

VIOLENCE AND ABUSIVE OR THREATENING LANGUAGE AT WORK

1.0 VIOLENCE

It is recognised that aggressive situations can arise from time to time and that staff may find themselves in threatening or potentially violent situations. While physical violence at work from fellow employees is comparatively rare it does occur. The aggressive situation could also arise from an intruder in the premises or as a result of a vehicle incident whilst out on business.

Staff must not endanger themselves protecting goods or premises occupied or managed by Poole Housing Partnership Limited.

If threatened verbally or physically, try to stay calm and say or do nothing to exacerbate the situation. Be conciliatory and not aggressive, however, you should endeavour to protect yourself at all times, using the minimum force necessary.

If you feel yourself to be at risk, withdraw from the situation immediately.

If you believe in advance that there is a potential for danger, consider the available options

- Do not see a client / customer / supplier alone, take a companion.
- Meet in public or open areas if at all possible.
- Make sure that your 'escape route' is clear.
- Try to calm the situation by not returning verbal aggression.
- Try to recognise the danger signs and, if you feel that you are at risk, withdraw immediately.
- Report the incident to your manager.

2.0 ABUSIVE OR THREATENING LANGUAGE

Employees of Poole Housing Partnership Limited may be required to deal with complaints concerning various business issues and, on occasions, tempers run high and strong language may be heard.

- Staff should try to mollify the complainant and should, on no account, employ similar strong or abusive language.
- Abusive or threatening language is a form of violence and, if staff feel that the situation has become dangerous or intolerable, they should withdraw at once.
- Whilst on the telephone, if a level of abuse has been reached which is intolerable for you (and everyone's threshold of tolerance is different in this respect), you should say, "I am sorry but your language is offensive and, if you do not calm down, I will have to hang up" (or any similar, polite warning would do).

- If the abusive language continues after this warning, say, with apologies, that you are going to hang up - and do so.
- Always report these incidents, try and obtain the name of the complainant, and recall as much of the conversation as possible.

3.0 GENERAL

For a variety of reasons (e.g. embarrassment, guilt etc.) some employees may be reluctant to report incidents of aggressive behaviour which will make them feel threatened or worried. They may feel that accepting abuse is part of the job.

All incidents need to be reported so that effective controls and procedures can be implemented. Help your colleagues by always reporting incidents.

If you know that a particular individual can be intimidating or violent, make sure that everyone else who might have to deal with that person is aware of the potential danger too.

Dependent upon the severity of the incident, the following points will be considered:

- Debriefing - victims will need to talk through their experience as soon as possible after the event. Verbal abuse can be just as upsetting as a physical attack.
- Time off work - individuals will react differently and may need differing amounts of time to recover. In some circumstances they might need specialist counselling.
- Legal help - in serious cases legal help may be appropriate and police involvement may be necessary. Poole Housing Partnership Limited will seek legal advice from its lawyers concerning further actions to be taken.
- Other employees - may need guidance and/or training to help them to react appropriately.

4.0 SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

There are many different reasons that cause an individual to become aggressive. It is, therefore, most important to be able to recognise the development of potentially violent situations.

It is possible to detect, via significant behavioural and mood changes, when an individual is likely to become violent by their displaying the following manifestations of potential violence/aggression:

- Becoming tense and agitated.
- Raising their voice in pitch and volume.
- Replying to questions abruptly.
- Showing signs of facial muscular tensions.
- Closing their hands to a fist.

- Banging their fists into their palms or a counter/table.
- Resisting eye contact and refusing to co-operate in the interview.
- Demonstrating by general demeanour and body language uneasiness and a wish to intimidate, menace or embarrass.

5.0 REDUCING THE RISKS OF ASSAULT

Develop confidence

- but don't appear arrogant in the way you walk, talk and behave with people.
- confident people are less likely to be attacked.

Be prepared

- Keep in touch with staff, if working away from the office.
- Know where you are going, and how to get there.
- Tell people where you are going, when you will be back and if your arrangements change and make sure someone records it.
- Take a mobile phone, consider taking a personal attack alarm.

Trust your instincts

- Be aware of potential hazards and work out how you will deal with them.
- If you feel scared or uneasy act immediately, e.g. get out of the situation - you don't have to make excuses.

Communicate

- Talk your way out of problems, calm rather than provoke the aggressor.
- Speak confidently, gently, slowly and clearly.
- Don't show stress or fear in your voice or manner.

Show respect

- Don't invade someone's personal space by standing too close to or touching anyone.

When in danger

- Don't freeze, breathe out to release your tension.
- Get away fast and don't look back.
- If you can't get away, shout or scream something positive like "phone the police", which people will take seriously and respond to quickly.
- Use a personal attack alarm to shock or disorientate your assailant.
- Report the incident immediately.

6.0 DEALING WITH ABUSIVE OR AGGRESSIVE PEOPLE

You should be helpful, courteous and fair in all your personal contacts - both by telephone and face to face. An individual's previous treatment by others may have affected their attitude.

You should do all that you can to avoid situations which may give rise to violence - and defuse the anger of potentially violent people. No staff who feel threatened either physically or verbally is expected to deal with the situation single handed and, if necessary, should exercise their right to withdraw from any potentially dangerous situation. Only you can be the judge of determining if the situation is becoming threatening, if any doubt exists - leave.

- Don't react.
- Resist the urge to respond in the same manner.
- Stay calm; breathe slowly to control your own tension.
- Don't argue or try to outsmart the person.
- Adopt non-threatening behaviour.

Adopt a position in which it is difficult to be confronted, e.g. next to the aggressor rather than in front. Try to get them to sit down and sit at the same level.

- Speak gently, slowly and clearly.
- Avoid gestures or postures that could be interpreted as aggressive or patronising, e.g. hands on hips or folded arms.
- Focus attention on something other than yourself, e.g. a document.
- Keep your distance - do not touch the aggressor.

Talk through the problem

- Suggest things they could do immediately, e.g. sit down, and talk with another person.
- Negotiate a way of taking a break.
- Be prepared to meet them half way or offer them ways out of the situation. You may need to compromise.
- Look at people, show them that you are really listening to them. Their problems are important.

Be prepared

- While talking, assess how you could escape or summon help if the situation worsens.
- Try to prevent the aggressor blocking your escape route.
- Never turn your back - always move backwards or sideways.
- When using an interview room always position yourself close to the nearest means of escape.

7.0 OFFICE INTERVIEWS

Interviews should not extend beyond normal working hours, if necessary they should be terminated and rearranged.

Where an extension is unavoidable then arrangements for other staff to be present (with the capability of dealing with any situation that may arise) should be made.

Customers should not be taken through the Offices to use any rear exit unless absolutely necessary and then only when other staff are present.

8.0 INCIDENT REPORTING

Any incidents of aggressive behaviour, which makes an employee feel threatened or worried, must be officially reported, in the Accident/Incident Report at Appendix 1 or other format can be used. Where injury has occurred the Accident Book (BI510) must also be completed. Accepting abuse / violence “as part of the job” is not to be considered.

All incidents need to be recorded so that procedures can be reviewed or developed for staff protection. Help your colleagues by always reporting incidents.

If you know that a particular individual/group can be intimidating or violent, make sure that everyone else who might have to deal with the person/s are aware of the potential danger too.

Trust your instincts, if the situation doesn't feel right or safe, then don't stay.

Only you can be the judge of determining if any situation is becoming threatening. If any doubt exists - leave. Staff making such judgements will be fully supported by management.

9.0 LEGAL ASSISTANCE AND ADVICE

If the Police decide to prosecute no further legal action need be taken, however the victim should inform the Police that they are seeking damages. If the Police do not prosecute Poole Housing Partnership Limited will on the advice of its lawyers support the victim should they wish to take a civil action against the offender.

Poole Housing Partnership Limited's lawyer cannot act legally for the employee, however, they can advise on an external solicitor. Where circumstances dictate that pursuance of a civil claim may not be viable Poole Housing Partnership Limited will reserve the right to withdraw financial assistance. It will always remain the Employee's decision to pursue or withdraw a summons.