

HOW TO RECOGNIZE DIFFICULT, ANGRY OR ABUSIVE BEHAVIOR

Basic Understandings of Violence

- Anyone is capable of acts of violence
- Dangerousness is situational
- Never should a threat of harm be dismissed or discounted
- People who act always have an advantage over people who react

Preconditions for Violence

- A person has not developed the capacity for guilt and remorse, or it is temporarily suppressed.
- A person feels overwhelming and unacknowledged shame/humiliation
- A person feels there is no legitimate non-violent options to restore self-esteem
- A person has been strongly influenced by our patriarchal culture and view of masculinity

Signs of Getting Triggered

38% of communication is nonverbal

- Frowning
- Racing heart
- Agitated
- Loud
- Sweaty
- Changing facial expressions
- Lump in throat
- Stomach hurts
- Posture change

Reasons for Violent Situations

underlying emotion can be sadness or fear

- Kicked out of store, group, home, etc.
- Payment has been cut off
- Partner has left
- Person feels out of control
- Person is trying to control others
- Person is retaliating
- Person wants to be heard

Concerning

Behaviors of Concern

- Raised voice
- Physical Agitation
- Paranoid & Delusional
- Hopeless thoughts
- Erratic speech
- Raising a fist
- Not respecting personal space
- Discontinuing of service
- Drug and alcohol situations

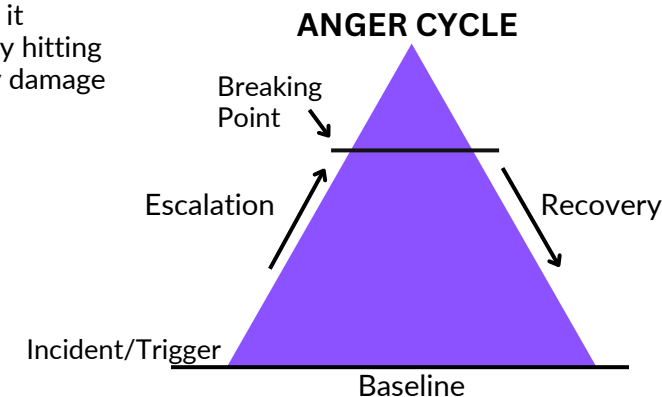
Threats

- Threatening personal safety
- Using words like: "you better," "or else," "you don't know me"
- Weapons involved

Serious

Assaults

- Taking personal property and breaking it
- Physically hitting
- Property damage



STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH DIFFICULT BEHAVIOR

→ First and foremost, listen.

Do not try to talk over the individual or argue with them. Let the individual have their say, even if you know that they are mistaken and don't have all the information, or you can anticipate what they are going to say next. As you listen, take the opportunity to build a rapport with them.

→ Build a rapport through empathy.

Put yourself in the individual's shoes. Echo the source of their frustration and show that you understand their position and situation. If you can empathize with an individual's problem, it will help calm them down. Here are some examples of empathetic statements:

- It is difficult when...
- It's stressful when...
- I wish it were different.
- I hear what you're saying.
- I'm sorry you had to deal with this.

→ Lower your voice.

If the individual gets louder, speak slowly, in a low tone. Your calm demeanor can carry over to them and help them to settle down. As you approach the situation with a calm, clear mind, unaffected by the individual's tone or volume, their anger will generally dissipate.

→ Respond as if all your Community Members are watching.

Pretend you are talking not only to one individual, but also to an audience that is watching the interaction. This shift in perspective can provide an emotional buffer if the client is being verbally abusive and will allow you to think more clearly when responding. Since an unruly client can be a negative referral, assume they'll repeat the conversation to other community members; this mindset can help you do your best to address their concerns in a calming way.

→ Stay Calm.

If the client is swearing or being verbally abusive, take a deep breath and continue as if you didn't hear them. Responding in kind will not solve anything, and it will usually escalate the situation. Instead, remind the client that you are there to help them and are their best chance of getting help to resolve the situation. This simple statement often helps defuse the situation.

→ Remember that you're interacting with a human.

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→ Don't take it personally.

Always speak to the issue at hand and do not get personal, even if the individual does. Remember that they are just venting frustration at you as a representative of your organization. Gently guide the conversation back to the issue and how you intend to resolve it.

→ Summarize the next steps.

At the end of the interaction, let the individual know exactly what to expect, and then be sure to follow through on your promises. Document the interaction to ensure you're well prepared for the next one.

→ If you promise a callback, call back!

Even if you promised an update that you don't have yet, call the individual at the scheduled time anyway. The individual will be reassured that you are not trying to dodge them and will appreciate the follow-up.

HOSTILE AND ABUSIVE BEHAVIOR

There is a difference between reasonable expressions of anger (angry behavior) which is short lived and not aimed at you personally, and unacceptable behavior that is hostile or abusive behavior. While you may tolerate some degree of angry behavior without being concerned, hostile and abusive is something you do not want to accept.

Hostile and abusive is intended, consciously or unconsciously, to have some or all of the following effects:

- Put you off balance
- Manipulate and control you
- Demean you in some way
- Cause you to feel guilty
- Intimidate you

It's this kind of behavior that causes the greatest amount of stress for people who serve different individuals, because it involves ranting, insulting, and using intimidation tactics. The primary goal, with abusive situations is to cause the abusive behavior to stop.

1. **Always maintain a polite and professional manner.** If you are sworn at or exposed to personal attacks on your character, resist the urge to react.
2. **Explain that you are there to help** and attempt to re-direct to the purpose of the visit/call, but if the individual uses foul language and/or threatens you, explain politely that you can go no further with the conversation.
3. **State that you do not have to tolerate being spoken to in such a manner** and warn them that you will end the conversation/call if they continue.
4. **Call a supervisor to assist the individual** or warm transfer a call to your supervisor or other support.
 - a. Use the phrase **"I am stuck at what to do next (sample phrase)"** to alert the supervisor or support that you are working with an abusive client before they arrive at the scene.
 - b. Use the same phrase during telephone call with a warm transfer which will allow you to speak to the supervisor or support and alert them that you are working with an abusive client before you press the transfer button and forward the call.
5. **Pull the duress alarm** if you feel physically threatened or hang up if a caller continues the abuse.
6. **Take care of yourself post-incident.** If you're feeling unsettled, take a 15-minute break and ask a colleague to cover for you.
7. **Complete an incident report** and submit it to your supervisor.