



Government of **Western Australia**  
Department of **Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety**

CODE OF PRACTICE  
Violence and aggression  
at work



**COSH**  
COMMISSION FOR OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH





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Department of **Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety**

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# Violence and aggression at work



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# Foreword

This code of practice is issued by the Commission for Occupational Safety and Health (the Commission), under provisions of the *Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984* (OSH Act). The Commission comprises representatives of employers, unions and government, as well as experts, and has the function of developing the occupational safety and health legislation and supporting guidance material, and making recommendations to the Minister for their implementation. To fulfil its functions, the Commission is empowered to establish advisory committees, hold public inquiries and publish and disseminate information.

The Commission's objective is to promote comprehensive and practical preventive strategies that improve the working environment of Western Australians. This code of practice has been developed through a tripartite consultative process and the views of employers and unions, along with those of government and experts have been considered.

## Legislative framework for occupational safety and health

### *Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984*

The OSH Act provides for the promotion, coordination, administration and enforcement of occupational safety and health in Western Australia. With the objective of preventing work-related injuries and diseases, the OSH Act places certain duties on employers, self-employed people, workers and others. These broad duties are supported by further legislation, commonly referred to as regulations, together with non-statutory codes of practice and guides.

### *Occupational Safety and Health Regulations 1996*

The Occupational Safety and Health Regulations 1996 (OSH Regulations) set out specific requirements of the legislation. They prescribe minimum standards and have a general application, or define specific requirements related to a particular hazard or type of work. They may allow licensing or granting of approvals and certificates.

If there is a regulation about a risk in the OSH Regulations, it must be complied with.

### *Codes of practice published under the OSH Act*

Codes of practice published under the OSH Act provide practical guidance on how to comply with a general duty or specific duties under the legislation. Codes of practice may contain explanatory information. However, the preventive strategies outlined do not represent the only acceptable means of achieving a certain standard.

A code of practice does not have the same legal force as a regulation and is not sufficient reason, of itself, for prosecution under the legislation, but it may be used by courts as a standard when assessing other methods or practices used.

If there is a code of practice about a risk, either:

- do what the code of practice says, or
- adopt and follow another way that gives the same level of protection against the risk.

If there is no regulation or code of practice about a risk, choose an appropriate way and take reasonable precautions and exercise proper diligence to ensure obligations are met.

*Note: There may be additional risks at the workplace not specifically addressed in this code of practice. The OSH Act requires identification and assessment of them and implementation of control measures to prevent or minimise risk.*

## Scope

This code of practice focuses on the general principles applied to the prevention and management of violence and aggression in the workplace. The intent of this code is to provide practical guidance for workplaces where people may be exposed to various forms of violence and aggression at work, including physical assault, sexual assault, verbal abuse, threats, intimidation and harassment, including sexual harassment.

This code of practice is primarily concerned with managing violence and aggression from external parties such as customers, clients, patients and students. For guidance on managing violence and aggression and other inappropriate and unreasonable behaviour between workers, see the Workplace behaviour code of practice.

The guidance in this code of practice should be considered in conjunction with the general duties in the OSH Act, the *Workplace behaviour code of practice* and the *Psychosocial hazards in the workplace code of practice*.

## Who should use this code of practice?

Everyone who has a duty to prevent, so as far as practicable, hazards at workplaces should use this code. This includes employers, employees, self-employed people, safety and health representatives and safety and health committees.

This code is intended to be read by employers who have a primary duty of care to provide and maintain a work environment without risks to safety and health under the OSH Act. Health includes both physical and psychological health.

It provides practical guidance on the processes an employer could use to identify and manage violence and aggression at work. You should use this code of practice if you have functions or responsibilities that involve managing, so far as is reasonably practicable, hazards and risks to psychological and physical safety and health at work.

The code may also be a useful reference for other persons interested in complying with the duties under the OSH Act and OSH Regulations.

## Using this code of practice

The terms used in this code of practice are intended to have a broad and flexible application for use across all Western Australian workplaces covered by the OSH Act.

Violence and aggression are present in situations where workers and other people are threatened, attacked or assaulted at work. All forms of workplace violence and aggression are serious work safety and health issues which can impact on a worker's physical and psychological safety and health. This code of practice is designed to help employers and workers to identify and manage behaviour that creates a risk of harm to health at the workplace.

Managing violence and aggression in the workplace can be challenging because of the complex interplay and changing nature of risks. The code of practice provides high-level guidance for a risk management approach, which should be tailored to the unique demands of each workplace. Effective consultation and communication are critical, and a proactive and integrated approach is required.

This code of practice includes references to both mandatory and non-mandatory actions. The word "must" indicates that legal requirements exist, which must be complied with. The word "should" indicates a recommended course of action, while "may" is used to indicate an optional course of action.

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 What is work-related violence and aggression?

Work-related violence and aggression is any incident where a person is threatened, attacked or physically assaulted in circumstances relating to their work.

Work-related violence and aggression covers a broad range of actions and behaviours that create a risk to safety and health of workers. These are actions or behaviours that may physically or psychologically harm another person. Examples include:

- abusive behaviour, including insults and name-calling intimidating behaviour that creates a fear of violence, such as stalking or threatening to cause physical harm
- any form of assault, such as biting, spitting, scratching, hitting, kicking punching, pushing, shoving, tripping, grabbing or throwing objects.

Sexual harassment is another set of behaviours, not always obvious, repeated or continuous, that can create a risk to worker safety and health. These include:

- suggestive comments or jokes, insults or taunts based on a person's gender or sexual orientation
- repeated or inappropriate advances online
- sending unwanted pictures, content and messages of a sexual nature
- indecent physical contact, including unwanted touching, hugging, cornering and kissing
- actual or attempted rape or sexual assault.

While both men and women experience sexual harassment, women are significantly more likely to experience it than men and are more likely to suffer negative impacts on their physical and psychological safety and health at work.

Sexual harassment should be reported to WorkSafe WA if it meets the notification threshold. Attempted and actual sexual assault is a criminal matter and the appropriate response is to contact the police. Contact with the police should be done with consent of the individual affected, wherever possible. There may be circumstances, for example, if the person is in imminent danger or incapacitated, where it would be appropriate to call the police without consent. The individual may choose to report the matter to police, WorkSafe WA or both.

Violence and aggression can harm both the person it is directed at and anyone witnessing it. Psychological harm, in particular, can arise from repeated exposure to violence and aggression.

Violence and aggression can be:

- physical, psychological, verbal or written
- one-off or repeated incidents
- minor behaviours through to more serious acts, including criminal offences, which require the intervention of public authorities
- in person or can include threats by correspondence, electronic means or social media.



Whether the violence or aggression was intended or not, or whether the perpetrator has the capacity to recognise that their actions could cause harm, does not reduce the risk of harm from the violence.

Acts such as indecent exposure, physical and sexual assault, stalking, and obscene or threatening communications (e.g. phone calls, letters, emails, text messages and posts on social media) may be offences under criminal law and should be referred to police as well as managed under OSH laws.

Physical assault or the threat of physical harm of any form is a criminal act. If a suspected criminal act has been committed, the appropriate response is to contact the police. Contact with the police should be done in consultation with the individual affected, wherever possible. This is to ensure they maintain control over their circumstances and are not unintentionally put at further risk which can occur with some forms of violence and aggression, such as family and domestic violence. For clarity, if the person is in imminent danger it would be appropriate to call the police without consultation.

## **1.2 Who is responsible for managing violence and aggression at work?**

### **Employer duties**

The OSH Act requires an employer to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety and health of workers while at work. Health includes both physical and psychological health.

An employer must ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, workers and other people are not exposed to risks to their psychological safety and health. An employer must eliminate psychosocial risks in the workplace, or if that is not reasonably practicable, minimise these risks so far as is reasonably practicable.

### **Worker and others duties**

The OSH Act also contains general duties and responsibilities placed upon people to ensure their own safety at work, and that of others who are at the workplace or who might be injured by the work. Workers and other persons must comply with reasonable safety and health instructions, as far as they are reasonably able, and co-operate with reasonable safety and health policies or procedures that have been notified to workers.

### **Workplace**

A workplace is any location where work is carried out and includes any place where a worker goes, or is likely to be, while at work. It can include:

- a home office
- work vehicles and private vehicles used for work purposes, such as transporting clients
- private homes and other community settings where clients are based
- accommodation camps for fly-in fly-out (FIFO) workers
- work-related events such as training, conferences and social activities.

## Reporting to the regulator

Employers (including principal contractors and labour hire agents) must report certain injuries or diseases to WorkSafe WA, including any injury, which, in the opinion of a medical practitioner, requires 10 or more days of lost time at work.

Some types of violence and aggression can attract criminal charges and should be reported to the police with the consent of the victim.

## Consultation

The OSH Act requires employers to consult and cooperate with safety and health representatives (if any) and workers about safety and health at the workplace, so far as reasonably practicable.

### 1.3 Who is at risk?

All workers and other people at workplaces are potentially at risk of experiencing some form of violence or aggression. Workers most at risk are those who have regular contact with the general public or provide direct services to clients.

Higher risk industries and occupations include:

- health care and social assistance – this includes nurses, doctors, paramedics, allied health workers, child protection workers, and residential and home carers
- public administration and safety – such as police officers, protective service officers, security officers, prison guards, welfare support workers and frontline service workers in large government agencies
- retail and hospitality, particularly for new and young workers – including workers at grocery outlets, pharmacies, petrol stations, restaurants, bars and takeaway food service
- education and training – including teachers and education assistants.

This is supported by Western Australian workers' compensation data which shows that, of all approved claims related to violence and aggression between 2014-15 and 2018-19, most claims came from education and training (35%), health care and social assistance (32%) and public administration and safety (15%). However, these percentages represent only the workers who have received workers' compensation. It is likely that many more incidents involving violence and aggression occur without being reported.

In some workplaces where workers are interacting with patients, clients or members of the public over time, it may even be considered "part of the job". This general level of acceptance may also be responsible for the under-reporting of the hazard. Research shows that under-reporting this hazard is due to a belief amongst these occupations that a certain level of violence and aggression is inevitable.

## 1.4 Why is it important to reduce the risk of violence and aggression?

Violence and aggression are workplace hazards. They may cause physical and psychological injury or harm and may result in permanent disability or death.

Violence and aggression can lead to:

- feelings of isolation, social isolation or family dislocation
- loss of confidence and withdrawal
- physical injuries as a result of assault
- stress, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- illness such as cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal disorders, immune deficiency and gastrointestinal disorders; e.g. as a result of stress
- suicidal thoughts.

There can also be considerable direct and indirect costs for the organisation, including lost productivity while people are not working, repairing property damage, and medical and legal expenses.

The injuries and harm to health can be cumulative. The incident that results in the worker complaining or taking time off work may be minor in nature, but may result in significant injury after cumulative exposure. Symptoms can appear some time after the exposure to violence and aggression.

## 2 Develop a prevention plan

Finding out what workers are exposed to, the types of behaviour they experience, the frequency and severity of incidents, and what can be done to prevent or mitigate the risk of exposure, needs a systematic and holistic approach. This can take the form of a violence and aggression plan developed using a risk management approach.

Generally, the plan should have:

- measures and procedures for preventing violence and aggression in the workplace
- measures and procedures for dealing with workplace violence and aggression immediately, should it occur or be likely to occur, including communicating risks and the need for assistance
- measures and procedures for workers to report incidents of workplace violence and aggression to the employer or supervisor
- information about how the employer will investigate and deal with incidents or complaints of violence and aggression.

The same measures and procedures for preventing violence and aggression will also work to prevent or mitigate the risk of exposure to sexual harassment and sexual assault.

The plan should include a violence and aggression prevention and management policy. The policy can be developed on its own, or may be included in a health and safety policy.

All workers must be made aware of policies and procedures in place to manage violence and aggression in the workplace. Employers should ensure that policies are accessible and understood by all workers. Training should be provided as part of induction and refreshed as required.

The next sections outline the steps for developing a violence and aggression prevention plan using a risk management approach.

Workplaces are usually constantly changing environments with new risks being introduced. Risk management should be conducted as an ongoing process, using information gained from reviews. Factors that affect the likelihood of an unwanted event and its consequences may change.

Once the prevention plans are established they should be periodically reviewed. Ongoing review is essential to ensure that the prevention plan remains relevant.

## 2.1 Provide information and training

Employers should make information on workplace violence and aggression available to all workers, supervisors and managers. Workers need to know what the procedures are for managing and responding to violence and aggression in the workplace. This information should also be included in induction training for new workers.

Information to workers could include:

- the nature and causes of violence and aggression in their organisation or industry sector, including potential triggers
- suggested measures to prevent such problems occurring, and best practices for their reduction and elimination
- the laws and regulations covering violence and aggression, both specifically and generally
- how to report incidents and how they will be investigated
- the services available to assist workers exposed to work-related violence and aggression.

Training can be preventative (e.g. positive communication skills, live risk assessment), focussed on management of aggressive behaviours (e.g. conflict resolution and de-escalation) or post-incident response (e.g. evacuation and incident communication). It may be formal, informal or on the job. If necessary, information should be provided in languages other than English.

There may be times when workers will have to assess the level of risk in a particular situation and choose the most appropriate procedure. Workers should be trained to make reasonable decisions in the circumstances and to balance the actions needed to maintain their own safety and the safety of others who may be in their care.

Managers and supervisors should analyse reported incidents to work out whether additional training or information should be provided to workers.

The training should be evaluated to ensure workers have acquired the skills they need to work safely.

### 3 Risk management approach

It is a requirement under the OSH Regulations to use a risk management approach based on the hierarchy of control to manage hazards and risks to worker safety and health, including psychological safety and health. Because it can affect the safety and health of workers, violence and aggression should be treated like any other hazard. Situations involving violence and aggression should be assessed for risks, and steps taken to minimise those risks.

Adopting a risk management approach helps employers to:

- prevent and reduce the likelihood of incidents of violence and aggression occurring
- prevent and reduce the likelihood of harm from exposure to violence and aggression
- identify and take opportunities to improve safety and health management systems (e.g. reporting systems, working environment and psychological support structures)

Figure 3.1 illustrates the risk management approach to managing exposure to violence and aggression in the workplace. Risk management is a continual process that involves the following steps:

- identify the hazard
- assess the risks
- control the risks by making the changes necessary to eliminate the hazards or risk factors or, if not practicable, minimise the risk of harm
- monitor and review the effectiveness of the controls and adapt or improve the controls where necessary.

The following sections describe each step.



Figure 3.1 Overview of the risk management process (adapted from Safe Work Australia).

Leadership commitment, and supportive and capable management and supervision are key to the successful management of risks. Communication and consultation with your workers and other stakeholders are important at all stages.

### 3.1 Identify the hazards

The first stage in the risk management process is to identify the hazard. In this context, the hazard is violent and/or aggressive behaviour from a client, customer or other person who is not a worker in that workplace.

In doing so, it is important to consider:

- the nature of the violence and aggression; in particular, its location, frequency and severity
- the interaction of different factors which can increase the likelihood of violence and aggression occurring.

There are a number of ways to identify situations where violence and aggression may occur. Choosing an appropriate process or procedure for identifying violence and aggression risks will depend on the nature of the work environment and the specific violence and aggression-related behaviours involved.

If there is not already a workplace safety and health incident reporting system in place, this should be established. This can then be used to review reported incidents of violence and aggression.

Some of the ways to identify situations include:

- consulting with the workforce about violence and aggression risks in their work area
- checking accident reports, injury records or client histories to find out about previous incidents
- conducting workplace inspections to identify risks of exposure; e.g. controlled access to staff-only areas, natural surveillance, duress alarm and communication systems
- reviewing means of access and egress for workers before/after working hours
- reviewing working arrangements; e.g. workplace design, working alone, contact with public, working after hours
- analysing feedback from clients to identify problem areas; e.g. service delivery, waiting times, way-finding
- seeking advice from external experts; e.g. WA Police, WorkSafe WA.

### 3.2 Assess the risks

The second stage in the risk management process is to assess the risk of injury or harm occurring. The risk assessment is a way of understanding the causes of the violence and aggression and prioritising what needs to be addressed. Employers should focus on workplace sources of risk that are within their influence, such as organisational and environmental factors.

A risk assessment worksheet may assist in identifying violence and aggression problems. Example risk assessment worksheets in [Section 5](#) show how hazard identification and risk assessment can cover workers and other people who may be at a workplace. The examples are a community worker, an education assistant, a 24-hour service station worker and a licensing centre customer service officer.

After the risks have been assessed they should be prioritised. Prioritising involves looking at the likelihood of violence or aggression occurring and, if it does occur, the extent of any harm or injury (i.e. the consequences). This includes looking at the different situations in which it is likely to occur, who might be exposed and how often.

### 3.3 Control the risk

The third stage is to implement control measures to eliminate or reduce the risk of the violence or aggression occurring and to ensure those measures are monitored and reviewed on an ongoing basis.

Some controls for the management of violence and aggression risks are more effective than others. They can be ranked from the highest level of protection and reliability to the lowest. This ranking is known as the hierarchy of control. Elimination controls are the most effective and reliable form of control, followed by risk minimisation controls (engineering, substitution and isolation), then administration and personal protective equipment (PPE) controls.

To minimise the risk to as low as reasonably practicable, employers should apply elimination controls supplemented by risk minimisation and administrative and PPE controls. For example, in a workplace where it is known that a person has a history of violent behaviour towards workers or others in that workplace, this person can be sanctioned from the workplace (elimination), physical barriers in place (risk minimisation) and workers provided with information, including triggers and responses (administrative).

Case study examples using this approach are provided in [Section 5](#), and the principles of the hierarchy of control are explained more fully in [Appendix 1](#).

### 3.4 Monitor and review

The employer needs to consult with workers to review the effectiveness of the control strategies put in place. Questions to be asked include:

- Have incidents of violence and aggression decreased?
- Have any new risks been introduced following implementation of the risk control?
- Are there other controls which may be more effective?

After an incident occurs, it is important to look at whether or not controls were applied, their effectiveness, and whether they need altering, amending or replacing.

Monitoring and reviewing are important steps to ensure that the controls are working as intended. This involves finding out whether the changes made have eliminated or reduced the assessed risks, whether control strategies are continuing to be effective and ensuring that new risks have not been introduced into the workplace as a result of implementing a control.

There should also be ongoing analysis of reported incidents to work out whether additional measures such as training or information should be provided to workers.



## 4 Responding to incidents

How employers respond to incidents is a critical part of the overall prevention plan. Information from the risk management process will guide the response. There are three key areas:

1. Planning and implementation
2. Immediate response: this is comprised of de-escalation and emergency procedures
3. Investigation and recovery which includes review of the controls in place.

### 4.1 Response planning and implementation

The employer has a duty of care to prevent harm to health for every person in the workplace. This includes injury or harm from violence or aggression.

It is important that employers support workers at all stages in managing violence and aggression in the workplace, from prevention strategies, to immediate response procedures and post-incident counselling and legal proceedings, should they arise.

Preventing violence and aggression in the workplace is the best way of ensuring workers and others at the workplace are not harmed. However, it may not be possible to completely eliminate or reduce risk associated with all situations where violence and aggression could occur.

When violence or aggression occurs in a workplace, ideally the planning should result in a well-coordinated response, with agreed procedures followed in accordance with the training provided. The response plan should also include reporting and investigation procedures.

Consider if a multi-agency response is required. There may be organisations who can share information, control strategies and emerging risks depending on the industry, workers and clients.

### 4.2 Immediate response

It is essential that there are clear procedures to be followed for an effective immediate response that controls and defuses the situation, and provides avenues for retreat should de-escalation and prevention fail.

The types of de-escalation strategies that can be applied are context-specific and should be identified in the risk management stage. Workers need to be aware of the antecedents to violence and aggression, how to respond and how to communicate with individuals who present a threat.

Workers must also be aware that they can remove themselves from situations that present a serious and imminent risk of harm and that they can do so without fear of being penalised.

When violent incidents occur, workers should know who has the authority to take charge of the situation. That person should be trained to coordinate the response, including taking care of workers who may be injured, in shock or affected by the incident in other ways.

Establishing effective communication systems to be used in an emergency is an essential part of emergency planning. This is especially important for people who work alone and those requiring rapid assistance. Further information on the use of technology can be found in [Appendix 1](#).

Assistance should be available as part of the immediate response and the recovery phase of violent or aggressive incidents to minimise the effects of trauma. Individual reactions to workplace violence and aggression can be delayed and continue for a long time after the incident. If the incident and workers' reactions are not actively managed, the impact of the incident on the individual and the organisation can be significant.

Physical assault or the threat of physical harm of any form is a criminal act. If a suspected criminal act has been committed, the appropriate response is to contact the police. In certain violence and aggression situations, such as those regarding family and domestic violence, contacting the police without consultation with the affected individual can unintentionally put them at further risk. For clarity, if the person is in imminent danger it would be appropriate to call the police without consultation.

### 4.3 Investigation and recovery

There are two components to post-incident response. One is investigating the incident and how it can be prevented from reoccurring; the other is supporting worker recovery, including injury management, counselling and return to work, where required.

When investigating an incident, it is important to:

- consult with workers and interview witnesses to investigate the incident
- review the controls to assess their effectiveness and whether they can be improved, replaced or new controls introduced
- inform all workers about what action will be taken to reduce the risk of harm or injury in the future
- keep records of incident reports, investigations and actions taken so that trends can be established and reviewed as part of the ongoing risk management.

To facilitate worker recovery, the employer should provide ongoing support for workers, which can include debriefing, and allowing time to recover and to consult medical professionals if needed. If necessary, support workers who wish to press charges to apply for restraining orders or other court actions

Table 4.1 provides examples of incident response measures that can be applied in a health care setting.

Table 4.1 Responding to incidents in a health care environment

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| Before | <p>Introduce measures to convey levels of risk across shifts i.e. patient flagging, documented risk assessments and regular risk alerts for the business.</p> <p>Orientate workers to the safety measures in the workplace, how to summon help and locations of duress alarms.</p> <p>Regularly maintain, test and review safety measures.</p> <p>Design the workplace to reduce the risk of aggression and allow for appropriate response; i.e. isolation.</p> |
| During | <p>Have a stepped response for violent and aggressive situations which is easily accessible to staff.</p> <p>Take action early to defuse situations and contain violent incidents.</p> <p>Prevent escalation of a situation and further danger to staff or property; i.e. during an armed hold up, by giving the person what they want, allowing them to leave and not following them – call 000.</p>   |
| After  | <p>Provide immediate support and emotional containment for the workers affected, restart the work processes and, if required, make arrangements for staff that need to temporarily leave the workplace.</p> <p>Make arrangements to check in with workers regularly.</p>  |

## 5 Risk management examples

### Hazard identification and risk assessment form

*Note: these are examples only and may not address all the risks, or all the work activities, at a workplace. A combination of controls may be required, depending on the circumstances of individual workplaces.*

The following example reflects worker exposure to unpredictable behaviours from clients, family or visitors in the client's home. The source of risk is that the client is unable to communicate their needs effectively, and an unpredictable reaction or risks posed by other persons in this workplace. As the employer has limited control over the client home, the risk is managed through communication systems, live risk assessment and clear procedures.

**The following risk profile summarises the risk assessment and controls for the scenario of a community service worker alone with a client in the community**

|   |   |   |  |
|---|---|---|--|
| <b>Location:</b> Client home  |   | <b>Position:</b>  | <b>Date prepared:</b>  |
| <b>Prepared by:</b>   |   | <b>Hazard:</b> Physical or verbal assault               |  |
| <b>Task #. 1</b> Visiting client with a disability and known history of unpredictable or challenging behaviours in their home to complete personal care tasks |   |   |  |
| <b>Task frequency:</b> Daily  |   | <b>Risk level:</b> High                                 | <b>Comment:</b> Restrictive practices such as physical restraint are not permitted |
| <b>Preferred order of controls</b>  | <b>Risk control</b><br>What can be done to make the job safe  | <b>Person responsible</b><br>Who makes sure it happens? | <b>Completion</b>  |
|   |   |   | <b>Date</b> <b>Sign off</b>  |
| <b>Elimination</b>  | Employer refuses to provide services to clients who continue to exhibit threatening behaviour towards community support workers, including indecent physical contact<br>Service provider has an onboarding process that does not accept high risk clients |   |  |

|  |   |  |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|--|
| <b>Substitution</b>                        | Transfer client to a clinic or hospital setting with other staff present and additional security measures (i.e. standby security)   |  |  |  |
| <b>Isolation</b>                           | Conduct live risk assessment in accordance with agreed system and record in client notes prior to entering premises (e.g. greet client from behind screen door and observe/listen for risks before entering)<br>Provide support and advice remotely (i.e. via phone/video link up)  |  |  |  |
| <b>Engineering</b>                         | Install mobile phone app on all community support worker mobile phones (these apps can track worker location, provide client behaviour plan, risk assessment detail including history of aggression for residents, and act as duress alarm in emergencies)  |  |  |  |
| <b>Administration</b>                      | Identify critical communication points (e.g. handover at shift end/beginning) to communicate emerging risks prior to entering client premises<br>Consider sending two workers to a high risk home environment<br>Ensure there is a journey management plan, including clear directions for parking and egress<br>Ensure all workers know the emergency response procedure and communication protocol outlining who to contact and when<br>Provide de-escalation training and refresher training to all community support workers<br>Conduct environmental risk assessment of client home every three months to identify emerging trends |  |  |  |
| <b>Personal protective equipment (PPE)</b> | Provide workers with a personal duress device (e.g. duress watch with GPS) on clothing or as a watch. Ideally, in addition to location tracking, it should allow a third party to listen in or ask questions and come with a “man down” function for injury<br>Provide a mobile phone charger for vehicles  |  |  |  |

The following example reflects exposure to client-related violence in a classroom. The source of risk in this example is unpredictable behaviours from students with a history of violence and aggression.

| The following risk profile summarises the risk assessment and controls for the scenario of an education assistant working with a child with a history of aggression in classroom |  |  |            |  |          |
|--|--|--|------------|--|----------|
| Location: Classroom  |  | Position:  |            | Date prepared:   |          |
| Prepared by:   |  |  |            |  |          |
| Task #: 1 Assisting child with history of unpredictable or challenging behaviours in class   |  | Hazard: Physical or verbal assault               |            |  |          |
| Task frequency: Daily  |  | Risk level: High                                 |            | Comment: Restrictive practices such as using restraint are not permitted |          |
| Preferred order of controls  | Risk control<br>What can be done to make the job safe  | Person responsible<br>Who makes sure it happens? | Completion |  | Sign off |
|  |  |  | Date       |  |          |
| Elimination  | Expulsion or suspension of students with a history of violence and aggression towards others in cases where this is permitted and all other options have been explored   |  |            |  |          |
| Substitution   | Provide an alternate learning setting  |  |            |  |          |
| Isolation  | Provide a “calm down” space where the child exhibiting aggressive behaviours can be moved and which separates them from others until behaviour de-escalates and self-regulation occurs   |  |            |  |          |
| Engineering  | Review safe design of the classroom situation for existing and new buildings, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>ability to reduce the stimulus in the classroom; e.g. noise and lighting</li><li>choice of furniture to remove hard edges and potential for weaponisation</li><li>construction of buildings to include dual egress for staff and location of hardwired duress alarms at various locations</li></ul> |  |            |  |          |

|   |   |  |  |  |
|---|---|--|--|--|
| <p><b>Administration</b></p>                      | <p>Ensure relevant staff are familiar with the management plan for the child</p> <p>Provide regular refresher training on evasive response to aggression</p> <p>Roster education assistant to work in buddy shift with high risk child</p> <p>Complete environmental risk assessment of classroom to identify any hazards restricting quick egress and provide room templates for optimal set up</p> <p>All workers provided training in the emergency response procedure</p> <p>Provide de-escalation training and talk-down techniques to education assistants</p> <p>Conduct environmental risk assessment of classroom annually to identify safe egress, controlled access and natural surveillance</p> |  |  |  |
| <p><b>Personal protective equipment (PPE)</b></p> | <p>N/A</p>  |  |  |  |

In a retail setting, it may assist to prepare a risk profile for each type of hazard likely to be encountered in the environment. This scenario looks at the hazard of robbery in a 24-hour service station. Because robbery is at the extreme end of violence and aggression, most of the controls for robbery will also work to minimise harm or injury from other incidents of violence and aggression.

### The following risk profile summarises the risk assessment and controls for the task of handling money at the counter

| <b>Location:</b> 24-hour service station       |  |   |   |
|--|--|---|---|
| <b>Prepared by:</b>                            |  | <b>Position:</b>  | <b>Date prepared:</b>   |
| <b>Task #:</b> 1 Handling money at the counter |  | <b>Hazard:</b> Robbery                                  |   |
| <b>Task frequency:</b> Daily                   |  | <b>Risk level:</b> Extreme                              | <b>Comment:</b> In addition to verbal aggression and threats of and actual violence, weapons may be used in attempts to steal cash and other goods of value |
| <b>Preferred order of controls</b>             | <b>Risk control</b><br>What can be done to make the job safe   | <b>Person responsible</b><br>Who makes sure it happens? | <b>Completion</b>   |
|  |  |   | <b>Date</b> <b>Sign off</b>   |
| <b>Elimination</b>                             | Provide payment options to eliminate customer interaction such as pay at pump, pay by mobile app and pay at night fill window (this is also substitution)<br>Introduce card-only payments to eliminate trigger of cash on premises |   |   |
| <b>Substitution</b>                            | As above   |   |   |



|                    |   |  |  |  |
|--------------------|---|--|--|--|
| <b>Isolation</b>   | <p>Control customer access to staff areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• install screens and/or jump wires to the counter area</li> <li>• increase or elevate the height of the counter</li> <li>• increase the depth of the counter</li> <li>• ensure that any access points to the counter (e.g. a gate) are substantial, properly locked at all times and the lock cannot be reached from the public side</li> </ul> <p>Increase distance between workers and customers by placing display stands in front of the counter</p> <p>Install two sets of electronic doors controlled by workers</p> |  |  |  |
| <b>Engineering</b> | <p>Ensure clear visibility at all times:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• install good lighting around the forecourt, parking areas and inside the premises</li> <li>• do not obstruct the shop floor or windows with tall fixtures and fittings</li> <li>• install mirrors for areas of obscured vision</li> <li>• elevate the cashier by raising the floor behind the counter, or providing a high stool</li> <li>• Install on-site security cameras</li> <li>• Install an under bench duress alarm, or alarm keys on the till</li> <li>• Install time-delay locks on safes</li> </ul>              |  |  |  |

|  |  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| <b>Administration</b>                      | <p>Develop procedures to address risks identified in hazard identification/risk assessment phase (e.g. handover procedures at night shift)</p> <p>Train staff in how to manage violent and aggressive situations (including armed hold up) on induction and provide refresher training</p> <p>Train staff in cash-handling procedures, emergency procedures and operation of security devices, and confidentiality of those procedures</p> <p>Increase staff during high risk periods (e.g. at opening and closing times)</p> <p>Consider employing a security guard during high risk periods</p> <p>Prominently display signs saying the premises are monitored</p> <p>Advertise that large amounts of cash aren't kept on the premises</p> |  |  |  |
| <b>Personal protective equipment (PPE)</b> | <p>Provide personal duress alarms for all staff to use when they move away from the counter</p>  |  |  |  |

People working in frontline counter service environments often encounter verbal abuse and threatening behaviour from members of the public. Using the hierarchy of control approach allows for a number of strategies to be put in place to reduce the risk of violence and aggression occurring.

| The following risk profile summarises the risk assessment and controls for the scenario of a customer service officer (CSO) providing driver and vehicle licensing services to members of the public |  |   |  |   |                 |
|--|--|---|--|---|-----------------|
| <b>Location:</b> Vehicle Licensing Centre  |  | <b>Position:</b>  |  | <b>Date prepared:</b>                                   |                 |
| <b>Prepared by:</b>  |  | <b>Hazard:</b> Verbal abuse, threatening behaviour      |  |   |                 |
| <b>Task #:</b> 1 Providing driver and vehicle licensing services to members of the public  |  | <b>Risk level:</b> High                                 |  | <b>Comment:</b> CSO separated from customer via counter |                 |
| <b>Task frequency:</b> Daily   |  | <b>Person responsible</b><br>Who makes sure it happens? |  | <b>Completion</b><br><b>Date</b>                        | <b>Sign off</b> |
| <b>Preferred order of controls</b>   | <b>Risk control</b><br>What can be done to make the job safe   |   |  |   |                 |
| <b>Elimination</b>   | <p>Increase scope of online licensing services and improve ease of access to online services to eliminate need for customer to attend centre</p> <p>Outsource the services to a third party</p> <p>Establish self-service computer terminals at each of the centres so that customers can use these terminals and not have to wait in line to be served by a CSO</p> |   |  |   |                 |
| <b>Substitution</b>  | Live tracking of waiting times in licensing centres publicised online can allow customers to choose to attend less busy licensing centres  |   |  |   |                 |
| <b>Isolation</b>   | <p>Use counter design to provide a barrier between the CSO and the customer</p> <p>Consider installing perspex screens between the CSO and customer</p> <p>Controlled access to worker-only areas (e.g. keycard)</p>   |   |  |   |                 |

|  |  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| <b>Engineering</b>                         | <p>Silent duress alarm system to alert manager of escalating behaviours from customer or other member of public</p> <p>Installation of free-to-air televisions to distract customers</p> <p>Installation of CCTV cameras and signage to deter anti-social behaviour</p> <p>Design of concierge, use of colour schemes and application of crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) principles to deter anti-social behaviour</p> <p>Use of ticketing machines to triage specific service needs (reducing waiting times)</p>  |  |  |  |
| <b>Administration</b>                      | <p>Restriction of service warning letter issued to customer with history of aggressive behaviour</p> <p>Workers are trained in de-escalating aggressive behaviour (signs of aggression, verbal and non-verbal communication strategies)</p> <p>Police attendance procedure for customers who refuse to leave the premises</p> <p>Traffic-light procedure displayed at customer service counters outlining process for responding to aggression</p> <p>Consideration of screening of customers with a history of aggressive behaviours and flagging of customer records to alert CSO of at-risk customers</p> |  |  |  |
| <b>Personal protective equipment (PPE)</b> | N/A  |  |  |  |

# Appendix 1 Hierarchy of control relating to violence and aggression

## Eliminate the hazard – change the system of work

In some situations it is possible to pinpoint the exact reason or “trigger” for workplace violence and aggression. If this “trigger” could be completely eliminated, the work could be carried out without the threat of violence, robbery or attack.

As the environment is a significant contributing factor to the potential for violence and aggression, attempts should be made to eliminate environmental triggers when designing or renovating workplaces.

### Examples

- Banning persons with a history of violence and aggression, including indecent physical contact, from venues or facilities (e.g. patrons at pubs or clients at health services)
- Refusing service to clients who repeatedly expose workers to violence and aggression, including unwelcome touching
- Providing alternative methods of customer service to eliminate face-to-face interactions (e.g. online licence renewal, ticket dispensers at customer service counters)
- Having controlled access to the work area.

## Substitution – use a safer alternative

Replace a hazardous procedure with a less hazardous one.

### Examples

- Use EFTPOS machines instead of cash
- Minimise discomfort in waiting rooms (e.g. provide televisions, water dispensers) and use signs to advise current waiting times
- Use way-finding volunteers at hospitals to reduce customer frustration and encourage them away from triage nurses and front desk admin.

## Isolation – separate workers from the hazard

If possible, workers should move away from violent or aggressive situations to a safe area. In other situations, it may be possible to move the violent/aggressive person; for example, an aggressive student could be taken to a designated area within the school.

Barriers could also be used to separate workers from customers, clients or members of the public who may cause them harm. Effective barriers are usually physical, but could also be in the form of procedures that isolate workers from hazards (e.g. requirement for live risk assessment conducted by community service worker out in the community).

### Physical barriers

#### Examples

- Electronically controlled doors with viewing panels that allow surveillance of public areas before the doors are opened from the inside
- Using furniture to create a barrier between workers and clients in interview rooms
- Staircases in venues with alcohol to have appropriate barriers to protect workers
- Controlled-access doors where access is via a security card or code
- Screens to reduce the risk of attack from clients; e.g. on buses, at counters.
- Interview rooms in hospitals, community health clinics and mental health clinics designed with controlled access and separate emergency egress to isolate aggressive clients.



Well-designed counter to eliminate ability of client or member of public climbing or reaching over.

Figure 1 Counter design as a physical barrier.

## Administrative barriers

### Examples

- Service agreements that outline acceptable behaviour and consequences when clients or members of public are violent or aggressive
- Procedures that prevent customers from contacting workers out of business hours, such as refusing to provide workers' home phone numbers and addresses
- Posters outlining acceptable behaviours and consequences of unacceptable behaviours
- Ensure workplaces with customer and client service are designed in a way to maximise natural surveillance as a deterrent to anti-social behaviour
- Signs warning that cameras are in use
- Roster work to minimise workers working in isolation.
- Use way-finding volunteers at hospitals to reduce customer frustration and encourage them away from triage nurses and front desk admin.

## Engineering solutions

Building or introducing technology, plant or equipment to reduce the exposure to the hazard.

### Examples

#### Building layout

- Allow for "escape routes" and avoid dead ends where workers are unable to retreat to a safer place when necessary
- Bollards outside entry points to the workplace
- Barriers in vehicles used to transport patients/clients
- Security doors to ensure controlled access to worker-only areas
- Permanent screens
- Security lighting (including for worker entry/exit and car parks if workers work late hours)
- Use of fixed and portable alarm systems
- Communication systems
- Furniture that cannot be used as projectiles.

#### Technology

- Closed circuit TV/surveillance/video monitoring
- Audio-capture wearable cameras on security guards
- Provide workers with a dedicated work phone
- Mobile phone apps for tracking workers (e.g. home-based care, community visits) and communication
- GPS tracking in vehicles used by community-based workers
- Rostering software that allows community workers to communicate location and potential delays in service back to head office for action
- Devices that increase mobile phone coverage in areas where mobile phone reception is poor

*Note: There can be overlap between substitution, isolation and engineering controls.*

## Administrative controls – managing the hazard

Administrative controls are usually procedures, training and internal processes which help to reduce the effect of the hazard. They can include “work arounds”.

### Examples

- Training workers in appropriate systems of work, dealing with difficult clients and conflict management skills; for example, in situations where cleaners work alone at night, there would be less risk of attack if cleaners worked together, cleaning one building after the other, rather than working alone in different buildings
- Implementing job rotation to reduce the amount of time workers are in stressful situations or working with high-risk clients, especially when they are new to the job
- In an organisation with client contact, ensuring new workers are not required to work alone until they have the competencies to do so. Assistance from more experienced workers should be available when it is needed
- Rostering to provide support for situations where it is known that the situation may be difficult
- Implementing regular emergency response drills for Code Black (i.e. personal threat of violence or a threatening confrontation) or client-related violence
- Establishing communication protocols for sharing information and facilitating the solution of problems related to service delivery. This includes not providing worker personal information to clients or customers
- Creating a social media policy which discourages use of personal social media accounts to engage with clients or customers
- Implementing customer feedback procedures
- Ensuring time is available for peer support, sharing information and problem solving and incident reporting.

## Personal protective clothing and equipment

Personal protective clothing and equipment (PPE) should not be the only control that is used, as it is the least effective way of dealing with workplace violence and aggression. PPE should be provided as a temporary measure whilst other risk controls are being considered, or in conjunction with other controls.

### Examples

- PPE for protection from contact with body fluids
- Protective body gear or riot gear in prisons or high security detention centres
- Personal duress alarms.



## Appendix 2 Relevant legislation

*Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986 (Commonwealth)*

*Criminal Code Act Compilation Act 1913*

*Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Commonwealth)*

*Equal Opportunity Act 1984*

*Mental Health Act 2014*

*Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984*

*Occupational Safety and Health Regulations 1996*

*Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Commonwealth)*

*Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Commonwealth)*

*Workers' Compensation and Injury Management Act 1981*

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