

Workplace Violence in Healthcare: Reacting to Stress and Interacting with our Communities and Co-Workers

Passion for excellence. Compassion for people.



Objectives

1. Review how fear and other emotions play into the increase in disruptive behavior we see in patients, families, co-workers and the community.
2. Identify early warning signs that can alert you to potential disruptive behavior.
3. Provide awareness for changes in co-worker behavior.
4. Indicate how the physical environment can provide protection during a violent event.
5. Review de-escalation techniques using healthcare-based scenarios.
6. Provide release techniques if put in a hold by a client demonstrating violent behavior.
7. Review the steps to follow in response to an active shooter event.

What is Workplace Violence?

Workplace violence is any act or threat of physical violence, harassment, intimidation, or other threatening disruptive behavior that occurs at the work site.

It ranges from threats and verbal abuse to physical assaults and even homicide. It can affect and involve employees, patients, and visitors.

Fear and Emotions

Fear and anxiety can be overwhelming to some adults and children which can cause strong emotions. These strong emotions can trigger outbursts of violent behavior that can put you and others at risk.

Sudden death of a loved one, ill loved ones, pending test results, loss of income or health insurance, fear of losing medical care and mental illness are some possible triggers that could cause aggressive behavior. This behavior could be emotional or physical.



Early Warning Signs Associated with Violent Behavior

Aggressive behavior can happen rapidly and unexpectedly. It is important to watch for early warning signs of aggressive or agitated behavior. After knowing what behaviors to watch for, you can better protect yourself and others by responding quickly and appropriately.

Aggressive behavior can happen amongst staff as well. It is important to watch for unusual behaviors displayed by a co-worker and report any suspicious or aggressive behavior.

Change or Increase in Anxiety

Behavior Displayed:

- An individual (patient, staff member or visitor) may show signs of restlessness, pacing, withdrawal or fidgeting when there is an increase of anxiety.
- A patient or visitor may also make repetitive requests and seek their presence often.

Staff Response:

- As staff members it is important that we remain calm and be attentive. Keep a gentle tone of voice that is reassuring and understanding. This is an opportunity to check for underlying needs.
- Acknowledge the change in behavior and validate any uneasy feelings or emotions, if necessary.
- Show compassion and understanding, offer support if you feel it is appropriate.

Person Becomes Increasingly Irrational and Agitated

Behavior Displayed:

- An individual may have an increase in vulgar language, such as swearing, criticism, vocalized anger, physical restlessness or repetitive mannerisms.
- In some instances they may resist or refuse care.

Staff Response:

- Be responsive to the irrational behavior, acknowledge the change in behavior and validate the feelings and emotions.
- Offering flexibility and choices may help diffuse the escalated emotions.
- Remain calm and ignore the challenge but do not ignore the behavior. While interacting with the person, check for possible triggers. Some examples of triggers could be unmet needs, your approach or the environment they are in.

Change or Increase in Emotional and Physical Response

Behavior Displayed:

- A patient, co-worker or visitor may display an increase in verbally threatening and abusive language with physical aggression such as hitting, biting, grabbing, pinching, spitting, etc.

Staff Response:

- It is important to protect yourself and others when there are signs of aggression. Be directive immediately, you should stop the task you were doing and increase personal space. Be aware of your surroundings and prepare to exit the room, if necessary.

Nonverbal Signs

Watch for nonverbal cues of escalation

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- Clenching fist
 - Tightening/untightening jaw
 - Sudden change in body language
 - Fidgeting or pacing
 - Change in eye contact
 - Disruptive behaviors
 - Nasal Flaring



Cultural Sensitivity

It is important to be culturally sensitive when you are at work. Our demeanor needs to be respectful to all racial, national, religious, linguistic and/or cultural backgrounds.

Sensitivity, understanding and responses to diversity can influence patient and co-worker acceptance.



Cultural Sensitivity

Treat everyone with respect, whether that be a co-worker, patient or visitor. Being culturally sensitive as healthcare providers gives our patients and families feelings of comfort and trust.

This also goes for respecting others of all socioeconomic backgrounds. Be cognizant of what you say and how you treat patients, visitors and co-workers.



Political Sensitivity

Do not judge others based on their political views. Treat everyone's opinions with respect, whether that be a co-worker, patient or visitor. Do not voice your own personal political opinions when they reflect sensitive topics and may offend others that hear the message.



Elements in the Physical Environment that can Provide Protection

Locate an Escape Route

When you enter a room, it is important to be aware of your surroundings. If an individual were to get physically aggressive it is important to be ready.

Have your escape route planned so you can react quickly and safely.

If possible, stay between the door/exit and the person displaying the aggressive behavior.



Remove Stethoscope and/or Lanyard

Remove anything from around your neck or other parts of your body that could be used to harm you.

If you have a stethoscope, simply place it in your pocket.

If you wear your ID badge on a lanyard, pin it to your clothing.



Keep at a Legs-Length Distance

Keeping space between you and the aggressive person allows you space to escape if they try to grab you. It can help the person feel less threatened if they have adequate personal space.



Keep an object between you and the other person

When applicable, keep a large object between you and the person displaying aggressive behavior. This object can act as a barrier so they cannot grab you as easily. Examples of objects would be a table, chair or desk.



Initiate a Security Alert

If you need assistance, follow your Business Unit specific protocol to initiate a security response.

If the situation continues to escalate you may need to contact local law enforcement.



De-escalation Techniques

Be Empathic and Nonjudgmental

You are not going to agree with everyone's opinions and decisions, do not cast judgment based on their beliefs and decisions. A person will feel less threatened if they are being shown non-biased care and are shown compassion. That connection of empathy can make a patient feel safe and diffuse the situation.



Respect Personal Space

When a person is feeling heightened emotions, give them space. It can be intimidating for a person if you try to get too close and they may display violent actions.

If someone is confrontational, try backing away to give them and yourself space



Use Nonthreatening Nonverbals

In an instance where there is aggression, actions speak louder than words. If you remain calm and use neutral body language you can help diffuse a situation before it becomes violent.

Neutral body language can be keeping an open body frame (not placing your hands in your pockets or not crossing your arms in front of your body), keeping eye contact and maintaining calm and happy facial expressions, when appropriate.



Avoid Overreacting

When someone is having heightened emotions, it is important to not react at their level. Listen to what they are saying and acknowledge you are hearing them. Rather, talk in a quiet tone of voice, be calm, rational and professional.

When someone is yelling at you, it can be easy to raise your voice and yell back. This type of behavior is not conducive for de-escalation.



Focus on Feelings

Many times a person can react in an aggressive manner because they feel their emotional needs or feeling are not being acknowledged. Try to understand what they are feeling to better help them and diffuse the event.



Ignore Challenging Questions

If someone is posing challenging questions, try and re-direct them back on track. This can be difficult because you do not want them to feel that you are not listening to them. As your re-directing, help them focus on how you can work together to solve the issue.



Set Limits

Set clear and attainable limits.



Choose Wisely What You Insist Upon

When possible, try to be flexible with the person. It can help de-escalate the situation if they feel they have some control. It is also important to establish what rules are flexible and which are not.



Allow Silence for Reflection

Allow moments of silence for thought. Stop what you are doing, pause from the conversation, and just be present. Offering silence allows for a person to gather thoughts and/or consider choices.



Allow Time for Decisions

This de-escalation tip may be the hardest as we all feel the pressure of time. It is important that we give our patients, family and loved one's time to make a well informed and thought out decision.



Sexual Harassment

Workplace Violence in Healthcare

Sexual Harassment

Purpose

At Aspirus Health, we are committed to a safe, respectful, and professional care environment.

This section focuses on practical tools to address inappropriate behavior from patients confidently and respectfully.

Core Reminders

- You have the right to a safe workplace.
- Addressing inappropriate behavior is a professional responsibility.
- Support your team, share concerns and document incidents.



Workplace Violence in Healthcare

Sexual Harassment

Recognizing Inappropriate Behavior

Examples include:

- Sexual or suggestive remarks
- Unwanted, inappropriate, or sexual touching or gestures
- Invasive personal questions
- Violation of personal space



Workplace Violence in Healthcare

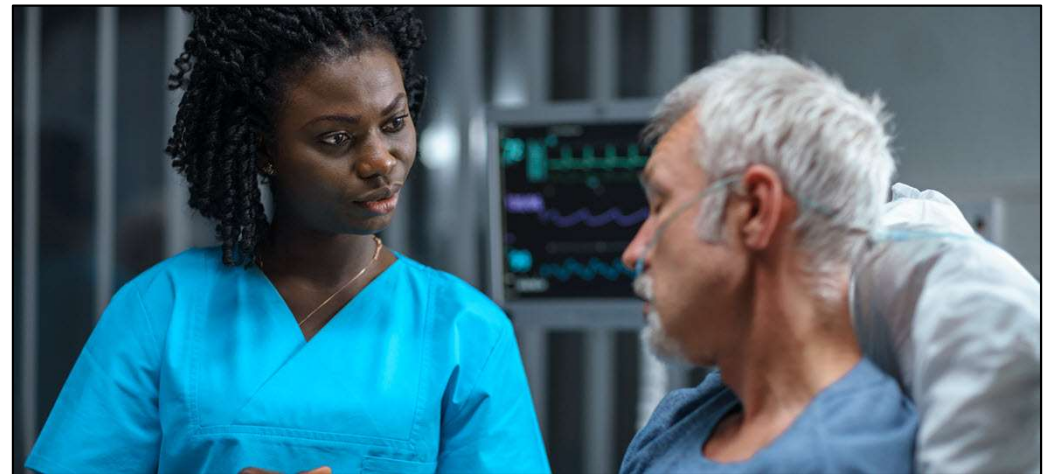
Sexual Harassment

Professional Responses for Staff Use

Step 1: Set Clear, Respectful Boundaries

"I'm here to provide you with professional medical care. That behavior is inappropriate and makes me uncomfortable. Please respect my boundaries so I can continue to care for you effectively."

Protect Your Safety. Remove yourself from unsafe situations and seek help immediately.



Workplace Violence in Healthcare

Sexual Harassment

Professional Responses for Staff Use

Step 2: Address Repeated Behavior Firmly

"I've asked you to stop. I will need to report the behavior and step away from your care."



Workplace Violence in Healthcare

Sexual Harassment

Professional Responses for Staff Use

Next Steps for Staff

- ✓ Report the incident to your Charge Nurse, Supervisor, or Hospital Supervisor.
- ✓ Document the behavior accurately in the patient's Epic chart according to Aspirus policy.
- ✓ Request support from Security or a chaperone when necessary.
- ✓ Document the event in Safety Zone as a Workplace Violence Event.
- ✓ Determine if Law Enforcement is needed.



Take Time to Debrief

Debriefing

Debriefing helps work through the actions and reflect on the event. This allows for improvement in future instances.

Debriefing is important to determine what went well and what did not go well.

After an event happens, meet with your manager or director to discuss the event and debrief.



Why Debriefing Techniques Matter

Debriefing creates staff consistency and offers an opportunity to learn from the challenges and the successes.

Debriefing can help you create a plan to make a positive change for your department and/or the organization.

This gives us the ability to deal with incidents next time, or better yet, prevent a next time.



Why Staff Consistency Matter

It is important for all our staff to be consistent. When we are consistent among all shifts, departments, and Business Units we remove uncertainty on job responsibilities, we build trust, promote teamwork, and increase quality of care.



Release Techniques

One Hand on One Wrist

1. Take a step back to gain stability, and then relax your wrist
2. Rotate your wrist towards attacker's thumb
3. Once the grip is loosened, retract your hand to prevent it from being grabbed again



Two Hands on One Wrist

1. Take a step back to gain stability, and then relax your wrist.
2. Take your free arm and weave it through the attacker's wrists in an over/under formation. This stops their movement.
3. Rotate your captured wrist towards the attacker's thumb
4. Use your strength to pull both hands from attacker's grasp.



Grabbing the Top of your Head/Hair

1. Grab onto the wrist holding your hair with both hands
2. Hold the wrist close to your head to limit the attacker's control on you
3. Slide one hand up and grip their pinky finger
4. Quickly pull the pinky back toward their wrist



Grabbing the Side of your Head/Hair

1. Grip the wrist holding your hair with one hand
2. Reach up with the other hand and slide your fingers around the attacker's pinky, using your hair to get under their hand
3. Peel the pinky back to the back of the attacker's hand
4. Slide away from the attacker's free arm as you bend the finger back
5. Step back immediately to create space and escape



Active Shooter

Active Shooter

It seems that lately every day we turn on the TV to watch the news there is a report related to a past active shooter incident. With active shooters on the rise, it is important that we know how to respond to this type of incident at any time or location.

If you are ever involved in an active shooter situation remember these three words:
RUN, HIDE, FIGHT

Run

If there is an active shooter have an escape route in mind. Try to evacuate regardless of whether others agree to follow. Help others escape, if possible. Do not attempt to move wounded people (help will be coming). Try to prevent others from entering an area where an active shooter may be. Try to use non-common hallways and stairwells.

Leave your belongings behind and when you leave the building make sure to have your arms up and nothing in your hands.



Hide

Another method of protecting yourself from an active shooter is to find a safe and secure place to hide. If you are hiding in a room with a door, make sure to lock it and blockade the door with heavy furniture to provide protection if shots are fired in your direction. Hide behind large items, such as cabinets and desks.

Remain quiet. Do not use a telephone. Silence all cell phones and pagers. Turn off any monitors, alarms, radios, televisions or any other source of noise.



Fight

If you decide to fight an active shooter it is important to commit to your actions. Attempt to incapacitate the shooter by acting with physical aggression. You will need to improvise a weapon for self-defense. Items like a fire extinguisher, chair or small table would work as a weapon.



Active Shooter Alert

Follow your Business Unit specific protocol for initiating an active shooter alert.

If you notice a suspicious person or behavior notify security immediately.



Aspirus Resources

Employee Assistance Program

Please contact the EAS Helpline at 715-847-2772 or at 1-800-236-4457 where Master-level counselors can offer support and guidance on a variety of work and personal topics.

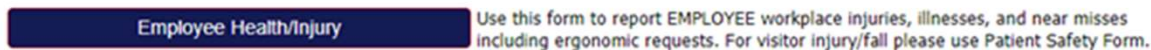
For more information visit their website: <https://www.aspirus.org/employee-assistance-services>

Safety Zone

If you experience or observe workplace violence, enter a safety zone event. You can access Safety Zone from the Aspirus Intranet. Follow the steps listed on the Safety Zone page to record your event.



The event is recorded by clicking on the Employee Health/Injury tab in Safety Zone:



Workplace Violence

If you ever feel unsafe or need assistance, contact your security team and/or local law enforcement.



Roles and Responsibilities

Staff

- Immediately contact security, your department director/manager or the local police if you witness a violent act.
- Complete a Safety Zone entry for any violent act you witness.
- Notify Security, your department director/manager, Human Resources or Law Enforcement if you been subjected to threats, harassment or aggressive behavior.

Leadership:

- Listen to staff concerns and thank them for their input.
- Take all concerns seriously.
- Encourage staff to document their concerns in a Safety Zone entry
- Investigate all Security Safety Zone events.
- Provide looped communication to staff presenting concern.

Roles and Responsibilities

Security Staff

- Respond to staff request for security assistance.
- Evaluate and provide a presence to location based on information provided.
- Engage local law enforcement when deemed necessary.
- Provide leadership with input on environmental security enhancements.

Law Enforcement

- Respond to organization's call for assistance.
- Investigate situation.
- Provide future guidance.
- Debrief staff involved.
- Participate in nursing staff circulation assessments when using forensic restraints (aka handcuffs) on Aspirus patients.

Workplace Violence in Healthcare

Need Help?

If you have questions about this topic, please contact your manager, Aspirus Health Employee Health, Human Resources, or Employee Assistance.



Sources

- Center for Disease Control (Website)
- Crisis Prevention Institute: Top 10 De-escalation Tips (Website)
- Divine Savior Healthcare: Crisis Prevention (Power Point)
- Federal Bureau of Investigation (Website)
- Joint Commission: Quick Safety De-escalation in health care
- Conflict Management, Recognizing, Responding and Reporting (Book)
- Self-Defense: Four Ways to Escape a Wrist Grab (Website)
- United States Active Shooter Events from 2000 to 2010: Training and Equipment Implications (Website)
- U.S Department of Homeland Security (Website)

Thank you.