

Topic: Workplace Health & Safety

7.5 Direct Contact with Clients or Working with Unstable or Volatile Customers (Bill 168)

Board Motion Number:	20.113
Date of Original Board Motion Number:	June 18, 2012
Date of Current Issue:	November 24, 2020
Date of Next Review:	2021
Attachments:	

Signature of Board Chairperson (and Date): _____

Hazards:

Staff members who have direct contact with the public will encounter situations in which an individual may be agitated or angry with the potential for violence and threat to personal safety

Hazard Control:

1. Circulation area/Boardroom/Offices/Computer Area are visible and within hearing range of other workers.
2. The circulation desk and computer area shall be kept free and clear of sharp, heavy and dangerous objects that could be used to cause personal injury if thrown or used as a weapon.
3. Staff shall provide a welcome and friendly atmosphere through positive customer service techniques but also be aware that they do not have to tolerate behaviour that is disrespectful, demeaning or threatening. It is okay to calmly and confidently advise the person of the consequences if inappropriate behaviour persists. (Examples: "If you continue to speak to me in this way, you will need to leave and come back when you are calm and we will be happy to assist you" "Violent behaviour is unacceptable in our workplace and will not be tolerated".)
4. Staff are encouraged to summon assistance from coworkers or the CEO/Librarian if they are uncomfortable with a situation or if an individual is becoming increasingly agitated or aggressive.

5. The Confidential Code Word may be used to summon assistance. All staff have a responsibility to report any suspicious persons or activities to the CEO/Librarian. The CEO/Librarian has a responsibility to inform staff of specific high risk client situations or locations if applicable. (Refer to Volatile Client Procedures)

6. In circumstances where a situation is escalating to the point that violent behaviour is expected staff members shall immediately call 911 for assistance. The situation should be assessed to determine if the call should be made from a phone remote from the situation so as to not further aggravate the person.

Tips for Verbal Communication when dealing with a potentially violent person

- a. remain calm and focus your attention on the other person and listen carefully
- b. be conscious of how you are delivering your words (ie. speak clearly, calmly and quietly and keep language simple)
- c. remain open minded and objective
- d. encourage the person to talk
- e. acknowledge their feelings (ex. I can see you are upset)
- f. do not offer unsolicited advice or criticism
- g. do not confront, antagonize or challenge

Tips for Non-Verbal behaviour and communication

- a. keep posture relaxed with attentive expression
- b. arrange yourself so your exit is not blocked
- c. position yourself at a right angle to the person rather than directly in front
- d. give the person physical space (ex. 2 – 3 ft.)
- e. do not stand over them but get on their level
- f. do not point your finger, put your hands on your hips or cross your arms

Tips for Problem Solving

- a. put yourself in their shoes to better understand the problem
- b. ask for their recommendation, what are you requesting
- c. repeat back to the person what you feel he or she is asking of you, to clarify what you are hearing
- d. accept criticism in a positive way (when a complaint is true it is okay to acknowledge it – “you are probably right” or “this was our mistake”)
- e. be honest do not make false statements
- f. remain professional and be respectful, take the person seriously
- g. break an issue down into smaller steps
- h. be reassuring and offer options and choices
- i. keep the persons attention on the issue at hand

Responding to Abusive Phone Call

- a. interrupt the conversation firmly, but politely
- b. advise the caller that you will end the call if the caller does not stop using abusive language
- c. advise the CEO/Librarian of the incident
- d. if the caller calls back advise the caller that you will transfer the call to the CEO/Librarian.
- e. The CEO/Librarian should take appropriate action to resolve any misunderstanding and reinforce with the caller that abusive language or behaviour towards employees will not be tolerated
- f. note the exact wording of the abuse or threat and any characteristics that may identify the caller so an incident report can be filed and the police contacted if deemed necessary

Confidential Code Word

To alert other staff to a potential threat to personal safety a code word will be established and provided by the CEO/Librarian to staff under separate cover.

Training

Staff shall be familiar with Volatile Clients Policy and participate in available training.

Consequences of Non-Compliance:

Failure to comply with this policy may result in violence or harassment to Library staff. Staff who do not follow this policy are subject to the provisions of the disciplinary policy.