



## **SUBJECT:** Dealing with Aggression at Work

**RECIPIENTS:** All Council Services (including schools)

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No matter how good our personal safety policies and procedures are and how much the risks have been reduced, it is still possible that a member of the public could become aggressive or even violent to an employee. Therefore it is vital that staff that may be at risk have the knowledge and skills to enable them to defuse or contain a difficult situation until help can get to them, if the need should arise.

Violence rarely comes out of the blue. There are normally warning signals - such as sweating, pacing, table tapping or rapid speech and movements – and it is important for our safety be able to recognise these. It is equally valuable to be able to make an appropriate assessment of the situation and to ensure that we can manage our own behaviour and communication.



**1. The Importance of Self-Awareness** - Self awareness plays a vital part in a person's ability to deal with aggressive situations. We all need to be aware of, and control, any feelings in ourselves - such as anger or tension - that may trigger or escalate the behaviour of others. We need to learn how to act appropriately when dealing with an aggressive situation, rather than reacting in a manner that could escalate it. Non-verbal communication is extremely influential. Only a small percentage of a message is conveyed with words, whereas the messages conveyed by body language and tone of voice are far stronger. We can tell someone we understand and sympathise with them, but if we are bored, desperate to go home or have any negative thoughts about them, this information can leak out in our body language or voice. This will be picked up by the other person and will override anything we are saying. Therefore our body language and tone of voice needs to be congruent with our verbal message.

**2. Active Listening** - People become aggressive for a number of reasons, including when they feel they are not being listened to or taken seriously enough. Therefore an important skill to have when dealing with people is 'active listening'. This is about not only listening carefully but also showing that we are listening and understanding what is being said - by nodding, taking notes, asking for points to be clarified and so on. Listening well is not a natural skill. Most people are so intent on interrupting and saying their piece that they miss half of what is being said to them. Good listening is a basic conflict resolution skill which anyone who interacts with the public needs to master.

**3. Be Prepared** - Dealing with upset and potentially aggressive or violent individuals is a skill that can be learnt and once learnt it can make working life a lot easier and safer.

The above outlines just some of the skills that can be learnt and used to help defuse an aggressive client or member of the public. For more information see [G23 –Working Alone](#), [G15- Violence at Work](#), [The Safe and Secure Pages](#) or by completing the "[Conflict Management](#)" e-learning course that's available to all staff on Lincs2Learn.

**If you require further assistance or clarification on the subject please contact:**  
**Your Mouchel Health & Safety Adviser (see George section: Corporate > Information for Working > Risk Management > H&S Advisers)**