



DEALING WITH VIOLENCE AND AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR: GENERAL STATEMENT AND GUIDANCE TO STAFF

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Snowdonia National Park Authority fully recognises that any of its employees in the course of their duties, which bring them into contact with the public, might at some stage face aggressive and potentially violent situations. The Authority is keen to ensure that everything possible is being done to reduce to a minimum the risks that exist.
- 1.2. The Authority has a policy of dealing with difficult customers entitled “Policy on Unacceptable Actions by Individuals”. This policy is a public document which aims to set out clearly to the public, what the Authority considers to be unacceptable behaviour and what actions it will take when it comes across such behaviour from individuals. In the main this policy is aimed at those who persistently make unreasonable demands and / or demonstrate unreasonable behaviour. However, violent behaviour is also dealt with by the policy.
- 1.3. The Authority also has a Lone Worker Policy, which should be followed in all instances of lone working. This policy should be consulted in conjunction with this guidance document.

2. Statement Aims

- 2.1. The aim of this statement is to set out the responsibilities of managers and to give advice and guidance to employees in:
 - Assessing risks;
 - Developing strategies for prevention; and
 - Dealing with the consequences of aggressive, threatening and violent behaviour.

3. Employees Responsibilities

- 3.1. Employees are expected to:
 - Deliver a high standard of service without giving expression to their own feelings;
 - Observe procedures to ensure the health and safety of members of the public, colleagues and themselves at all times; and to
 - Report all occurrences of aggressive / threatening behaviour and / or verbal abuse to their Head of Service or Head of Personnel.
- 3.2. The Authority will not support employees who compromise their responsibilities as set out above.

4. The Role of Management when Dealing with Potentially Violent Situations

- 4.1. The task of prevention or control must be seen as an integral part of the management of each service. The Health and Safety Executive's definition of violence at work is:

“Any incident in which an employee is abused, threatened or assaulted by a member of the public in circumstances arising out of the course of his or her employment”

An incident of violence that results in an employee suffering an injury may be reportable to the Health and Safety Executive. Even though strictly speaking such an incident is not an accident, details of the injuries should be documented in the accident book for your service. The relevant page of the accident book should then be sent to the Head of Personnel, who will decide whether a report should be submitted to the Health and Safety Executive.

- 4.2. In reality such violent incidents are rare. However, some situations are known in advance to be potentially dangerous because of the confrontational nature of the work involved, prior knowledge of the individual concerned etc. Once such a situation is identified, the Authority will not expect employees to go alone into what might be a potentially violent situation. Heads of Service must ensure that risk assessments are carried out on all employees who identify such a situation, to ascertain what level of risk from violence they may be exposed to.
- 4.3. Heads of Service should take steps to identify employees whose interaction with the public could create a degree of risk. These employees include:
- Planning and Compliance Officers;
 - Car Park Attendants;
 - Wardens;
 - Those who serve legal notices; and
 - Those who undertake any kind of site visits or have direct contact with the public.

5. Incidents of Violence

- 5.1. If any employee is assaulted, the incident should be reported immediately to the direct line manager or Head of Service. The employee who has been assaulted should:
- Be relieved of their duties – in order to recover from the experience where the nature of the assault or the effect on the individual requires it;
 - Have access to first aid when necessary or referred to hospital if appropriate;
 - Complete the accident book and prepare a written statement as soon as possible.
- 5.2. The Head of Service will inform the police of the incident of deliberate assault, unless already called out at the scene.

6. Site Visits

- 6.1. If an individual is behaving aggressively or threatening an employee, it is acceptable to terminate the site visit after giving due warning of your intentions.
- 6.2. Such incidents should be reported to the Head of Service. The Head of Service and the employee should conduct a risk assessment which should include what steps to take to prevent a re-occurrence and what control measures are needed for any future site visits.

7. Dealing with Members of the Public

- 7.1. Apart from site visits and other similar work, many other employees encounter members of the public daily as part of their work. At times these encounters can appear frustrating to the public and could result in aggressive behaviour on their part. Such areas of work include that carried out by attendants who are managing car parks and wardens who approach members of the public when they appear to be undertaking dangerous and unlawful activities etc.
- 7.2. The types of incidents that occur in these situations are usually one-off, in that the member of staff is not likely to encounter the individual again. These situations by their very nature are impossible to predict. However, the general guidance outlined in Appendix 1 should always be followed when dealing with the public, so as to try and, as far as is possible, defuse any such potentially aggressive situations.

APPENDIX 1: General Guidance to Employees

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Employees who deal directly with the public may face aggressive or violent behaviour. You may be sworn at, threatened or even physically attacked. However, the chances of becoming a victim of violence are very low and, by taking sensible precautions, the risks can be reduced further.

2. Principles of Good Practice

2.1. Causes

Physical and psychiatric conditions sometime provoke aggressive and violent responses. Some causes are very complex, but others may have simple origins, such as being told that what they are doing is not permitted or being refused a service they think they are entitled to. Aggressive behaviour and violence cannot always be easily anticipated, since it may be provoked by the person's own mood as well as external events.

2.2. Signs and Symptoms

It is difficult to produce a comprehensive list but significant behavioural and mood changes may be warning signs of aggressive and violent behaviour to come. It is therefore important for employees to recognise any such changes.

The following are common signs of behavioural changes:

- Tense and agitated.
- Raising voice to a high pitch and speaking loudly.
- Replying to questions abruptly.
- Showing signs of muscular tension in the face and limbs.
- Pupils may be dilated.
- Closing hands into a fist.
- Sudden changes in behaviour.
- Attempts to control or frighten.
- Demonstrates by his / her general demeanour and body language an uneasiness and wish to intimidate, menace or embarrass.

2.3. Control

It is not possible to give specific instructions to staff on what must be done in such a situation, as each case will be individual in nature and probably very different from the next. The best course of action is for you to assess the situation on the spot and trust your instincts on how best to respond. The points below are general in nature and are in the main applicable in most aggressive situations.

To try and keep control of the situation:

- Always try to treat people with respect, regardless of their behaviour.
- Step back and give the individual enough personal space. Bear in mind when people are under pressure or stressed, what is regarded as personal space is expanded.
- You should stay as calm as possible; it can help tensions from escalating and may help defuse the situation. If you cannot stay calm you should consider walking away.

- Try and show empathy and concern. For example by saying “I can see your frustration, and I’m frustrated too. Unfortunately, the rules are.....”.
- Advise the individual that their language and / or behaviour are offensive and unacceptable.

You should try and avoid the following:

- Raising your voice or getting into an argument.
- Telling the individual to calm down.
- Wave or gesture wildly while talking.
- Insist that you are right and the other person is wrong. Instead let the individual know that you see the situation differently and explain why.
- If you are indoors, try to ensure that your exit from the room is clear i.e. avoid the situation as far as possible whereby the other person is stood between you and the door.

Trust your intuition and react accordingly. Do not stay if you feel the situation might escalate and that you may be in danger of being physically attacked.

2.4. General Good Practice Points

- Site Visits: Do not discuss your findings on site with the owner, if there is a potential for the individual to react badly with your findings.
- Always carry the Authority identity card.
- Always carry a mobile phone or radio.
- Always inform the office / base of movements.