

# Encountering an Angry Client

## What to Do & How to Prepare

There has been an increase in violence in schools throughout the United States by members of the campus and visitors. Universities are generally open to the public and people can become angry for a variety of reasons. This anger may be from frustration, stress, mental health or unrelated issues that they are having difficulty dealing with. In some instances a violent situation may develop. What can you do when facing a potentially violent situation? The following steps are recommended.

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### What to Do

• **Observe:** When there is an outward sign of intoxication, hallucinations, unusual or bizarre speech, contact the Department of Public Safety immediately. After doing so, listen to the complaint until assistance arrives.

• **Listen:** Listen to the subjects' complaint; they need to know not only that you are willing to help them, but that they are top priority to you.

• **Avoid Defensiveness:** Do not defend the action of your department when the subject complains.

• **Acknowledge:** Their Emotions Through Support: This will reduce the subject's fear and hostility. For example, it would be appropriate to say, "I can understand how you would be upset, please tell me how we can help you." Non-support will only provide fuel to their emotions.

• **Speak Slowly, Softly & Clearly:** It will help you reduce their anxiety.

• **Ask Questions:** Ask questions that are relevant to the subject's problem and repeat their response so they know they are being understood. For example, "Mr. Jones, I can understand why you feel angry. How can we best help you?"

• **State Consequences:** If the person persists with threats, inform them that you will notify the Police Department unless they calm down.

### Plan for Protection

• Establish policies for handling violent situations.

• Develop a list of potentially violent persons or those you have had prior negative contact with and make the list available to others in your work area.

• Establish conditions and procedures for calling the Police Department.

• Outline procedures for notifying employee and medical assistance.

• Train staff for trauma incidents.

• If someone you have identified returns to your department or residence and is creating a disturbance, immediately put your plans into action.

• If the subject leaves, lock the door to prevent them from returning.

### Additional Guidelines

• Do not allow the person to sit between you and the door. You must have the ability to exit first and last.

• Remain seated two to three arm lengths away. This provides adequate distance from the individual, yet provides for effective communication. *Don't turn your back to the person.*

• Don't have instruments such as scissors or sharp objects on your desk on in your work area during the incident.

• Do not have heavy unsecured objects within reach, which could potentially be used as a weapon by the person.

• If possible, have another person in the room when speaking with the person. It also allows for a possible third point of view to solve the issue.

• Describe the consequences of violent behavior. For example "I understand that you are angry, but violence will only complicate matters even more."

• If you feel you are in danger, alert the police immediately.

• If you see a weapon, immediately call 911 for the police and leave the location as soon as safe for you to do so.

• In the work place, develop a code word that signifies you are concerned for your safety with others. This will identify to others to notify the police.

### Conclusion

It is wise for every department or residence to have a Violence Prevention and Management Plan in place. Each department should evaluate its physical security policies, its crisis management policies, and develop a plan for preventing and managing potential violence from employees and/or outsiders. Sound plans include training to identify potential perpetrators, and to instruct managers, supervisors, and staff to follow departmental procedures. Detailed instructions for handling the aftermath of a violent incident and the ensuing trauma and chaos should be included. Open communications between management and employees is encouraged.

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