

Aggressive Behaviour

Aggressive behaviour is behaviour that may be perceived as threatening to your safety or the safety of others or behaviours that deliberately aim to induce fear.

Warning signs of aggression

- Agitation and intense frustration
- Fearfulness
- Invasion of your personal space
- Banging or pushing furniture
- Pacing
- Prolonged glaring or avoidance of eye contact
- Facial muscle tension (furrowed brow, tight jaw, quivering lips)
- Dilated pupils
- Flushed appearance
- Hyperventilation
- Clenched fists
- Speaking in loud voice, rapid speech
- Using sharp or caustic retorts, sarcasm, or demeaning inflection
- Expressed confusion or lack of understanding
- Mumbling or talking under their breath

General principles on dealing with aggressive behaviours

Do's

- Remember that your safety is most important!
- Always try to get help
- Try to keep calm
- Keep at a safe distance, don't invade their personal space
- Move quietly towards the nearest safe exit
- Position yourself to be out of reach to avoid physical injury
- Remove anything that could be used as a weapon (if safe to do so)
- Act neutrally and keep your hands empty
- Be aware of your reactions and responses
- Try to make them feel comfortable
- Keep communications short, simple and to the point
- Actively listen & reflect back your understanding
- Speak slowly and clearly
- Focus on the issue and not the person
- Be patient and empathetic

Don't's

- Don't be heroic: if it is possible to get help, do so
- Don't react aggressively or argue
- Don't question them excessively
- Don't crowd the aggressor
- Don't corner the aggressor
- Don't back yourself into a corner
- Don't turn your back
- Don't pick up anything that might be taken for a weapon

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Appropriate communication response

- Actively listen and reflect back your understanding: *"It sounds like you're experiencing..."*
- Be patient and empathic: *"I'm sorry to hear that you're feeling..."*
- Remember to use 'I' statements: *"in order for me to help you, I need you to stop this (describe behaviour)"*
- Name the behaviour: *"This (describe behaviour) is not getting us anywhere."*
- Use the repeat technique, especially with people who may be under the influence of alcohol
- Indicate that while this behaviour continues, you will not be able to help them
- Focus on the issue and not the person
- DO NOT threaten them with violence

Below are some body language techniques which can help to diffuse an aggressive situation

- Use non-threatening body language
- Use open hand language, e.g. don't cross your arms
- Use calm but firm tone of voice
- Make eye contact but do not stare
- Indicate your willingness to assist by using 'friendly' gestures
- Do not invade personal space, as this may inflame the situation

Self-care

- Don't take the anger personally, even if it seems personal
- Use balanced thinking to keep things in perspective
- Don't bottle it up – go and talk to somebody (friend, workmate, manager, professional – EASA, or peer group)
- Request a forum where issues may be discussed with a facilitator
- Don't feel guilty if you are provoked – you are reacting to a stressful situation
- Use breathing techniques to help maintain control and reduce anxiety
- Use relaxation to reduce tension
- Use positive self-talk to stay in control mentally

Further information

Where you can find out more about aggressive behaviour:

- Department of Health website: www.health.gov.au (4.3 Managing aggressive and disruptive behaviours)
- Skills You Need website: www.skillsyouneed.com (Dealing with aggression)

Also, read our tip sheets on:

- Trauma
- Bullying in the workplace