

## **Article: Tips for Organisations...**

**What they should do and how:**

**Organisations can help prevent violence and aggression in the workplace (McElhaney, 2004), as it is often preceded by a pattern of events, where intervention at critical points can change the outcome. Such patterns must NOT be avoided or denied, as this will result in incidents and foster a culture of inevitability, tolerating and indirectly supporting violence and aggression. This leads to bad practice, staff anxiety about reporting incidents, and staff doubting their skills. Ensuring the safety of staff is a moral and legal obligation!**

### **Key principles**

- Commitment to staff well-being and managing workplace violence.
- Early warning signs, inappropriate behaviour or staff concerns are not ignored.
- Staff know that complaints are handled confidentially and sensitively.
- Staff are aware of their responsibilities and respond in an appropriate, timely, planned manner if situations arise.
- Clear reporting, investigation and documentation systems are in place to promote awareness and ensure appropriate action.
- Managers are trained to recognise and manage conflict, and get to know their employees in order to recognise changes.
- Personal safety risks are carried out regularly.

### **1. Conduct personal safety risk assessments?**

Risk assessments help to raise awareness of personal safety and to manage staff safety pro-actively. The risk assessment should include consideration of:

- Clients/customer needs
- Environment
- Behaviour triggers
- Staff needs

**Theory:** Risk assessment is a dynamic process. Some factors are static and some change over time. Risk assessment should address all relevant factors, especially those that change.

### **2. Have a robust reporting procedure in place?**

Collecting the number and type of incidents provides information on risks, trends and changes needed to reduce or eliminate risks. Staff must be encouraged to report 'near misses'. They can be a valuable guide to reducing future incidents.

A reporting procedure requires clear definition of violence and aggression, staff guidance on what to report, and a simple incident form and reporting procedure.

### **3. Bring policies and procedures 'to life'!**

Policies and procedures often cover workplace violence, bullying and harassment, equal opportunities, alcohol/drugs, discipline and grievance, communication and sharing information, recruitment and selection, lone worker and outreach worker, complaints and incident management.

Organisations should answer the following questions: 'Has each policy and procedure document got a living, pro-active element?', 'Would staff notice if the policy or procedure was scrapped?' .

### **4. Encourage staff involvement**

To raise awareness of personal safety try to...

- Develop effective communication, involvement and 'buy-in' to risk assessments,

- policy/procedures and training.
- Identify reasons for resistance to policies and procedures.
- Promote staff accountability to established standards of behaviour.

### **5. Train staff effectively**

Ensure staff understand their responsibilities and have the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes.

**Theory:** Training may vary across different staff groups. For example, awareness training for ALL staff (e.g. policies and procedures, recognising signs of aggression), training for managers (e.g. incident management, recognising at-risk staff, conflict and crisis management), and training for 'specialist' teams (e.g. HR, security).

### **6. Establish an employee assistance programme**

Staff sometimes need specialist help with issues beyond the resources of the organisation, including counselling, mental health services, security, outplacement services and coaching.

**Theory:** Staff need to be able to trust the people running these programmes.

### **7. Implement practical safety measures**

Work on what is practical, including personal alarms, mobile phones, office design, security screens, CCTV, appointment books, alarm drills, signs outlining standards of behaviour.