

Violence at Work

Date of first issue	October 2012
Document Reference	CM006
Version	2.0
Revised Date	Oct 2013

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Introduction

1.1 Context

With the right response, most situations of violence can be prevented or diffused. Following the basic procedures outlined within this policy will help you in being able to deal effectively and confidentially with violence in the workplace.

A poor response towards an irritated or agitated person from an untrained person may aggravate the situation. It must be remembered that 'bad behaviour breeds bad behaviour'.

It is vital all employees are aware that if at any time a situation becomes aggressive or there is a perceived threat to an employees safety or the safety of others, the situation should be avoided and the Gardaí called for assistance.

1.2 Purpose

The aim of this policy is to provide employees and line managers with the information required to deal with situations of violence in the workplace safely and with confidence.

Preventing violence at work and ensuring the safety of our employees and members of the public within our stores is critical to ensure that nobody is subjected to any physical injury or stress. Violence at work can also lead to many negative effects on our business such as high absenteeism and high employee turnover.

1.3 Scope

This policy applies to all employees working in the pharmacy who may be subject to violence from members of the public during the course of performing their duties. This policy document is used in conjunction with the employee Workplace Violence E-Learning module which is completed annually by all employees and relevant risk assessments within the Risk Management section of the on-line Health and Safety Management system.

Procedure

2.1 Definitions

Workplace violence occurs where people in the course of their employment are aggressively verbally abused, threatened or physically assaulted.

In 2009 4.4% of all reported incidents to the HSA were related to violence at work

The Safety Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 and the Safety Health and Welfare (General Application) Regulations 2007 require employers to ensure the safety health and welfare of their employees. This includes,

Finding out if there is a problem and how serious it is by:

- Identifying the hazards.
- Assessing the risks to health and safety from violence at work and,
- Putting in place appropriate safeguards.

Violence at work can include:

- Verbal abuse, such as shouting, threats and insults.
- Racial or sexual harassment or discrimination.
- Physical attacks.
- Bullying.

2.2 Effects of Violence at Work

Violence at work can cause the following:

- Physical injury
- Disability
- Stress and depression
- Employees who commit violent acts can lose their jobs and face criminal charges
- Low employee morale
- High absenteeism and high employee turnover

All of these lead to lower productivity and lower profits.

2.3 Causes of Violence at Work

Factors, which can give rise to workplace violence, may include:

- Frustration or anger – this often happens when people have to wait, or when they feel they are being ignored
- Resentment – some people resent those in positions of authority
- Lack of training – without proper training, employees may not have the skills needed to keep operations running smoothly or to deal effectively with aggressive customers
- Lack of communication/information
- Lack of policies / training regarding correct process for crime prevention

2.4 Preventing Violence at Work

The following tips can help when dealing with customers, colleagues and the public:

1. Visualise Success

Approach customers, colleagues and the public with a positive attitude and thought process.

A positive thought process is:

Thoughts

Calm
Controlled
Do
Yes

Body

Eye contact
Open hands and body language
Sincere facial expressions

A negative thought process is

Thoughts

Panic
Cant
Wont
No

Body

Folded arms
No eye contact
Mocking or insincere expressions

2. Assess threats

Prior to going into potential difficult conversations you need to be aware of an exit strategy and keep a safe stance. This should be 2 arm's length away from the person you are dealing with.

The following are signals you need to be looking out for,

Verbal

- Use of demands.
- Not listening to you.
- Use of bad language.
- Unable to understand what the persons concern is.

Visual

- Assess the environment for additional persons.
- Is there a possible use of alcohol or substance abuse?
- Are there possible health issues with the person(s)?
- Are there any potential weapons. (Either on the person or within reach of them)
- Aggressive body language.

3. Determine your response

Avoid

If there is an immediate threat to the safety of yourself or others, avoid confrontation and call the Gardaí.

Defer

If the person escalates from irritated to agitated, deferring them to a more senior person may alleviate tension. Remember, when a confrontation escalates to where there is a threat to safety you should avoid as above.

Confront

To diffuse a potential confrontation,

- Listen.
- Gauge the potential verbal and visual threats.
- Empathise.
- Ask questions.
- Provide a decision and provide a reason for that decision.

When reviewing your workplace for the potential for violence always think about the attacker, the victim and the work environment and how these might come together to create a violent situation.

Considerations

- Ensure all employees have completed the on-line training module for prevention of Violence at Work.
- If some of the companies' employees work alone outdoors, e.g. drivers delivering medicines to nursing homes, ensure you have a contact system in place to monitor their whereabouts.
- Ensure outdoor employees do not unnecessarily carry valuable goods such as laptop computers, and tools.
- The company will make arrangements for counselling employees who have suffered violent attack e.g. Employee Assistance Programmes.

In locations identified as high risk advanced training will be provided which will cover the following topics:

- Crime prevention.
- Conflict management.
- Personal safety and security.

Employees who conduct home visits or travel for business must take additional precautions including:

- Know where you are going and how to get there.
- Be aware of your surroundings and any potential hazards.
- Get to know clients in advance, if possible.
- Report your plans – for example, location and arrival and departure times. Call your pharmacy regularly.
- Consider morning visits – this may be a safer time of day.

Risk assessments must be completed for all employees carrying out deliveries to nursing homes/lone workers. These can be found under the Driving for Work and Lone Worker risk assessments on the Risk Management section of the online H&S management system.

If Violence has Occurred

After an incident has taken place, contact the Retail Operations Coordinator on 01-4287709. An incident must also be completed using the Incident Management section of your on-line H&S management system. Any supplementary documents such as statements or photographs should be attached to the on-line incident report and the original stored securely in the pharmacy.

2.5 Employee Assistance Programme

Employees who have been victims of violence at work will be provided with support through the Employee Assistance Programme. This programme provides a confidential service to help employees manage life and work challenges. This service is available to all employees 24/7 and offers a wide range of advice and support services. The EAP helpline can be contacted on 1800 955 955 or by e-mail at eap@vhic.ie. For more information regarding this service please see An introduction to your Employee Assistance Programme within the documents section of your on-line health and safety management system.

2.6 Additional Support

With the right response, most situations of violence can be prevented or diffused. Following the basic procedures outlined above will help you in being able to deal effectively and confidentially with violence in the workplace.

A poor response towards an irritated or agitated person from an untrained person may aggravate the situation. It must be remembered that 'bad behaviour breeds bad behaviour'.

Remember that if at any time a situation becomes aggressive or perceive a threat to your safety or the safety of others you should avoid the situation and call the Gardaí for assistance.

Additional support for managers and employees is available through the following:

- Business Manager
- Health & Safety Coordinator
- Human Resources Department