

Disrespectful Behaviour and Abuse of Staff, Including Aggression and Violence and Appropriate Response

Policy Statement

This policy shows how the Group of Companies exercises its duty to care to keep its staff safe from the abusive behaviour and risks of being harmed by suppliers, clients and “third parties” in the course of their work. “Third parties” include relatives and friends of suppliers, visiting professionals, suppliers, tradespeople, and contractors. There are separate policies and procedures for addressing abuse to and from colleagues in the workplace, which is usually treated as misconduct and addressed through the Group of Companies disciplinary procedures.

The Group of Companies default position is that its staff should always be treated courteously and with respect for the work they are doing. They should not be subject to abusive behaviour in any form, which includes:

- rude, disrespectful, and offensive behaviour, including derogatory remarks and disruptive acts amounting to verbal and emotional abuse,
- sexual harassment: unwelcome sexual attention, behaviour, suggestions, messages, or remarks of a sexual nature that offends, intimidates or humiliates the complainant; a promise or reward for sexual deeds; or a sexual threat.
- racist and discriminatory abuse
- threats of physical violence
- aggressive and violent behaviour

The Group of Companies considers that staff should be safe at work and should not be exposed to undue or unreasonable risk. It believes that staff must work safely, free from the threat of injury or distress from the abusive behaviour of others. It will not tolerate abuse in any shape or form and will investigate all reported or observed incidents of staff being subject to disrespectful behaviour or abuse.

Physical attacks on staff at work are, fortunately, very rare and the Group of Companies does all it can to minimise this risk to ensure that staff are as safe as possible. Verbal abuse is more common and can cause considerable emotional distress. The Group of Companies recognises that its staff could be subject to some form of abuse at any time and recognises its duty to ensure that staff are properly trained and supported to deal with any incident.

The Group of Companies Approach to Keeping its Staff Safe

This policy applies to all staff in contact with the people who use our services and “third parties” as defined above.

1. The Group of Companies expects everyone in contact with its staff to treat them politely and respectfully and not to subject them to any form of abuse. The Group of Companies has a zero – tolerance approach to any form of abuse, which applies to its staff.

2. In line with health and safety requirements, the Group of Companies has in place systems to assess, record, audit and control all risks to its staff from any form of behaviour that breaches acceptable standards of conduct amounting to abuse by suppliers, clients and third parties. This means that all risks of workplace abuse are comprehensively assessed, and any identified risks are systematically managed.
3. Staff should report to management or the Human resources department any incident in which they or colleagues have been subject to disrespectful or abusive behaviour from suppliers, client or third parties. They should also record the incident with full, factual information in terms of what was said or done and with as much supporting evidence as possible from witnesses, including photographic / video evidence if that has been obtained.
4. Managers will discuss the harm caused by, and risks of further harm to those subject to such behaviour and decide the actions to be taken, which will depend on the form and seriousness of the disrespectful or abusive behaviour. They will then act proportionately to and in line with their assessment.
5. Persistent abuse from suppliers, clients and third parties to staff could amount to a breach of contract and contracts cancelled.
6. With clients, when financial services are provided and clients are persistent with abuse in any form, The Group of companies might;
 - A. enter into constructive discussions to avoid recurrence,
 - B. issue written warnings to de-escalate behaviour, or
 - C. take action to prevent the person from being in a position of being able to continue their abusive behaviour.
 - D. If there is enough evidence to prove harassment and abusive behaviour in any form, an interim protection order will be sought from a competent court for the employee, together with a suspended warrant of arrest. Any action will be recorded, and a full explanation will always be given to the perpetrator.
7. Clients on the Group of companies' business premises who act in an abusive manner towards staff may be asked to leave and told that they could be prevented from visiting the business premises again if their behaviour and attitude does not alter.
8. Managers will avoid the need for lone working whenever there are identified threats to employees' personal safety from the abusive behaviour of supplier/s, client/s or third parties.
8. Staff will always work to minimise the risk of and prevent abusive, aggressive, and violent behaviour. They are encouraged to adopt a confident, calm, professional, dignified approach in response to any disrespectful, impolite, or overtly abusive behaviour.
9. Employees are expected to avoid retaliating to others' abusive behaviour in kind other than to protect their own safety, for example, where being physically attacked. This is important to allow for constructive solutions to be found, to avoid escalation and counter charges, which could make them subject to disciplinary procedure.

Responding to Verbal Abuse and Disrespectful Behaviour

1. The issues concerning suppliers, clients and third parties who are persistently disrespectful to The Group of companies employees, including racist abuse, will be addressed, although The Group of companies accepts that any abuse should not be tolerated it also recognises that there are often underlying factors behind individual's behaviour and will always seek constructive solutions.
2. Staff who are subject to abuse from suppliers, clients and third parties should refrain from being abusive in retaliation but are entitled to say how they feel about being the recipient of abuse such as *"I am hurt by what you are saying or your manner"*; *"I do not think you should talk to me like that"*, *"I find what you are calling or saying to me offensive"*.
3. When staff feel they are subject to such abuse, they should state they will report it and indicate that the matter will be parlayed. They might also direct the person to address any concerns about a service user's care that might have triggered an abusive outburst to the management or file a complaint.
4. The Group of companies will consider any report and decide on the appropriate actions to be taken, which might involve:
 - a. discussions with the perpetrator to request more respect from them
 - b. directing any concerns through the complaint's procedure
 - c. a verbal, followed by written warning, for persistent abusive conduct
 - d. a written agreement to stop being abusive
 - e. allow the staff member to follow a legal process to seek, address and recourse of the abuser's behaviour.
5. All actions will be fully recorded and subject to regular review.

Physical Intervention

Staff must always deal with behaviour that challenges them calmly and professionally. Physical and verbal aggression by suppliers, clients and third parties should be understood by staff and dealt with appropriately.

In the event of an aggressive incident, staff should summon help or call the police immediately. They should try to de-escalate incidents, wherever possible, and their priority should be for their own safety and the safety of other people present. Physical interventions should be used only as a last resort by trained staff, and in line with best practice guidance to protect the rights and best interests of the service user, and which are consistent with safety of all concerned.

If a member of staff is attacked, they are permitted to use "minimum reasonable force" to defend themselves. Care should therefore be taken to ensure that minimum force is indeed used and that

service users who are acting in an aggressive or threatening manner are not subject to undue restraint.

The law gives protection to people from being abused or attacked and, if a member of staff is attacked, they can use “minimum reasonable force” to defend themselves. However, staff should remember that if they restrain a violent person and injure them because of the force they use, they could be charged for assault. Because of this risk, staff should always follow the established procedure.

Reporting and Support

1. Any verbally, abusive or violent behaviour towards staff (or temporary employees), no matter how minor, must be reported at once to the Human resources manager, who should make a record in the incident book.
2. Staff involved should complete and submit a written record of the events.
3. Appropriate support will be offered by the Human resources management to employees who are subject to abuse and who are emotionally distressed as a result and to any staff member involved in violent or aggressive incidents.
4. Violent or aggressive incidents, even if they just amount to being shouted at, can be very upsetting for a member of staff and, in extreme cases, can lead to them suffering psychological trauma or illness — staff should therefore be given the opportunity to discuss their experiences.
5. In extreme cases, the service understands that there may be a need for ongoing support and referral to occupational health services or professional counselling.
6. Where absence from work arises from a violent or aggressive incident, any such absence will be treated as special leave rather than sickness absence.
7. The Group of companies will always seek the approval and consent of the member of staff abused or attacked before making any decision about reporting the incident to the police or other authorities. However, it will report the matter without the victim’s consent where it deems this to be the correct action to take in the public interest or to protect other people from possible abuse.

Monitoring

The appropriate manager from The Group of companies will review all reports of aggression and violence or potential aggression and violence and look for any trends or patterns or lessons to be learned.

Managers will carefully monitor all incident reports annually with the Human resources manager relating to abuse, violence, or other forms of misconduct to ensure that the staff are being appropriately protected.

Training

The Group of Companies ensures that all staff are trained to show respect for others and to expect the same respect from others as described in this policy.

How to respond appropriately to verbal abuse, aggressive or potentially violent behaviour is included in the induction training for all new staff.

All staff are trained to recognise the early warning signs of potential aggression and how and where to seek support if needed, including in high risk situations the use of panic alarms.

In-house training sessions are conducted at least annually, and all relevant staff will attend.

Managers are trained in the management of abusive behaviour, violent or emergency situations and in appropriate post-incident follow-up.