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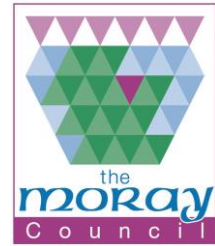
Health and Safety Guidance Note

Subject: **DEALING WITH WORK RELATED VIOLENCE**

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Part One: Procedures.

- 1.1 Definition of Violence.**
- 1.2 Range and Scope of this Document.**
- 1.3 Legal Framework and Context.**
- 1.4 Statement of Policy.**
- 1.5 Employee Support.**
- 1.6. Health and Safety Strategy.**
 - 1.6.1 Risk Assessment.
 - 1.6.2 Risk Management.
- 1.7 Post Incident Practices.**
- 1.8 Post Incident Procedures.**
 - 1.8.1 Police Involvement.
 - 1.8.2 Reporting Procedures.
 - 1.8.3 The Incident Report Form.
 - 1.8.4 The Accident Report Form
 - 1.8.5 The RIDDOR Report.
 - 1.8.6 Debriefing Meetings.
 - 1.8.7 Loss or Damage to Personal Property.
 - 1.8.8 Personal Injury - Employer's Liability.

Part Two: Guidance for Coping with Violence and Good Practice.

- 2.1 The Causes and Signs of Violent Behaviour.**
- 2.2 Communication Skills and Body Language.**
- 2.3 Coping with Non-physical Violence .**
- 2.4 Coping with Physical Violence.**
 - 2.4.1 Defusing the Situation.
 - 2.4.2 Getting Away.
 - 2.4.3 Defence.
- 2.5 Good Practice for Travelling.**
- 2.6 General Good Practice.**
- 2.7 Good Practice for On-Site Working.**
- 2.8 Good Practice for Late/Evening Work.**
- 2.9 Good Practice for Handling Money.**
- 2.10 Good Practice for Reception.**
- 2.11 Good Practice for Dealing with Dogs**
- 2.12 Anticipating and Assessing Violent Behaviour**

INTRODUCTION

Violent behaviour is an ever-present problem in today's society. It includes not only physical attack, but also verbal abuse and threatening behaviour. Council employees, no matter what their role, may have to deal with violent behaviour as a work hazard even where the level of risk is very small.

This guidance has been developed to help Council employees where possible avoid or at least minimise the effects of violent or aggressive acts perpetrated on them by members of the public. Violent or aggressive acts between Council employees or by Council employees, should be dealt with in line with The Moray Council's grievance and harassment policies.

The Moray Council has adopted the Health and Safety Executive definition of violence as: "Any incident in which an employee is abused, threatened or assaulted by a member of the public in circumstances arising out of the course of his or her employment". This definition includes actual or threatened assault, physical and verbal abuse or harassment, or any form of aggression which is experienced by the victim as distressing or intimidating. The Council acknowledges that no employee should have to work in fear of assault and takes a serious view of any incident of assault against its employees. It will fully support any employee who is assaulted or threatened in the course of their duties. However, employees who do not observe safe working procedures or deliberately put themselves or others at risk, then become a dangerous hazard within the workplace themselves.

Some types of work have very obvious personal safety hazards associated with them. For those that do not, staff should not assume that their jobs are hazard and risk free. For example, almost all jobs require people to get to and from a work place and there are hazards and risk associated with travelling. The most sophisticated policies and procedures for safety adopted by an organisation and practised by its members, cannot guarantee that a violent incident will never occur. This includes the possibility of aggressive or violent colleagues within the workplace. As such, these guidelines are given without prejudice and are directed at both managers and staff. Under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 everyone has a responsibility to themselves and others for safety at work.

This guidance has been produced in two parts, Part One 'Procedures' and Part Two 'Guidance for Coping with Violence and Good Practice', which is designed to complement the Council's training in this area.

1.1 Definition of Violence

"Any incident in which an employee is abused, threatened or assaulted by a member of the public in circumstances arising out of the course of his or her employment".

This definition includes actual or threatened assault, physical and verbal abuse or harassment, or any form of aggression which a person would feel was distressing or intimidating. As far as safety at work is concerned, violence is a broad term and perceptions of it will vary between victims and non-victims and people at higher risk and lower risk.

Violent Behaviour can be split into two categories:-

1. Physical Violence.
2. Non-Physical Violence.

Some examples of Physical Violence:-

- ◆ Kicking
- ◆ Biting
- ◆ Punching
- ◆ Scratching
- ◆ Spitting
- ◆ Head Butting
- ◆ Use of Weapons
- ◆ Use of Missiles
- ◆ Sexual Assault

Some examples of Non-Physical Violence:-

- ◆ Verbal Abuse
- ◆ Racial/Sexual Abuse
- ◆ Swearing
- ◆ Shouting
- ◆ Insults
- ◆ Deliberate Silence
- ◆ Threatening Gestures
- ◆ Abusive Phone Calls
- ◆ Threatening Use of Dogs
- ◆ Bullying
- ◆ Innuendo

1.2 Range and scope of this document

The procedures set out in this document relate to violence by service users or members of the public, against any member of staff arising out of the course of their work. Violence perpetrated by one employee upon another, whilst totally unacceptable, is not addressed in this document. Such matters may be dealt with using the Harassment, Discipline and Grievance Procedures. Damage to personal property and/or loss of possessions arising from violence against staff is dealt with separately in Section 1.8.7. Personal Injury/Employer Liability Issues are covered in Section 7.

1.3 Legal framework and context

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 and the accompanying Code of Practice give clear and detailed guidance:-

"Every employer shall make a suitable and sufficient assessment of the risks to the health and safety of his employees to which they are exposed whilst they are at work".

The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 further requires an employer, **"so far as is reasonably practicable"**, to provide a safe and healthy workplace, in particular:-

"the provision of such information, training and supervision as is necessary to ensure .. the health and safety of employees. (Section 2(2)(c))"

and

"the provision and maintenance of a working environment for ... employees that is ... safe, without risk to health, and adequate as regards facilities and arrangements for their welfare at work" (Section 2(2)(e)).

Chief Officers and Managers have a duty to take initiatives and develop safe practices; and with all staff to familiarise themselves with the relevant policies, procedures and instructions; to comply with agreed measures and to take all reasonable precautions for the safety of themselves and others.

1.4 Statement of policy and contents

The Moray Council is opposed to violence and aggression in any form. We will establish and promote practices that seek to minimise the potential risks of violence and aggression towards employees.

We aim to:

- ◆ ensure that incidents of violence or aggression are reported in order that high risk areas are identified and tackled
- ◆ achieve a level of understanding and awareness among managers and employees of the effects of violence and aggression
- ◆ offer appropriate support to employees who are involved in violent or aggressive incidents and recognise that employees who are victims of a violent or aggressive act may suffer from emotional and psychological trauma in addition to physical injuries

We are committed to reducing the number and severity of violent and aggressive incidents to employees and ensuring that employees are trained to handle difficult situations and customers.

1.5 Employee Support

Individual managers* should understand and accept their role in providing support to employees and should be sufficiently trained to do so.

The initial debriefing and support from their managers will be available to all employees who have been victims of a violent or aggressive act.

Further support, if required, will be made available from an Occupational Health Professional. This would involve referral to the Council's Occupational Health Adviser. The employee shall be granted reasonable time off work to attend such appointments.

Where absence from work arises from, or is relevant to a reported violent incident, then any such absence should be treated as special leave rather than sickness absence.

1.6 A Health and Safety Strategy

In accordance with its statutory duties and as part of its commitment to staff welfare, the Council will undertake *"a systematic general examination of all work activity and record the significant findings of that risk assessment"*.

1.6.1 Risk Assessment

In consultation with the relevant staff, Health & Safety Representatives and the Health and Safety Section, all managers must:-

- a) endeavour to identify the hazards present in any activity;
- b) evaluate the extent of the risks involved - taking into account any existing control measures;
- c) review risk assessments annually or, as and when working practices change.

The **risk assessment** should begin with a general overview of work activity and then focus on particular working practices and points of contact with the public. It needs to be thorough and comprehensive but the focus and setting should be local and specific i.e. in the context of each service, team or unit. It should consider all areas where staff and service users come into contact, and examine the environment, working practices, and the history of encounters with certain individuals.

For example:-

In relation to site visits, the assessment should examine the emotive potential of certain visits, the number of workers required, timing, contingency plans for breakaway and escape, check-in, search and rescue arrangements, and reporting procedures. In the context of safe visiting practices in general, the nature of risk related to certain individuals will then need to be considered.

Following a general risk assessment and local/specific ones, managers and staff must attempt all reasonable, practicable measures to reduce the risks identified.

Wherever risks are identified in general working practices or in office layout and design, there should be ongoing consultation and review of these risks. Any preventative or safety measures recommended or instituted should be based on a full consideration of the issues, advantages and disadvantages, and the feelings of the staff primarily affected.

1.6.2 Risk Management

When the risks have been identified and eliminated or minimised then the duty or operation should be carried out with regard to any remaining risk and using whatever measures and skills as are necessary to prevent or limit harm. Good Practice is about *Safety First Awareness, Communication Skills* and *Back-up contingencies*.

1.7 Post Incident Practices

Members of staff harmed physically or psychologically by violence, need support. Experience has shown that the immediate care and concern of colleagues and managers is much appreciated and may limit or even prevent altogether any serious long term effects. It is the duty of all staff and especially the immediate line manager to give, both in the short and medium term, whatever support appears necessary to a colleague who has experienced violence.

Such measures might include:-

- ◆ encouraging the person to seek medical attention or attend hospital;
- ◆ looking after the person's belongings or vehicle if they need to leave them behind
- ◆ contacting relatives or friends where necessary;
- ◆ allowing the person to talk about the incident as often and as long as they wish;
- ◆ acknowledging and respecting the person's feelings whether there be anger, fear, resentment or guilt;
- ◆ affording the person a private meeting to recount events from a personal perspective;
- ◆ reminding the person of the availability of counselling;
- ◆ demonstrating a team/shared concern for the person's welfare;
- ◆ being aware for any need for 'time out' either away from the scene of the incident or the perpetrator involved;
- ◆ maintaining supportive contact if the person is away from work for a while;
- ◆ taking a lead from the person concerned as to how they can best be helped to recover and return to normal functioning;
- ◆ advising the person to contact their appropriate trade union representative;
- ◆ AVOIDING ANY SUGGESTIONS OF BLAME.

1.8 Post Incident Procedures

It is important to support a colleague first and foremost. Later, but as soon as possible, the worker should be encouraged to begin the post-incident procedures.

These should include:-

- ◆ deciding whether or not to involve the Police. (In most cases of assault and injury, the involvement of the police is a minimum prerequisite of any eligibility for Criminal Injuries Compensation.)
- ◆ completion of the Incident Report Form.
- ◆ completion of the RIDDOR Report Form where the employee is absent for more than three days.
- ◆ a debriefing meeting to contribute to understanding and organisational learning rather than a meeting aimed primarily at giving support.

1.8.1 Police Involvement

The police exist to enforce the law and arrest criminals, not to settle disputes



The Police may be needed to further restrain any aggressors and restore order, or to receive reports of any offences committed. Staff need to have in mind exactly what they are asking the police to do. It is not appropriate to use the police simply as 'frighteners', although the police may consider a planned warning as the best strategy. The Department cannot be a complainer so the aggrieved staff member needs to be aware of whether he/she is acting as a worker or as an individual, and whether such action is to effect a change in the behaviour of the perpetrator or is a means of pursuing damages or compensation. The police have to assess the likelihood of successful prosecution and may decline to charge an individual. Such a decision would not necessarily affect any later civil action. The implications for a service user or other member of the public of a warning, prosecution and possible conviction should be a serious consideration when a staff member elects to make a complaint to the police. The staff member should be helped to make this decision but not be pressurised either way.

1.8.2 Reporting Procedures

These reporting procedures are important. The number of incidents reported has been very low, which suggests under reporting, consequently the serious matter of violence against staff may remain hidden and often underestimated. The reporting procedures enable:-

- i) accurate monitoring of the number of incidents;
- ii) monitoring of the nature and type of incidents (the risk);
- iii) a record/evidence for courts or tribunals;
- iv) an investigation from which managers and practitioners can learn.

1.8.3 The Incident Report Form

The Moray Council's Violence/Aggression/Harassment Incident Report Form is reproduced in Appendix 1. The purpose of the form is threefold:-

- ◆ to record the number and type of incidents in order to monitor and evaluate procedures and practice.
- ◆ to learn from experience and practice, and be able to make the necessary changes.
- ◆ to establish a record of the facts as a document of evidence which will inform and substantiate evidence at any subsequent criminal or civil proceedings.

The completion of the Incident Report Form should be done as soon as possible in order to achieve maximum accuracy. The process of completing the form combines the issues of support and enquiry and, as such, needs to be handled sensitively.

The appropriate manager should complete the Incident Report Form together with the staff member concerned, an informal debriefing will then take place, but the proper process of enquiry is best postponed whilst the staff member remains in any way distressed. The completed form should be returned to the Senior Health and Safety Advisor, via the appropriate Departmental Co-ordinator - each of whom should retain a copy. The manager should explain the dual purpose of the Incident Report and emphasise its importance as a tool for prevention, learning and change. This is a critical moment for staff who have been a victim of violence. Much underreporting is due to a number of common reasons, these include:-

Feelings of failure or errors of judgement:

Notwithstanding the most supportive responses from a manager and colleagues, and where the worker is totally blameless, there is much evidence that staff can engage in self recrimination after such incidents. Professional workers will naturally reflect on their actions and the outcomes of any particular decision or approach. Occasionally people judge themselves harshly.

The 'macho-culture syndrome':

Throughout the welfare professions there is a history of an organisational culture type which condemns, or appears to condemn, those who fail to keep up supposed professional standards which typically include-

- ◆ denying stress;
- ◆ being seen to be coping;
- ◆ being emotionally strong and tough;
- ◆ taking the bruises and complaints;
- ◆ managing excessive caseloads (treading water or keeping the lid on).

The 'macho-culture syndrome' - whether real or imagined - cannot cope with open admission of fear and anxiety. This culture pretends that all aspects of the work are manageable and that all service users can be 'controlled'. It is the culture which says "you must have done something wrong for X to act like that" or "It's not important, its

all part of the job". Dealing with an aggressive person may well be 'part of the job' but being threatened or assaulted is not. There may also be a feeling that any formal action would cause harm or unhelpful repercussions for the service user. Manager's and team members should try to counter any negative reactions or acceptance of violence by colleagues who are subject to it, by encouraging full reporting of incidents. The size of the problem can never be fully appreciated otherwise.

IT IS VITALLY IMPORTANT THAT ALL INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE ARE REPORTED:

- ◆ one experience might be minor and insignificant - the next one might be fatal.
- ◆ violence must be taken seriously and managed objectively.
- ◆ to report violence is not an emotive reaction - it should be seen as a professional preventative strategy.

Managers and teams must examine the culture in their workplace and ask whether their group is one that inhibits or enables the open expression of feelings and concerns following a violent incident.

1.8.4 The Internal Incident Report Form (SMS 8.1)

In addition to reports of accidents in general, the Incident Form must be completed in all cases of physical injury arising from violence to staff. The Incident Report Form is a report by a Line Manager who has thoroughly investigated the incident and should be sent to the Health and Safety Section, via the relevant Departmental Co-ordinator. This process is a key ingredient in the monitoring of violence against staff from a health and safety perspective. Should any civil proceedings, criminal injuries compensation or rights to sick-pay/benefits arising from a violent incident subsequently be contested, the Incident Form is a crucial document and forms part of the legal audit trail.

1.8.5 The RIDDOR Report

Under the Regulations for Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences 1995 (RIDDOR), employers and their representatives (i.e. senior officers and managers) are required to inform the Health and Safety Executive whenever an accident (including violent incidents) results in three or more days absence from work due to injury or stress-related illness. Note that serious injuries must also be reported immediately by phone to the Health and Safety Executive. Reports under RIDDOR are easily made by the web at: www.riddor.gov.uk or over the phone on 0845 300 9923.

1.8.6 Debriefing Meetings

The purpose of a debriefing meeting is to inquire into the facts of a violent incident and to determine what, if any, actions need to be taken. Post incident debriefings or meetings will inevitably require the key witness to be present and should, therefore, be conducted in a manner which acknowledges any enduring distress experienced by the worker concerned. It may be the case that the staff member who has been threatened or assaulted is not in a fit state to help with an early debriefing. Care and sensitivity will be needed. **The meeting should enquire into:-**

- ◆ the decisions made and events occurring prior to the incident;
- ◆ what happened and who did what to whom;
- ◆ what explanations, causes and triggers can be identified;

- ◆ what measures or events led to the end incident;
- ◆ what helped and what hindered;
- ◆ what needs to be done to prevent a recurrence.

The notions of responsibility, blame and guilt could easily surface in a debriefing meeting. The purpose of such a meeting is not to apportion blame. The full and accurate account of the worker concerned, together with their evaluations or suggestions can not be obtained if they feel that they are on trial. If there have been any mistakes, negligence or misconduct, then that is a matter for the Manager, and best dealt with in a later and differently constituted meeting.

1.8.7 Loss or Damage to Personal Property

Staff members who suffer loss or damage to their personal property whilst carrying out their duties, can make an insurance claim through the Council's insurers, for compensation in respect of damage to personal clothing or property, resulting from an assault occurring whilst at work.

1.8.8 Personal - Employer's Liability

The Moray Council maintains an "all duty" personal accident insurance policy to cover employees who may be injured whilst employed on Council business. The Council is also insured against findings of default and negligence arising from court proceedings under various employment and health and safety law, which may lead to a plaintiff being awarded compensation.

PART TWO -

GUIDELINES FOR DEALING WITH VIOLENCE AND GOOD PRACTICE FOR PERSONAL SAFETY

2.1 The Causes and Signs of Violent Behaviour

The most common causes of people becoming violent are:-

- ◆ Poor Service
- ◆ Frustration
- ◆ Drunkenness
- ◆ Drugs

The most common sorts of behaviour that can trigger aggressive/violent reactions:-

- ◆ Talking down to people
- ◆ Patronising people
- ◆ Telling people they are wrong to feel the way they do
- ◆ Being rude
- ◆ Standing on your official dignity
- ◆ Trivialising peoples concerns
- ◆ Using the wrong form of address or incorrect name
- ◆ Ridiculing
- ◆ Not listening and paying attention
- ◆ Using organisational and professional jargon
- ◆ Incorrect body language

Both verbal and non verbal communication can signal impending violence. Verbal threats or suggestions are readily recognised. Non-verbal signs are generally more common than verbal signs of impending violence, therefore recognising non-verbal signs of danger is very important. Examples include:

Verbal Signs

- ◆ Shouting
- ◆ Swearing
- ◆ Abusive comments
- ◆ Over sensitivity to ideas/suggestions
- ◆ Threatening comments
- ◆ Aggressive tone and language
- ◆ Unreasonable disagreement

2.2 Communication Skills and Body Language

The purpose of communication is the process of creating, transmitting and interpreting ideas, facts, options and feelings. However, there are many barriers to effective communication:-

- ◆ Accent
- ◆ Tone of voice
- ◆ Different language

Before we can communicate effectively, we must learn to listen and hear correctly. To listen, you have to:-

Concentrate: If people really want to be good listeners, they must, on occasion, force themselves to pay attention to the speaker. It is important not only to focus on the speaker, but to use non-verbal clues to let them know they are being heard.

Identifying What's Important: Listen to what someone is saying before drawing a premature conclusion. Question the speaker in a non-accusing manner to identify what they require.

Make Good Eye Contact: Use eye contact to keep the persons attention and show that you are actively listening to them.

Show Interest: Show through body language and good eye contact that you are interested in what the person has to say, also paraphrase back to that person to show that you have understood. Paraphrase means to tell the person what they have told you, but in your own words.

2.3 Coping with Non Physical Violence

In the event of being faced with abusive or threatening behaviour, you need to decide if you can handle the situation. You have other choices, you can seek help from others or exit the situation altogether. If you feel able to cope, there are two strategies that have proved successful.

Strategy 1: Control Trilogy is comprised of three steps; **calming, reaching** and **taking control**.

Step 1: Calming - taking the heat out

The purpose of this stage is to calm the situation and start positive dialogue with the abusive person. The key is to accept what is said to you without retaliation or response. Try to calm and relax yourself first, then concentrate on your verbal and non verbal communication, and pay special attention to the following:-

Voice - Steady and calm. Without appearing to talk down to them, speak gently, slowly and clearly maintaining an even tone and pitch.

Eyes - Make eye to eye contact, but be careful to avoid staring, this may be considered threatening and could trigger aggression in others.

Position - Do not adopt a position higher than the other person.

Face - Facial muscles relaxed. Nod your head to signal you are listening, attentive and are following the conversation

Posture - Do not stand with hands on hips, wave or fold your arms. These stances are interpreted as aggressive or defensive.

Space - Do not stand close. Give the other person plenty of personal space.

Listen - Pay attention to what they are saying and make sure they know you are doing so.

Talk - Try to get them to explain their problem and the basis of their grievance. When seeking further information/clarification, always use open ended questions.

Patience - Let the calming stage go on for long as is necessary for the other person to have their say. Now is not the time to try and draw conclusions or attempt to solve the problem.

Observe - Look for changes in the other persons behaviour, such as the lowering and steadying of voice and changes in posture and language.

Composure - Do not get drawn into an argument. This may easily escalate into confrontation.

Step 2: Reaching - building bridges

If you feel confident that the aggressive/abusive person has sufficiently calmed down, you can now begin to reach out and engineer the development of dialogue. Maintain your behaviour as in the calming stage but concentrate on developing interactions. These can be done by:-

- ◆ Repeating back to them what you believe they have said and what they want.
- ◆ Seek confirmation of the main points they have made.
- ◆ Confirm what action or assistance they require from you or the Council.
- ◆ Try to continue the conversation, sitting down if possible to try and further relax the situation.
- ◆ Smile when appropriate, but be careful not to give the impression that you find the situation funny.
- ◆ Empathise, don't patronise.
- ◆ When asking questions, explain why you need to know.
- ◆ Encourage them to ask questions or seek clarification or further information.
- ◆ Ask the customer or client, if they mind if you take notes, as an indication of the seriousness of your intent to help them.

Step 3: Taking Control - working together to achieve a solution

If you feel confident you have negotiated a satisfactory level of communication, now is the time to enter the Controlling Stage. This is designed to move you together toward resolving the problem in a controlled manner, (it is important to still maintain the behaviour of the calming and reaching steps). To achieve this resolution, the following approaches have proved useful when working with the other person as customer or client.

Set out what you need to achieve and by when ensuring that you have a common understanding. Establish reality - be clear and honest.

- ◆ Deal with complex issues, one at a time.
- ◆ Deal with the simple issues first. Resolving these demonstrates progress, then you can move onto the more complex aspects.
- ◆ Be honest about what is in your power to do or not do.
- ◆ Accept that the other person has their own point of view and has the right to be heard.
- ◆ If there have been failings, either by yourself or the Council as a whole - admit them.
- ◆ If the other person has made an error, be careful to avoid blaming them or making them appear foolish. Don't dwell on past failings, be positive and move on to the future.
- ◆ Use language and terminology the other person will understand. Avoid using jargon.

- ◆ Offer alternative solutions, but ensure they are realistic and go at least some way in meeting the other persons needs.
- ◆ If you cannot solve the problem yourself, refer it to others, but only to those who you know can offer help or advice. Make sure you let the other person know what you are doing and that you pass all the relevant details to those you are referring the issue to.
- ◆ Do not rush - make time to handle the situation.
- ◆ Acknowledge progress and the other person's part and co-operation in making it.
- ◆ Arrange a date, time and place for further meetings if the problem cannot be dealt with in its entirety there and then. Agree what each of you will do before each subsequent meeting or contact, and review progress afterwards.

Summary

This approach is designed to help you think through the progress of dealing with an abusive/aggressive person and build up the necessary skills to successfully manage the situation whilst keeping safe yourself. But remember that it's not easy and requires time, thought, patience and practice. It is also important to remember that you may not be able to complete all three steps. At any time the aggression could be inadvertently triggered off again and you may find that you have to revert back to the calming stage to salvage the situation. Likewise, you have the choice to stop the process at any time you like if you feel at risk or need to get help. Remember that the process is not foolproof and is unlikely to succeed when dealing with abusive/threatening people who are ill, or under the influence of drink or drugs.

Strategy 2: Confrontation Control consists of six steps -

Step 1: Positive Approach - Introduce yourself, smile, shake hands, do not fold your arms.

Step 2: Private Place - Suggest you move away to a quiet area such as an interview room. This shows caring and consideration.

Step 3: Prepare to Listen - Do not interrupt the client. Withhold all judgements temporarily and give the client your individual attention. Confirm your understanding by nodding. Don't send out negative signals such as shaking your head.

Step 4: Repeat and Emphasise - Confirm your understanding of the clients concerns or request and relay the facts back to the client for confirmation.

Step 5: Offer Options - Provide the client with the various options open to them, within your operational guidelines. If you can't give them exactly what they want, help them find a reasonable alternative and be positive. The decision becomes the client's and they should feel in control.

Step 6: Reconciliation - If the client does not agree any solution then repeat the position calmly and clearly. If the client insists that no reasonable solution can be reached then repeat again what you have previously said. Continue this approach until the client agrees to a reasonable solution or until you are convinced that no progress can be made. If necessary terminate the interview and advise the client that you will have to consult a superior and arrange to meet again.

2.4 Coping with Violent Situations

The chances of physical attacks on the average person is one in a hundred years, but remember many staff are in a relatively high risk category.

If you are facing a physical attack, there are three options:-

- ◆ DEFUSING THE SITUATION
- ◆ GETTING AWAY - ESCAPING FROM THE SITUATION AT THE FIRST SUGGESTION OF VIOLENCE
- ◆ DEFENCE - TO GET FREE TO ESCAPE

2.4.1 Defusing the Situation

This may not be a realistic option if the attacker is determined on assaulting you. However, many attackers are only driven to violence as a means to obtaining what they want. You could try an approach to defuse the immediate circumstances and then get away.

There are 3 general approaches:-

1. *Try and buy time by calming the attacker.*

(By talking or asking questions whilst staying calm yourself.)

2. *Refuse to be intimidated.*

(Speak clearly and show confidence.)

3. *Give in.*

(Hand over whatever they want. Don't worry about handing over your employer's property.)

2.4.2 Getting Away

Running away is very often the best form of defence. However, it's often more difficult than it sounds. The effect of a surprise attack can be a shock that can immobilise you and once you have recovered the chance to run has been lost. It is worth thinking through how to react in such a situation. There are a number of fairly simple things you can do to make it easier to get away if you need to:-

- ◆ Wear appropriate shoes that you can run in.
- ◆ Wear appropriate clothes that allow you to move easily.
- ◆ Keep your eyes open in whatever environment that you are in. Memorise exits, escape routes and places where there will be other people.
- ◆ Use a personal alarm. But remember to keep it handy.
- ◆ Scream and shout. Shout something like 'Police' rather than 'Help' which may be interpreted as larking about.
- ◆ Leave belongings. Do not try to take them all with you if you run, as this will hinder you.

2.4.3 Defence

Physical restraint should only be used in self-defence when it is impossible to back off, or in the defence of others who are under attack. It is lawful in these circumstances for a person to use force in self-defence provided that it is reasonable. This immediately raises the question "what is reasonable"? The best guide to follow is that physical restraint should be the least force sufficient to restrain the person and avoid injury. Try to restrain a person by holding the arms or legs. Try to avoid contact with the sexual areas of the body or interfering with breathing. If it is impossible to avoid attack then the Council will support any member of staff who, in the course of work, takes such measures as are reasonably necessary in the circumstances to ensure their own protection or that of a colleague.

There are a number of legal pointers you must bear in mind if you choose to pursue this option, which you must always remember is a last resort.

- ◆ You can defend yourself but may only do what is reasonable in the circumstances. You cannot extract revenge.
- ◆ You may use reasonable force to defend your property.
- ◆ You may use reasonable force to detain an attacker until help/police arrive.
- ◆ You may decide to make use of an object which you have with you or that is lying around, however you must consider whether its use in the circumstances is reasonable..
- ◆ You cannot carry an offensive weapon in a public place even if it is for defence.

If you do momentarily disable your attacker - run away as fast as you can.

Don't stop to see what you have done. Go to where there are people and call the police.

Remember - if you do decide to fight back you may face the possibility of prosecution for assault, so make notes of the whole incident as soon as possible afterwards. If you train in self defence this raises further issues:-

- ◆ It will be assumed that your training will ensure the minimum use of force.
- ◆ It can lead to a false sense of security and over confidence.
- ◆ It is not effective unless it is practised regularly.
- ◆ It inevitably leads to injury - an outcome where there is no injury to either party is better.

2.5 Good practice for travelling

On foot

- ◆ Plan to travel in daylight where possible, or accompanied at night.
- ◆ Let colleagues know your destination, route and estimated time of arrival.
- ◆ Do not take short cuts, familiarise yourself with your route.
- ◆ Think ahead, be alert and aware of your surroundings.
- ◆ Keep to busy well lit roads.
- ◆ Carry an alarm in your hand or in an accessible pocket.
- ◆ Carry a mobile phone with speed dial and change for public phones.
- ◆ Do not wear a personal stereo.
- ◆ Avoid being overburdened with bags and belongings.
- ◆ Wear appropriate clothes and shoes in case you need to run.

- ◆ When travelling don't be tempted to take shortcuts down alleys, subways or unlit areas.
- ◆ Look and move confidently, avoid stopping to check maps or ask directions.
- ◆ Face oncoming traffic and don't accept lifts from strangers.
- ◆ Cross over the road and/or change direction if you feel uneasy.
- ◆ Look out for possible safe havens and places to raise the alarm.
- ◆ Go straight to your destination, if this is home then have your keys ready.
- ◆ Let your Line Manager or colleagues know that you have arrived safely.

Within Client Premises

- ◆ If you have not previously met the client find out as much as possible about them by asking colleagues and checking files.
- ◆ If a client has displayed violent behaviour this must be recorded on a Council Incident Report form with a copy placed on all relevant files and colleagues informed.
- ◆ Consider the type of visit you are making and the likely reaction of the client, then decide if the meeting should take place in your own office or a visit made with a colleague.
- ◆ Consider whether you need to enter the premises and/or if you do should have a colleague accompany you inside or remain outside with a phone.
- ◆ Telephone the client to confirm the appointment and directions.
- ◆ Leave a note of your intended destination, estimated time of departure off site and your return time to the office or home, to comply with your Team check-in arrangements.
- ◆ Let your Line Manager or colleagues know that you have arrived home safely.
- ◆ Do not accept sudden changes of venue without verifying authenticity.
- ◆ Think about how you will approach the premises and look out for possibly nearby safe havens.
- ◆ If necessary travel in pairs.
- ◆ Don't enter if you feel uneasy.
- ◆ Request that animals are tethered and kept out of reach before entering.
- ◆ Look, sound and move confidently.
- ◆ Always check in and out of reception so your presence is known on site.
- ◆ Be prepared to adjourn a visit if it is or could become violent.
- ◆ Observe your surroundings and look for possible means of escape.
- ◆ Try to reach workable compromises rather than insist on your own way.
- ◆ Inform your office/home you are leaving and your estimated time of arrival back.

Private Car

- ◆ Keep your car in good working order - check petrol, oil and water levels and tyre pressures including the spare.
- ◆ If necessary carry extra petrol in an approved petrol container.
- ◆ Carry a tool kit including a torch and a first aid kit.
- ◆ Know how to and practice changing a wheel.
- ◆ Be a member of a breakdown rescue organisation.
- ◆ Plan outward and return routes and times and ensure that your Line Manager or colleagues have copies.
- ◆ Always have the necessary directions so you don't have to stop.
- ◆ Make sure you have a mobile phone and change for a public phone.
- ◆ Check road and weather conditions before setting out on a long journey.
- ◆ Before you get in the car, check the back seat.
- ◆ Keep doors locked and windows closed.
- ◆ Always lock anything valuable in the boot or remove it from the car completely.
- ◆ Lock your car even if you leave it for a minute.
- ◆ Do not deviate from your route without letting your Line Manager or colleagues know your revised plan.
- ◆ Avoid taking people in your car unless they are well known to you.
- ◆ Do not pick up hitchhikers.
- ◆ In the event of a breakdown contact your office and your breakdown service, do not accept help from anyone else.
- ◆ If you and your stationary vehicle are approached get inside, lock doors and close the windows, if necessary only open the drivers window an inch.
- ◆ When you park in daylight, think what it will be like at night.
- ◆ Try to park in a well lit, official car park and reverse into your space.
- ◆ Don't park facing the dead end in a cul-de-sac.
- ◆ At night, park in a busy, well lit place.
- ◆ Keep keys handy for a quick exit.
- ◆ Report any incidents to your Line Manager promptly, including near miss events.

Taxis

- ◆ Always to use a licensed taxi, look for the local authority license plate.
- ◆ You can arrange for a taxi to wait for your return and to follow you along or across the site area.
- ◆ When requesting a taxi, ask for the driver's name and car details.
- ◆ Ask to see the driver's badge and note the cab license number.
- ◆ If you chat with the driver don't give any personal details.
- ◆ If you feel uneasy with the driver, stop at a busy familiar place and get out.
- ◆ Always sit in the back.
- ◆ Tell colleagues which taxi company you phoned and details of your journey.
- ◆ Give your manager details of your intended destination and timetable.

Public transport

- ◆ Check timetables and destinations.
- ◆ Keep bags/luggage to a minimum.
- ◆ Avoid long scarves and keep visible jewelry to a minimum.
- ◆ If driving to a rail/bus station park with the return journey in mind - time of day.
- ◆ Ensure your manager or colleagues know your plans and timetable.
- ◆ Wait for the bus at a well lit bus stop.
- ◆ Have your fare ready, but separate from your other money and valuables.
- ◆ Try to sit near the driver and stay downstairs on the bus.
- ◆ Try to sit on the outside seat near the aisle.
- ◆ Know the emergency procedure on the train.
- ◆ Try not to sit in an empty carriage.
- ◆ Move to an alternative seat or be prepared to get off if you feel uncomfortable.
- ◆ Wear appropriate shoes in case you need to run.
- ◆ Carry a personal alarm in your hand or in an accessible pocket.
- ◆ Don't get into personal conversations with strangers and avoid careless talk if travelling with others.
- ◆ Do not agree to mind other peoples luggage or carry other peoples packages.
- ◆ Do not go to sleep.
- ◆ Avoid travelling alone at night on any form of public transport.
- ◆ Try to be met if possible.
- ◆ Do not linger at the bus stop or railway station.
- ◆ Keep to well lit areas.
- ◆ Have vehicle/house keys ready.
- ◆ Report incidents promptly to your manager
- ◆ Ensure completion of the 'Incident Report Form' - this information contributes directly to the development of safe practice, guidance and training.

2.6 General good practice.

- ◆ Never assume that it won't happen to you, think situations through and be prepared.
- ◆ Consider your means of escape.
- ◆ Never give your home address or telephone number.
- ◆ Always try to stay calm and relaxed.
- ◆ Look and sound confident, move confidently and be assertive.
- ◆ Do not arrange to meet anyone when you are alone in a building.
- ◆ If clients have to wait, ensure the client knows when they are likely to be seen.
- ◆ Don't blind clients with science - use language they can understand.
- ◆ Don't be condescending or talk down to clients.
- ◆ Try to understand the client's feelings over issues - don't be dismissive.
- ◆ If you expect an interview to be difficult, do it at a time when you are at your best.
- ◆ Don't make promises you cannot keep.

- ◆ Avoid tapping pens, rolling your eyes and generally showing impatience.
- ◆ Never get drawn into aggression.
- ◆ Speak to the client as you would wish to be spoken to.
- ◆ Try to solve problems immediately if only minor ones, to demonstrate you are trying to find a solution - don't pass a client from one department to another without checking that you are sending them to the correct place.
- ◆ If necessary travel, visit or interview with a colleague.
- ◆ Keep your Line Manager and colleagues informed, particularly if you change your plans.
- ◆ Carry a personal alarm.
- ◆ Get away from real danger.
- ◆ Take note of your natural instincts.

2.7 Good practice for site working

Remember the potential for violence may depend on why you are there. One of the triggers of violent behaviour is when people feel there is an intrusion into their private life and that they will suffer detriment as a result. Before leaving work make sure others know where you are going, what your plans are and when you expect to finish. Also:-

- ◆ Go in daylight if possible.
- ◆ If a stranger rings to arrange a meeting, call back to check on and copy details.
- ◆ If you feel concerned arrange to meet in your own office during normal hours.
- ◆ If you are arranging to meet any client on site, check them out first.
- ◆ Take only what is essential to the site.
- ◆ Ask for identification where applicable.
- ◆ Make sure that it is understood why you are there.
- ◆ If possible, place yourself with a clear line of exit.
- ◆ If you get a hostile reception consider leaving immediately.
- ◆ If you feel at risk, leave as quickly as possible.

2.8 Good practice for late evening working

- ◆ Do not work late evenings unless it is essential to do so.
- ◆ Rearrange working to normal work times or weekends if possible.
- ◆ Ensure that your manager knows who is working late and for how long.
- ◆ If you have a programmed series of visits, advise and liaise with your manager and follow your own office check-in arrangements.
- ◆ Make sure colleagues are aware of any callers that are expected.
- ◆ Arrange travel home in advance, and advise contact officers of your safe arrival.
- ◆ Ensure that a member of your family or friends know that you are working late.

2.9 Good practice in handling money

- ◆ Ensure that staff are aware that their priority is to keep themselves safe, not their own valuables or Moray Council property.
- ◆ Issue personal alarms to staff moving money and advise on their proper use.

- ◆ Restrict information on when, how and by whom money is moved.
- ◆ Where practicable, send more than one person.
- ◆ Think about how money is best moved.
- ◆ Vary the times and routes of moving money.

2.10 Good practice for reception

- ◆ Use wide counters so that staff can avoid being reached.
- ◆ . Where fitted, staff should be aware of panic buttons and how/when to use them. Ensure that the panic buttons are unobstructed,
- ◆ Organise the reception layout so that reception staff are visible to other staff.
- ◆ Ensure that the layout does not create hiding places for potential assailants.
- ◆ Ensure that alternative escape routes are kept clear.
- ◆ Ensure reception staff are notified by other employees of expected visitors.
- ◆ Ensure that there is a good view of the entrance, if not provide mirrors.

2.11 Good practice for dealing with dogs

Dogs, large or small, can be very frightening. There may be instances where a client or a member of the public will encourage their dog to behave aggressively towards you.

You would find it difficult to interview a client where a large dog is constantly growling and the dog is not restrained by the owner. In such cases, the dog is being used as a threat against you.

In situations like this, ask the client or member of the public to control the dog or move the animal to another room. If they refuse, speed up the interview, but do not create further conflict. Arrange another meeting, insisting that this takes place at your office. If you know in advance that you have to contend with a ferocious dog, tell your manager and agree a strategy.

If you come into contact with a dog whilst carrying out your duties, the following information is designed to assist you in understanding a dog's behaviour towards strangers when on its own ground. There is, of course, neither a simple answer nor a set formula to solve the problems of the unfriendly dog, but all dogs tend to conform to predictable rules of behaviour. When you are faced with a difficult situation, this knowledge could assist you in avoiding trouble.

Even friendly dogs will bark at you, as it is their job to defend their territory. Talk to the dog in a firm but quiet voice and if it approaches in a friendly way, no snarl or hackles up, stand still so that it can sniff you. Many dogs will respond by wagging their tails, but do not be too friendly.

As you approach a dog, observe how it reacts to you. If it stays put or backs off, it probably regards you as a dominant intruder and so will be too scared to attack. If it walks or runs towards you with his tail wagging in a low position it is probably friendly and unlikely to bite. If it stiffens up, holds its tail high, snarls and stares at you then be on your guard. If it shows its teeth it may be safer to go no further, but don't turn and run - back away slowly. Never stare at a dog, staring is a threat and a dog may read

it as a challenge and attack you. Never run past a strange dog, or walk quickly away from it. This may release its chase response and you may get bitten as a result. Always walk slowly, even backwards facing the dog, if you feel it may chase you. Don't forget, many occasional visitors get bitten as they are leaving a house. Remember the golden rule, if in doubt back away slowly, keeping the dog in your sight at all times. Try to avoid showing any fear. A dog can read fear in your eyes and body movements. Keep calm, walk slowly and speak firmly to it.

Dogs rarely attack, so do not be overanxious about every dog you meet. Most are scared about getting into a fight but like to act tough on their own territory. Do not ignore dogs but behave in a friendly and confident way at all times. You will then lessen the dogs own fear.

2.12 Anticipating and assessing violent behaviour

Forewarned is forearmed, so if you plan ahead you may be able to anticipate situations that might bring you into contact with violence, and then consider ways of either avoiding them or dealing with them. You can make a start by carrying out some basic risk assessment.

Assessing the risk

Make a mental note or written list of the following:-

- 1) The situations you face at home, socially or at work where you are most likely to encounter aggression or violence.
- 2) The people you deal with who are most likely to become aggressive or violent and the reasons why.
- 3) The occasions when you feel most vulnerable or uneasy.

Now consider the answers to some of these questions:

- ◆ Does anyone know where you are?
- ◆ If you change your plans, do you inform people?
- ◆ Do you check or vet people you go to meet alone?
- ◆ Can you be contacted?
- ◆ Is there a check-in system, and do you use it?
- ◆ Do you think about where you park - is it safe?
- ◆ Do you use the quickest route?
- ◆ If you carry money or valuables, do you really need to?
- ◆ Are you ever alone at work?
- ◆ Are you properly protected from potential assailants?
- ◆ Do you carry a personal alarm?

There is a lot more to formal team based risk assessment, but as individuals answering some or all of the above questions you can help to plan for your own personal safety.

Reducing the risk

To help reduce the level of risk you need to ask yourself:-

- 1) Am I the most appropriate person to deal with the situation or should it be referred?
- 2) Is the timing right or should it be deferred to a more advantageous time?
- 3) Can I deal with the client in a way that will not incite violent behaviour?
- 4) Can I choose a solution that will avoid contact with a potentially violent client?

It may not be possible to eliminate completely the risk of violent behaviour but you may be able to reduce it significantly by considering how to deal with other people and your own behaviour.

The client's behaviour

Use your observation and listening skills to monitor the client's behaviour, particularly for changes in behaviour. Observe their facial expression, posture, stance and how they use their limbs. Listen to the tone of their voice. Listen also to the words and phrases they use to detect signs of different emotions. In particular, listen and look for signs that they are moving towards or away from an aggressive state of mind.

Your behaviour

It is important that your behaviour does not provoke aggression and violence in others, or adversely influence an existing volatile situation. Monitor your own verbal and non-verbal behaviour in the same way that you monitor the behaviour of clients. Reflect afterwards on your own behaviour to identify any lessons for the future. Behave assertively, look confident, sound confident and move confidently. Aggressive or submissive behaviour on your part may provoke or maintain aggression in others.

Recognising signs of aggression

Learn to recognise the early warning signs and how to use your own body language and voice to help defuse rather than trigger or escalate violent behaviour in others. These signs include:

1) Facial expressions -

- ◆ Aggressive staring without blinking
- ◆ Clenched teeth
- ◆ False or sarcastic smile

2) Hands, arms and gestures -

- ◆ Tightly folded arms
- ◆ Pointing or wagging fingers
- ◆ Clenched fist

3) Body stance -

- ◆ Standing too close in an intimidating or boxer like stance
- ◆ Moving back and forth

4) Vocal style -

- ◆ Pitch of voice being raised or made low and menacing
- ◆ Nervous, staccato speech

- ◆ Emotive language

Using body language to avoid aggression

- ◆ Don't mirror your aggressor's body language
- ◆ Try to appear calm, relaxed, open and confident
- ◆ Show you care and are interested

Expressions, eyes, head and facial movement

- ◆ Maintain eye contact but don't out stare an aggressor
- ◆ Tilt your head slightly to one side

- ◆ Nod at appropriate points to show that you are listening

Hand and arm positions and gestures

- ◆ Keep your arms uncrossed and relaxed
- ◆ Hands, on hips, in pockets or fidgeting may suggest anger, impatience or fear
- ◆ Don't point your finger at or touch an aggressor

Body stance and leg position

- ◆ Keep your distance and don't enter an aggressor's personal space
- ◆ Stand slightly side on
- ◆ Try not to tense up
- ◆ Avoid rocking on your feet
- ◆ Don't turn your back on an aggressor

Vocal style

- ◆ Talk calmly, gently and at a moderate speed
- ◆ Don't shout or raise your voice
- ◆ Pause before you speak to help lower the emotional temperature

Handling skills

- ◆ Don't meet aggression with aggression
- ◆ Introduce yourself and politely ask the aggressor's name
- ◆ Move to a quiet spot but not out of sight or sound of assistance
- ◆ Ask them to explain so you can understand, this may subconsciously flatter
- ◆ Allow the aggressor time to let off steam and get their complaint into the open before replying
- ◆ Show an aggressor that they have your attention and demonstrate concern
- ◆ Use confirming noises or words to show that you are listening
- ◆ Don't interrupt or make excuses
- ◆ Try to see things from their point of view and apologise for inconveniencing them
- ◆ Remain calm and don't take abuse personally
- ◆ Ask open questions to establish the facts
- ◆ Don't belittle, patronise, show subservience or hide behind authority
- ◆ Don't dwell on symptoms, get to the root of the problem to find a solution
- ◆ Empathise to let the aggressor know that you understand how they feel

7-20-25

- ◆ Consult them on what they consider to be acceptable solutions
- ◆ Try to compromise to create a win/win situation
- ◆ Settle the matter at the time if you can, if you can't, then reassure the aggressor that another named officer will try to resolve the issue as soon as possible.
- ◆ Take the aggressor's details and contact them as soon as you have sought advice

Further Assistance:

Advice and assistance in Health, Safety and Welfare issues is available from the Health and Safety Section, telephone number 01343 56 3178 or e-mail safetyadviser@moray.gov.uk

Related Legislation:

Health and Safety at Work Act 1974

Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999

HSE Sources: www.hse.gov.uk

L21 Management of Health and Safety at Work

HSG229 Work Related Violence

[INDG69 Violence at Work](#)

Associated Documents:

TMC SMS5.7 Lone working, procedure

TMC SMS5.17 Work Related Violence, procedure

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