



What to do when aggression in the workplace occurs

Safety

- Put your safety first
- Right of defence
- Isolate employees from the source of aggression
- First aid or medical assistance
- Immediate support

Action

- Report the incident to the Police
- Report to management and OSH personnel
- Debriefing
- Injury management and workplace rehabilitation
- Follow-up support

Prevention

- Investigate incident
- Re-conduct risk assessment
- Implement controls
- Practice responses to critical incidents
- Train employees to identify precursors or signs of escalation towards aggression

Safety

Put your safety first

In all circumstances your safety is the most important priority followed by others' safety. If it is safe to do so, help other people if you can. If it is not safe to do so, remove yourself from the aggressive situation and request the Police attend to provide assistance. If the aggressor is requesting money, goods or materials give them to the person. Your safety is more important than money, goods or materials.

Rights of defence

Workers subjected to unacceptable behaviour have the right to withdraw to safety. Employees do not have the right to retaliate physically or verbally. However, if a person is physically assaulted and there is no way out, they can use reasonable force to defend themselves or another person from assault and injury. The force used should only be enough to ward off an attack.

Unreasonable force may result in the aggressor successfully bringing legal action against the employee. If an assault does occur, filing an incident report for both appropriate administration and the Police is vital for future prevention.

Staff directly affected by an aggressive incident should be offered the option of removing themselves from their work environment, with time and resources to allow settling of remaining anger or tension. This will limit the further spread of anger, tension or fear to other employees and facilitate return to business as usual. This time can also be used to better assess the requirement for further treatment, counselling, mediation or action by management to reduce episodes of further aggression.

First aid or medical assistance

First aid should be provided to any person requiring it following an aggressive or violent incident in the workplace. First aid providers should not place themselves at risk of violence at any time.

Immediate support

Other employees should listen to and assist the person/s who has been affected, providing support and empathy. The person/s affected may also benefit from a colleague to accompany them home, and to stay until other support is available.

Report the incident to the Police

Physical assault or the threat of physical harm of any form is a criminal act. Under these circumstances, the appropriate response is a direct complaint to the police. If a crime is happening or someone is in immediate danger, contact emergency services by telephoning 000.

Report the incident to management and OHS personnel.

The incident should be reported using your workplace's reporting procedures as soon as possible after the incident.

Debriefing

Employees directly and indirectly involved in the incident may benefit from critical incident debriefing. The debriefing process may help those involved to cope with the event and access on-going appropriate support. This service may be available through an Employee Assistance Provider or provided by suitably qualified professionals such as Psychologists.

Injury management and workplace rehabilitation

Workplace rehabilitation and injury management may be required for physical or psychological illness or injury following an incident of aggression in the workplace. The appropriate Injury Management / Rehabilitation Coordinator within your workplace must be consulted immediately if an injury has possibly been sustained. The Injury Management / Rehabilitation Coordinator will assist with the rehabilitation process and with lodgement of a Workers' Compensation claim as needed.

Follow-up support

Ideally, managers should continue to follow up with employees after the aggression incident to ensure their safety and health, and provide support. Additional counselling may be required on an on-going basis for some person/s involved in the aggression incident. Managers involved in supporting and helping other workers may also benefit from counselling for debriefing and support.

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Investigate incident

Investigate the incident in a timely manner. The investigation should identify all the factors that contributed to the incident occurring. An investigation will assist in preventing future incidents occurring again and improve responses to future incidents. Investigations should not be about finding someone to blame, rather looking for ways to prevent the incident from occurring again.

Re-conduct risk assessment

Review whether the existing controls were effective and determine how controls could be improved given the incident.

Implement controls

The main reason for conducting an investigation is to prevent future incidents by identifying improvements to controls or ways to reduce the risk. Implement the controls as soon as possible to prevent future reoccurrence of the incidents and minimise the risk to employees' safety and health.

Practice responses to critical incidents

It is important that responses to critical incidents are practiced on a regular basis to ensure employees are informed and would know what to do in an emergency situation. Just as emergency evacuation responses are practiced regularly in the workplace, so should responses to occupational violence incidents.

Train staff to identify precursors or signs of escalation towards aggression

Provide training to workers to enable them to identify signs of aggression and develop strategies to manage sources of aggression to prevent escalation.

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