PREVENTION OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE POLICY

Objectives

The objectives of this policy are to:

- provide a framework for the prevention and management of workplace violence

- promote *zero tolerance* for workplace aggressive behaviour and violence

- promote a safe working environment for all employees

- promote strategies for the management of workplace aggressive behaviour and violence.

Policy Statement

Management will identify, assess if necessary and control the risk of workplace violence. To achieve this, ALG Centre Management (ALG) will have a violence prevention program in place. This program will focus on the elimination of violent behaviour. Where risk cannot be eliminated, it must be reduced. Strategies to reduce risks must be undertaken using a consultative framework with employee input.

All managers and supervisors are responsible for promoting a workplace free of aggressive behaviour and violence, including managing incidents involving aggressive behaviour and violence.

Workplace violence impacts workers and their ability to perform their work, their families, and the community. It should be recognised that workplace violence is potentially a criminal offence, and police action will be taken when appropriate.

Prevention of Workplace Aggression and Violence Policy

Workers have the right to work in an environment free from aggressive behaviour and violence. Clients and others also have the right to receive services in an environment free from risks to their personal safety.

Workers who believe they are subjected to workplace violence and aggression are encouraged to report such incidents to their supervisor. All complaints will be treated seriously and will be investigated promptly.

Support mechanisms will be made available to all workers through an Employee Assistance Program or the internal support network.

It is important to note that a worker or manager does not have the right to retaliate physically to an act of assault unless the responding action is deemed to be self-defence and is of equal intensity or less.

Violence towards workers and others is a significant work health and safety (WHS) issue, and just like other aspects of WHS, all workers have a role in and responsibility for maintaining a safe workplace.

Definitions

- **Zero tolerance**: a complete refusal to tolerate aggressive behaviours. It is important to differentiate unacceptable workplace aggressive behaviour from behaviour demonstrated as a result of a medical condition such as dementia, hypoxia or brain injury, for example.
- **Workplace aggressive behaviour**: incidents, perceived or real to individuals, when they are abused, threatened, or assaulted in circumstances arising out of, or in the course of their employment, involving an explicit or implicit challenge to their safety, health, or wellbeing.
- **Workplace violence**: an action or incident that physically or psychologically harms another person. It includes situations where workers and others are threatened, attacked, or physically assaulted at work.
- **Non-physical violence,** such as verbal abuse, intimidation, and threatening behaviour, may also significantly affect a person's health and wellbeing. Threats may be perceived or real, and there does not have to be a physical injury for the violence to be a workplace hazard. Workplace violence may affect workers even if they are not directly involved.
- **Physical violence**: physical force against another person or group that results in physical harm. It includes but is not limited to, pinching, biting, pushing, spitting, slapping, kicking, beating, shooting, and stabbing.
- **Psychological violence**: the use of power against another person or group that results in psychological harm or an inability to develop professionally. This includes but is not limited to, verbal abuse, suggestive behaviour, threats of physical abuse, intimidation, and bullying.

Zero Tolerance

The zero-tolerance response means that in all violent incidents, appropriate action will be taken to protect workers, clients, and visitors from the effects of such behaviour. To create and nurture a zero tolerance culture, certain messages must be communicated and regularly reinforced to managers, workers, clients and others.

These strategies should be specifically designed to meet local needs ensuring that managers, workers, clients, and visitors clearly understand that workplace aggressive behaviour and violence are unacceptable. Crucial to the success of creating a zero-tolerance culture is the active elimination of internal violence and aggression.

Introduction

Workplace violence is recognised as a significant workplace hazard. Numerous personal and business risks are associated with exposure to violence, including physical and emotional trauma, low morale, high staff turnover, financial costs, lost productivity, lessened public opinion and litigation. Work health and safety legislation requires employers to take all practical steps to eliminate as far as possible workplace violence risks. If a violent incident occurs, there should also be response procedures in place to minimise the event's impact.

Under the Work Health and Safety Act, organisations have a duty of care to provide and maintain a safe work environment where workers and others are not exposed to hazards and can work without risk of injury or harm to themselves and others.

ALG aims to meet its responsibilities by:

- providing an overarching policy on the prevention of workplace aggression and violence

- providing information and guidance to workers and managers

- identifying a framework for grievance resolution

- providing a directory of education and training programs

- outlining relevant support mechanisms, including internal support networks, such as contact officers, grievance officers, peer support officers, and an Employee Assistance Program

- identifying risk management approaches

- ensuring that all clients have a positive behaviour support plan developed and that this is implemented at all times.

These guidelines provide information for managers and workers on how to promote a working environment free from workplace aggression and violence and how to resolve complaints if incidents are reported.

A fundamental principle underpinning the development of the policy and guidelines is that workers have the right to work in an environment free from workplace aggression and violence.

Training in Prevention of Workplace Aggression and Violence

ALG provides regular training to prevent workplace aggression and violence, and the management of violent incidents and attendance is mandatory.

Risk Management Approach

A risk management approach to workplace aggressive behaviour and violence is adopted. Thorough risk assessments of all services will be undertaken to identify any workplace violence risk and implement appropriate control strategies such as positive behaviour support plans.

Warning signs of Conscious Violence

Warning signs/cues of violence	Responses that may help diffuse aggression
A repeated succession of questions	Appear calm, self-controlled, and confident, confirming that you are addressing their concerns.
Using another language in an aggressive manner	Identify language origin and locate an interpreter to assist.
Using obscenities or sarcasm	Do not match their language.
Shouting	Ask for information with a calm voice.
Replying abruptly or refusing to reply	Calmly confirm the received information back to the assailant.
Rapid breathing	Breathe slowly and evenly.
Pacing	Attempt to sit them comfortably.
Clenched fist or pointing fingers	Do not fold your arms or clench your fists in reaction.
Invading your personal space	Maintain a comfortable distance.
Staring	Maintain normal, but broken eye contact.
Tight jaw with clenched teeth	Open hands to the assailant
Shoulders squared up and dominating.	Stand to the side.

Consultation

Consultation is pivotal at all risk identification, assessment and control stages and an integral part of good management. Consultation with health and safety representatives, security experts, workers and union representatives should occur to identify risks and effective solutions.

Incident reporting

All services will implement a local system for reporting and recording violent incidents that involve workers regardless of whether or not the incident results in an injury or lost time or is notifiable. Local incident reporting aims to identify trends and develop strategies to reduce and prevent these.

Workers must be aware of reporting requirements and actively encouraged and supported in reporting all violent incidents. A readily accessible, straightforward to implement reporting procedure will encourage reporting, as will prompt, sensitive and appropriate follow-up.

Responding to Violence

Immediate response options

Every effort should be made, via the risk management process, to prevent violence from occurring. However, if a violent incident does occur, workers must be aware that they have a range of response options. These responses will depend on several factors, including the nature and severity of the event, whether it is a client, visitor, co-worker or intruder and the skills, experience and confidence of the worker(s) involved. Responses may include calling for backup, security, or local police.

When a client becomes violent, consideration should always be given to the possible causes of the behaviour. A violent outburst may be secondary to a number of medical conditions. Assessment and prompt action should be of primary concern after ensuring workers' and other clients' safety.

Mental Health First Aid training is provided to all staff at ALG.

Post-incident response

When the incident is concluded, workers can access support services and have the option of time out from duties. Line managers provide appropriate psychological and operational debriefing.

In addition, a management review of the incident by appropriate staff and experts, such as a security consultant, is included. The purpose of a review is to critically analyse how the incident was managed with a view to setting new standards for the management of future incidents.

Incident reporting

Violent incidents must be reported and recorded using the appropriate form and forwarded to the manager or supervisor.

Depending on the nature of the incident, it may also necessitate reporting to external agencies such as Safework, the Police or other appropriate external organisations.

Please consult with the Health and Safety Lead.

Incident investigation

The most effective way to prevent a recurrence of an incident is to determine why it happened and if it was preventable. Incident investigations should:

- be undertaken promptly by the manager or supervisor in consultation with the health and safety representative and/or relevant workers

- not apportion blame

- be conducted in a supportive and non-judgmental way

- identify underlying root cause/s and contributing factors

- consider all sources of relevant information, for example, witnesses, incident reports, relevant workplace policies and procedures, the working environment, equipment used, level of supervision at the time, relevant training provided and expert advice, including occupational health and safety or risk management staff

- include an operational review if relevant

- identify and recommend control measures to prevent a recurrence.