught. The advice given should contribute to better coping with potentially difficult classroom situations. In the event of a situation occurring which is beyond what is acceptable in the relevant establishment, or which takes place outside of scheduled school activities, then these procedures must be followed.

3. Aims of the Guidance

The aim of this guidance is to:

- To prevent violence/acts of aggression occurring at work.
- Set out the commitment of the London Borough of Redbridge to protect the personal safety and security of its employees.
- Increase staff awareness of personal safety issues.
- Identify the roles and responsibilities of managers and employees, and provide advice on measures for the prevention and control of violence and aggression at work.
- Ensure that the potential for violent or aggressive behaviour is recognized, the risks identified and safe working procedures adopted to reduce the risks so far as is reasonable practicable.
- Make staff aware of available appropriate training.
- Ensure that appropriate support is available to staff who are victims of violent or aggressive behaviour at work.
- Encourage full reporting and recording of all acts of physical or verbal abuse towards staff at work.

4. Definitions

The HSE defines work related violence as "Any incident in which a person is abused, threatened, or assaulted in circumstances related to their work".

The Council considers that: "A violent incident, is an event, or series of event, in which an employee is threatened or assaulted physically, verbally, or in any other way (including those relating to race, age, ethnic origin, sex, sexual orientation, religion or

belief or disability) in circumstances arising out of the course of their employment which produces damaging or hurtful effects”.

5. Responsibilities

Chief Officers should:

- Decide how best to communicate, promote and champion the prevention of incidents relating to personal safety.
- Monitor the Personal Safety of Staff incident statistics for their Service Area on a quarterly basis.
- Review Personal Safety of Staff incident investigation reports for their Service Area.
- Set targets for achieving reductions in the number of Personal Safety of Staff incident incidents in their Service Area.
- Ensure that adequate resources and support is provided to enable managers to carry out their duties and responsibilities in addressing Personal Safety of Staff issues.
- Ensure that this guidance is adopted and implemented in their service area.
- Monitor the efficacy of the guidance by considering the number of incidents relating to personal safety.

Senior Managers should:

- Identify which of their staff are at risk from potential violence or aggression.
- Ensure that risk assessments are undertaken to identify the risks, control measures identified and implemented, and safe working procedures are established.
- Monitor the adequacy of the risk assessments and safe working procedures by considering the number of personal safety incidents.
- Ensure that adequate resources are available for line managers/supervisors to implement control measures identified in personal safety risk assessments.
- Inform their line managers of any deficiencies in the personal safety arrangements.
- Report the Personal Safety of Staff incident statistics for their Service Area on a quarterly basis to their line manager.
- Review Personal Safety of Staff incident investigation reports for their Service Area.

Line Managers/ Team Leaders should:

- Be alert to, and anticipate, work situations that can lead to incidents of assault, threats or verbal abuse.
- Undertake risk assessments to cover potential violence or aggression and personal safety of staff issues, and involve relevant staff in the process.
- Ensure that control measures identified in the risk assessments are implemented.
- Produce safe working procedures ensuring that all control measures identified in the risk assessments are included.
- Ensure their staff receive adequate information, instruction, supervision and training and that they are aware of the need to report Personal Safety of Staff incidents.

- Ensure that all accidents and/or violent and aggressive incidents are reported in accordance with the Council’s reporting procedures on a quarterly basis (see “Accident reporting and investigation guidance” for further details).
- Conduct Personal Safety of Staff incidents investigations and ensure that any reasonably practicable measures to reduce the number of incidents are undertaken (see “Accident reporting and investigation guidance” for further details).
- Ensure that employees are made aware of the support measures in place for victims of assault, threats or verbal abuse
- Review the adequacy of the safe working procedures by analysing the number of incidents relating to personal safety.
- Inform their line managers of any deficiencies in the arrangements relating to the personal safety of staff.

Employees should:

- Co-operate with their line manager by following the safe working procedures in accordance with the information, instruction and training received.
- Attend training as arranged for them by their line manager.
- Report any deficiencies in the safe working procedures.
- Report any accidents or incidents of violence or aggression to their line manager.

6. Managing Violence and Aggression at Work

Although this guidance provides general advice on the role and responsibilities of managers, and employees in identifying and reducing the risk of violence at work, they do not provide detailed information on all procedures. More detailed local procedures and advice should be devised within Service Areas.

The Health and Safety Executive recommends that violence at work be managed using the four stage management process set out below.

- Stage 1 - Find out if you have a problem
- Stage 2 - Decide what action to take
- Stage 3 - Take action
- Stage 4 - Check what you have done

These four stages are not a one-off set of actions. If stage four shows that a problem still exists then the process should be repeated. Undertaking a risk assessment completes stages 1 and 2.

6.1 Stage 1 – Find out if you have a problem

As with risk assessment, the first step is to identify the hazard. All managers should be alert to the safety needs of their colleagues and work together with their employees to develop strategies to reduce or eliminate potential risks. Trade Union Safety Representatives can also provide valuable information on employees’ perception of risk of violence at work.

Managers have an important role to play in anticipating work situations, which can lead to incidents of assault, threats or verbal abuse and this can best be achieved by finding

out from your staff whether or not they feel threatened in work. Ideally this would be done formally through a staff survey or informally through team meetings.

Commonly, the types of work where employees are most at risk are:

- activities involving contact with members of the public (eg hospitals, benefits offices, schools or work related to traffic or parking)
- work involving highly stressful and emotive circumstances, such as bereavement, eg in a hospital or care home
- work with people suffering from various mental impairments (including those caused by illness, injury and substance abuse)
- work involving the storage or handling of money or valuables.

To help managers decide on which factors that contribute to aggressive/violent behaviour a summary is shown at Annex A. There is also a guide to identifying and assessing potentially violent behaviour shown at Annex B.

Managers should also ensure staff are aware that they need to record any incidents and also ensure they are investigated and reported to the health and safety function.

6.2 Stage 2 – Deciding what action to take

Having found that violence could be a problem managers need to continue the risk assessment process using the following steps:

Decide who would 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 minimized.

Evaluate the risk -

Check the existing arrangements and decide whether the precautions or control measures already in place are sufficient or whether more should be done. Examples of the sort of control measures that could be considered are shown at Annex C.

Record your findings:

Keep a record of the significant findings of the assessment. The record should provide a working document for both managers and employees.

Review and revise the assessment:

Regularly check that the assessment is a true record of the current work situation, and add additional preventative measures or change those that are not working. This is particularly important where the job changes. The risk assessment should also be reviewed and any necessary changes be made should if a violent incident occur.

6.3 Stage 3 – Take action

Using the control measures identified in the risk assessment, establish a safe working procedure and ensure that this is communicated to all relevant staff.

The procedure should include the need for employees to report all incidents of physical and verbal abuse, how they do so and how these will be monitored.

6.4 Stage 4 – Check what you have done

Check how well the arrangements are working on a regular basis, and consult with staff representatives to obtain their comments. It may be helpful to establish a joint management and safety representative committee to do this.

Records of incidents should be kept and regularly reviewed to see if the preventative measures are working and if the problem is changing. If there are still problems, go back to stages 1 & 2 and review the risk assessment.

7. Role of, and Advice for, Employees

Employees should recognize that the London Borough of Redbridge does not regard assaults, threats or verbal abuse as being “part of the job”. Most potentially violent situations occur because the person’s job requires them to take some form of decision or action which angers or distresses the customer. Research has shown that employees who have been assaulted, threatened or verbally abused are in general no different from their colleagues in terms of competence or ability.

Employees have an important role to play in reducing the potential for violence/aggression at work by:

- Being prepared to discuss with colleagues and their line manager areas of work in which there is a potential risk of violence.
- Sharing information on potentially and actually violent customers. This could mean, for example, checking records of customers, with the necessary safeguards for confidentiality, before making a visit to their homes and sharing relevant information with other Council employees who may need to visit the same customer.
- Making proposals to improve security and reduce potential for violence and aggression in the workplace.

If violence is directed solely at property, employees should not become involved in a physical struggle that puts their personal safety at risk.

In situations where the potential for violence exists employees can minimize the risk by adhering to the following advice:

- Find out how to summon help if it is needed.
- Discuss with your immediate line manager if it is appropriate to see the customer alone.
- In an office situation, try to ensure that colleagues can easily observe you and that there is a safe exit in the event of an escalation in violence.
- If visiting a customer in their home, be vigilant and do not place yourself in a position with no means of retreat if aggression occurs.
- Sit or stand in a way which is least threatening to a customer, e.g. do not “tower” above the customer, sit in a relaxed fashion.
- In situations where an employee feels their personal safety is at **serious and imminent** risk they should, in the first instance or if feasible, contact their line manager. If this is not feasible they should immediately contact the Police.

8. Incident Reporting

Employees must report all incidents of aggression/verbal abuse as outlined in the Council's reporting procedures and using the Council's reporting form. Information gathered from this reporting system will enable identification of priority areas for management action to minimize the risk of violence or aggression.

The results of any investigation should be shared with staff who should be, where relevant, consulted on any changes required. All staff need to be made aware of any violent incidents that have occurred and of any steps taken to reduce the risk of similar occurrences.

Some violent incidents may also need to be reported to the relevant enforcing authority under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995.

[Please click here to view the Accident & incident form](#)

9. Employee Support

When an incident occurs managers must respond promptly and sympathetically to help employees to cope with the experience.

Managers should ensure that employees are:

- Not unjustly 'blamed' for the incident or seen to be 'at fault' for allowing it to happen.
- Encouraged to describe the incident and express their feelings
- Advised to report the incident, in every case no matter how minor
- Given practical advice about availability of legal advice, involvement of police, compensation, etc.
- Given help and support, including the provision of professional counselling, where this is appropriate and acceptable.
- Reminded that the Employee Assistance Programme is available if required, and provided with the contact details.
- Reallocated to other work on a temporary or permanent basis wherever possible and appropriate.
- Assured that they will be kept informed of the action the Council will be taking to prevent a repetition of the incident

Reports of incidents of assault, threats or verbal abuse should be thoroughly investigated with the employee and, if appropriate, their safety representative/friend.

The Council has developed measures to support employees who are victims of violence or aggression at work. This may include 'in house' support services and external counselling agencies as appropriate.

Employees may also use the 24-hour **confidential** telephone helpline on **0800 282193** to seek advice following incidents of violence or aggression. The full contact details of the helpline, including e-mail address, is widely publicised throughout the Council.

The 'Council Commitment' notice should be displayed in all areas to which the public have access or workplaces in which the potential for violence or aggression is considered to be high. It affirms that violence or aggression towards employees is unacceptable to the Council.

9.1 Redbridge Victim Support Scheme

As part of its support services the Council has an agreement for employees to be referred to the [Redbridge Victim Support Scheme](#) for professional counselling where this cannot be provided 'in house'. Managers can refer employees to the Victim Support Scheme with the approval of their Service in accordance with normal arrangements for time off.

9.2 Compensation

The Council has measures available to compensate employees and where necessary their immediate families who have been victims of violence. These measures are based on compensation through insurance cover, other compensatory payments or sick leave and, if the employee is a contributor, the Superannuation Scheme Injury Allowance.

9.2.1 Insurance Cover

Employees: Conditions of Service make provision for lump sum compensatory payments in the event of an employee suffering death or total permanent incapacity for work as a result of a violent incident. Benefits are also payable in the event of permanent partial disablement on a sliding scale relating to the severity of the injury.

Family Members: where members of an employee's immediate family have been victims of violence arising from the employee's duties, identical cover to that referred to above is available. In addition, a weekly benefit is payable for lost earnings for up to two years, as well as compensation for loss of, or damage to, personal effects where this is directly related to the claim.

9.2.2 Compensatory Payments

These are available at the discretion of the appropriate Chief Officer to compensate for loss of, or damage to an employee's personal property resulting from a malicious act during the course of performing their duties.

9.2.3 Sick Leave

Employees are entitled to pay based on scale of allowances as for sick pay (i.e. depending on length of service) but calculated as a separate entitlement and not counted as sick pay.

Note: these provisions may vary for certain employee groups e.g. Direct Service Organisation (DSO) employees— If in doubt please contact the [Employment Relations Team](#) in Human Resources.

9.2.4 Superannuation scheme

The Local Government Superannuation Regulations make provision for Payment of an Injury Allowance to employees who are members of the Scheme and who become permanently unfit and retire prematurely as a result of an injury sustained at work.

The Scheme also provides benefits in the event of death in service.

Other means of compensation

9.2.5 Criminal injuries compensation scheme

In addition, where an employee has been the victim of violence in connection with the discharge of duties, compensation may be available from the [Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority](#) (C.I.C.A.). A claim to the C.I.C.A. will arise if an injury is sustained as the result of an actual assault (and may arise in the case of psychiatric injury). Assaults must always be reported promptly to the Police, as it is a prerequisite of any compensation claim to the C.I.C.A.

If criminal proceedings are brought successfully, whether supported by the Council or not, the Court can be requested to make a compensation order to the employee in addition to any fine or other penalty imposed on the assailant.

If Civil proceedings are successfully brought the employee can request the Court to award damages. Advice on compensation payments is available in the first instance from the [Employment Relations](#) Team in Human Resources.

9.3 Legal assistance

The Council will adopt a robust approach to third parties who threaten or physically attack its employees. However, it is recognised that being involved with legal activities, may create extra strain following a stressful experience, For this reason, management will do all that it can to consult with victims on any action proposed and as far as possible, address the issue in a sensitive and mutually agreed way.

The following **General Statement of Intent** defines the Council's policy on legal support.

- The Council declares its intention to be fully supportive of any of its employees who are the victims of physical aggression arising out of their official duties no matter where such an incident occurs.
- The Council confirms that any person who assaults one of its employees in the course of his/her official duties or arising therefrom will be liable to prosecution.
- In cases where the Crown Prosecution Service is not proposing to prosecute, the Council will secure the provision of legal advice in all cases and legal representation in all appropriate cases for employees who wish to institute proceedings for alleged assault or malicious damage where such events arise out of the employee's official duties.
- Where threats are made to an employee in the course of the performance of his/her official duties the Council will, after discussion with the employee, in all appropriate cases send a formal letter to the person concerned warning that legal action may be taken if a breach of the law should occur.

- Prosecution or other appropriate civil proceedings may be undertaken against any person who is on Council property for unlawful purposes and/or uses violent, threatening, abusive, offensive language or conducts themselves in a disorderly manner.

Note:

Under the Law Society's Practice Rules, it is not possible for an employed Solicitor (e.g. a Council Solicitor) to act on behalf of a fellow employee in any situation where there is an actual or potential conflict of interest between the fellow employee and the employer. An example of this would be where an employee who is assaulted may wish to bring proceedings against the Council alleging that it has failed to discharge its obligations under the Health and Safety at Work Act. In such a case the employee, or their representative, may wish to instruct their own solicitor.

10. Training

The objectives of training for dealing with violence are to:

- ensure employees understand the risks associated with violence in the workplace
- give employees an appreciation of the circumstances and situations that may give rise to work-related violence
- make employees aware of the Council's policy on violence
- ensure that managers can:
 - recognise situations that may give rise to violence in the workplace
 - comply with the company's own policy and procedures
 - give a prompt and appropriate response to workplace violence.
 - recognise the extent of their own competence to deal with a situation.

A key feature of the implementation of this policy is training in preventative rather than reactive practices. It is envisaged that this training will include the following core areas:

- Training for managers, including:
 - key areas of this policy and the effective management of workplaces under their control in order to minimise the risk of violence or aggression.
 - the role of management culture and actions in producing and managing violence at work
 - the manager's role in supporting those who have been affected by workplace violence
 - how and when to refer an issue to specialists, eg medical department
 - the importance of maintaining medical and employee confidentiality
 - the circumstances that may require involvement of outside agencies, personal counsellors or the police.
- Training for front line employees in:
 - techniques for preventing potential violent situations arising, improving their personal safety and understanding the behaviour of customers. conditions that may result in increased risks of violence at work
 - indicators that a violent situation is potentially arising
 - how such situations can be avoided and managed

- effects of workplace violence on employees
- company attitude and policy towards violence at work
- processes and procedures in place to manage violence at work.

For staff in higher-risk occupations, eg those routinely working alone or who work with the public in volatile situations, more detailed training should be provided on:

- recognising potentially violent situations
- managing conflict and confrontation
- personal security.

Training should include some degree of practical experience, such as role-playing and situational analysis, wherever possible.

Human Resources offer a [“Conflict Resolution”](#) training course. To book this course, please complete an [on-line nomination form](#), or for further information please contact HR on 020 8708 3029.

11. Useful Links or Contacts

[Violence in the Education Sector \(HSE\)](#)

[The Home Office](#)

[Workplace Violence \(Maybo\)](#)

[Department of Transport - protecting bus and coach crews](#)

[The Suzy Lamplugh Trust](#)

[Victim Support](#)

[The Institute of Conflict Management](#)

[Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers \(USDAW\) - Freedom from Fear campaign](#)

12. Appendices

Policy statement from the Chief Executive.

13. References

HSE homepage on violence

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/violence/index.htm>

HSE guidance on violence at work

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg69.pdf>

HSE guidance on Managing work-related violence in licensed and retail premises

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg423.pdf>

Working alone safely

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg73.pdf>

14. Further Advice

If there are any comments or questions regarding the contents of this document or the range and availability of employee support services mentioned within it, please discuss this with your Chief Officer/Head of Establishment. Some Chief Officers/Heads of Establishment may ask either the Health & Safety Co-ordinator or other senior member of staff to deal with this on their behalf.

Help can also be obtained via the 24 hour confidential helpline: **0800 282193**

Factors Contributing to Aggressive/Violent Behaviour

The factors that cause people to become aggressive and/or violent are varied, but can be generalised under the following headings:

- frustration
- extreme negative emotions
- threatening behaviour
- substance use and abuse
- mental illness or brain injury
- storage and handling of money, valuables, controlled drugs, etc.

In addition, there are other contributory factors that may influence a situation. The way furniture is laid out within a room may appear confrontational (eg sitting directly opposite someone over a table).

An individual's personality may also be relevant. People have different tolerances and some may feel threatened more easily than others. For example, everyone has different personal space zones; certain individuals may feel uncomfortable if someone comes too close to them.

Assertive people or people with volatile tempers may also be perceived as appearing more intimidating and threatening.

Frustration

A wide range of situations may cause frustration. Most commonly, these are:

- insufficient or unclear information
- lack of control over situations (eg tight time constraints)
- frustration resulting from reduced physical/mental abilities following injury or illness.

Extreme Negative Emotions

The effect of extreme negative emotions may stimulate aggressive or violent behaviour, even in people who do not normally express these tendencies. Healthcare staff may have to handle relatives who are coming to terms with bereavement or with patients dealing with a serious illness or injury.

Insecurity, whether in personal perception or in job retention, may develop into aggressive or violent behaviour if not addressed.

External factors away from the workplace, such as divorce or financial difficulties, may also affect staff attitudes and increase the potential for more aggressive behaviour.

Threatening Behaviour

Threatening behaviour may be seen as an aggressive act and may in turn create an aggressive response in the person being threatened. The threats do not necessarily

have to be physical. Mental manipulation, bullying, harassment, and actual or emotional blackmail can have a similar effect.

Substance Use and Abuse

The effects of substance abuse (alcohol, drugs, etc) are well known, as are their adverse effects on an individual's ability to react rationally. Even if the substance abuse is stopped, the changes in personality and moods may continue for long periods afterwards.

Perhaps less obvious is the fact that some prescribed medications can induce side effects that have a similar impact. In situations where any such medications are prescribed, staff will need to be aware of the possible effects and a risk assessment will be necessary to determine the level of risk.

Mental Illness/Injury

Aggressive and violent behaviour may result from a mental illness or a brain injury. In these situations, it may not be possible to rationalise with the affected people. Different and/or additional protective measures may need to be considered for the safety of staff and others.

People with severe types of these problems tend to be cared for in special units with highly trained staff.

Identifying and Assessing Potentially Violent Behaviour

Generally, where any factors contributing to violent behaviour are present, the potential for an incident exists. The degree of risk in any particular circumstance should be determined by a risk assessment.

There are several indicators that an aggressive or violent incident could or is about to occur. Where exposure to aggression and violence is a possibility, staff should be trained to recognise these indicators so that preventive actions can be implemented before situations get out of control.

These indicators can be classified as:

- behavioural
- known histories
- known high-risk situations.

Behavioural Indicators of Potential Aggression

Most communication is visual rather than verbal so changes in body language and behaviour are good indicators of how an individual is generally feeling. The eyes are particularly good indicators of mood.

In most cases there is a defined progression of behavioural changes from initial agitation through to increasingly aggressive behaviour (disruptive and destructive) and, finally, to violent acts. There is a progressive loss of behavioural control.

Agitation Indicators

Indicators of agitation include:

- increased body tension
- excitability
- reduced concentration/increased distraction
- fiddling with objects
- spontaneous emotions such as crying or laughing
- rocking, pacing and other repetitive movements
- wringing of hands, etc.

At this stage it is unusual for other people to be affected or involved.

Indicators of Aggression

Aggressive indicators include:

- verbal abuse (shouting, screaming)
- slamming doors
- banging objects
- annoying other people
- breaking things

- throwing things at inanimate objects
- ripping and tearing things
- overturning furniture
- thrashing around.

As these changes occur there is an increasing effect on any other people who may be present. Initially the behaviour is disruptive but will become increasingly destructive, often with inanimate objects being targeted first.

Indicators of Violence

Violent indicators include:

- cutting
- kicking
- scratching
- hitting/striking
- biting
- head-butting
- self-harm (head-banging, self-mutilation, etc)
- removal of medical aids, eg catheters, IV lines, etc
- use of missiles against other people (throwing things) or use of anything as a weapon.

If a situation has progressed to this stage there is a real possibility of actual bodily harm, which may result in serious injury or the death of any person present.

Known Histories of Aggression/Violence

Another important indicator is the known history of people likely to demonstrate aggressive or violent behaviour, particularly of any mental illnesses or injuries. The risks are easier to identify if the potential perpetrators are familiar to the workers.

In healthcare situations this would include knowledge of any medications and their side effects if these could cause this type of behaviour. Being able to identify possible aggressive or violent residents and their “triggers” is an important control measure.

Known High-risk Situations

There are some work situations that are especially associated with a risk of aggression and violence. These include:

- home visits to clients living in known high-risk areas
- work involving the issuing of fines or the handling of money, eg banking fees
- workplaces where controlled drugs are kept within the premises.

These work situations will particularly need to be considered in the risk assessment.

Examples of Control Measures

In a lot of cases, identifying where aggressive or violent situations could occur will go a long way to controlling and even eliminating the risks. This will also assist in determining appropriate control measures.

It is usually a combination of factors that result in a violence incident. The factors that a manager can influence include the level of training and information provided to staff, the working environment, and the design of the job. The way these factors work together to influence the risk of violence should therefore be considered.

Communication

Regular and clear information should be provided about what is going on, especially if there are any intended changes to work procedures or time delays in returning from a home visit.

Gathering of and acting upon available information is an important control measure, and may involve sharing information with other employers.

Vigilance

Being aware of what is going on around oneself is also very important. Mobile phones should be used discreetly when in public areas. Vigilance when placing valuables inside vehicles, even if they are placed out of sight, is a good idea.

Working in Pairs

In some situations, eg a home visit to a high-risk area, it may be appropriate for staff to work only in pairs. Maintain numbers of staff at the workplace to avoid a lone worker situation developing.

Work Environment

Changing the work environment can reduce the degree of risk resulting from aggressive or violent behaviour. Spacious, light, clean and comfortable surroundings may all have calming effects. Provide the public with more regular information about delays, and when they are due to be seen

Escape Routes and Alarm Points

There should always be an escape route from a place of danger so "dead end" areas should be avoided. High-risk areas should be fitted with call alarm points (panic buttons) so assistance can be immediately requested if a situation gets out of hand.

If such alarms are not available in every room for example in a healthcare setting, people with known aggressive or violent tendencies should be allocated rooms where the alarms are present. This is particularly the case if the service being offered requires staff to tend to such people in privacy.

Security

If money and/or controlled drugs are held on the premises, then security is also important. This may include:

- protective screen barriers
- intruder alarms
- CCTV
- Coded security locks on doors to keep the public out of staff areas
- Wider counters and raised floors on the staff side of the counter to give staff more protection

Removing Potential Weapons

In units specially designed to deal with individuals with severe problems, items that may be used as potential missiles must be removed or moved to a more secure location.

Removing potential missiles may affect other areas of health and safety and, if so, any associated risk assessments will need to be reviewed and revised. For example, portable fire extinguishers may be used as missiles or weapons and may need to be removed from normal locations in corridors, etc. The fire risk assessment should address this situation — other measures may be necessary to ensure acceptable fire safety standards are maintained.

Dealing with Aggressive or Violent Behaviour

Staff should be trained to recognise potentially aggressive or violent situations. Recognising the signs and dealing with the causes at an early point will usually prevent a situation getting worse. Often, people are just looking for attention and/or reassurance. Calming them, talking to them and trying to identify the causes of their concern are good starting points.

Providing staff with sufficient information will enable them to identify clients with a history of violence, or to anticipate factors that might make violence more likely - Check the credentials of clients and the place and arrangements for any meetings away from the workplace

Staff must be able to assess these situations in regard to their own safety, that of the perpetrator and anyone else who may be present, and take the appropriate action. Responding in a confrontational manner to aggression or violence should be avoided as such responses will inevitably cause the situation to deteriorate.

Staff also need to fully understand any system set up for their protection

In extreme situations, and as a last resort, some form of restraint may be necessary. This is a highly specialised area and requires specific training to minimise the possibility of injury to the person being restrained.

There are also training programmes for staff that teach self-help techniques to block certain physical attacks, eg arm grabbing, being struck, etc. Again, these are purely defensive

While the law allows people to exercise "reasonable force" to defend themselves, what actually constitutes "reasonable" is very much open to interpretation. It will be dependent on the particular circumstances of each situation.

Use of the 'council commitment' statement to help clarify the Council's position that violence/aggression is unacceptable. The statement should be prominently displayed in all areas to which the public has access or workplaces in which the potential for violence/aggression is considered to be high, and violence and aggression should be regularly discussed at team meetings.

[Click here to view the Council Commitment Statement.](#)

Examples of some of the issues to be considered are given below, although this list is neither definitive nor exhaustive:

- Pre-visit briefings to find out as much as possible about the customer and to identify high risks.
- Staff to notify the office or base of their movements and the time of return. Calling in on a regular basis if out of the office for long periods or visiting difficult clients.
- Visiting difficult customers with a colleague or inviting the client to the workplace.
- Wearing suitable clothing/footwear and carrying a personal alarm if necessary.
- Being aware of the premises to be visited and identifying who else may be resident, including animals, especially dogs.
- Using breakaway techniques to remove oneself from difficult situations.
- Having agreed codeword to use to summon assistance without alerting or alarming a potentially violent client.
- Ensuring can maintain contact with the office or base by carrying coins for telephone call/phone card/mobile phone.
- Having a clear procedure for dealing with customers apparently under the influence of drink or drugs, etc.

It should be noted that the threat of violence does not stop when the work period has ended. It is therefore good practice to make sure that, where staff are required to work late, they are able to get home safely. This may be by helping to arrange transport home or by ensuring a safe parking area is available.

A mixture of preventative measures often works best since concentrating on just one aspect of the problem is likely to make things worse in another aspect. An overview should be taken and the risks to staff should be balanced against any possible reaction of the public. An atmosphere that suggests that employees are worried about violence can sometimes increase its likelihood.

Staff are likely to be more committed to preventative measures if they are involved in identifying them and putting them into practice, since they will have personal ownership of them. It is therefore recommended that risk assessments be undertaken with either staff.



The commitment of the London Borough of Redbridge to the personal safety of staff

Our Staff are here to help you and will answer your enquiry courteously. However, the Council will **not** tolerate the behaviour of those few individuals who may become abusive.

Appropriate action will be taken to ensure the safety of staff.

Chief Executive London Borough of Redbridge