

Encountering an Angry Client

What to Do & How to Prepare

There has been an increase in violence in the workplace by current or former employees and a significant increase in violence by clients. The term "client" refers to anyone one may come into contact with here at the UC Davis campus or Health Systems facilities. These clients may be students, staff, faculty, patients, hospital/clinic visitors, or members of the public. Many UC departments provide services to community members and the public wherein routine visits are made by clients to departments responsible for accepting payments, handling complaints, counseling, etc. In some instances a violent situation may develop. What can the employee do when facing potentially violent clients? The following steps are recommended:

What to Do

- **Observe:** When there is an outward sign of intoxication, hallucinations, unusual or bizarre speech, contact the Police Department immediately. After doing so, simply listen to the complaint until assistance arrives.
- **Listen:** Listen to the client's complaint, they need to know not only that you are willing to help them, but that they are top priority to you.
- **Avoid Defensiveness:** Do not defend the action of your department when the client complains.
- **Acknowledge Their Emotions Through Support:** This will reduce the client's fear and hostility. For example, it would be appropriate to say, "I can understand how you would be upset, please tell me how we can help you." Non-support will only provide fuel toward their emotions.
- **Speak Slowly, Softly & Clearly:** It will help reduce their anxiety.
- **Ask questions:** Ask questions that are relevant to the client's problem and repeat their response so they know they are being understood. For example, "Mr. Jones, I can understand why you feel angry. How can we best help you?"
- **State Consequences:** If the person persists with threats, inform them that you will notify the Police Dept. unless they calm down.

Additional Guidelines

- Do not allow the person to sit between you and the door. You must have the ability to exit first and last.
- Remain seated two to three arm lengths away. This provides adequate distance from the individual, yet provides for effective communication. **Don't turn your back to the person.**
- Don't have scissors or sharp objects on your desk during the incident.
- Do not have unsecured heavy objects within reach, which could potentially be used as a weapon by the client.
- If possible, have another individual of the opposite sex in the room when speaking with the client. Two males may create a "macho" type of atmosphere. The third person can also provide solutions or alternatives to the problem.
- Describe the consequences of violent behavior. For example, "I understand that you are angry, but violence will only lead to jail."
- If you feel you are in danger, alert the Police Department immediately. Human Resources should then be notified as soon as it is safe to do so.
- If you see a weapon, immediately call 911 for the Police and leave the location as soon as it is safe for you to do so.

Plan for Protection

- Establish policies for handling potentially violent situations.
- Develop a list of potentially violent persons or those you have had prior negative contact with.
- Establish conditions and procedures for calling the Police Dept. & secure a pre-arranged distress signal.
- Outline procedures for notifying employee and medical assistance.
- Train staff for trauma incidents.
- If someone you have identified returns to your department and is creating a disturbance, immediately put into motion dept. procedures.

Conclusion

It is wise for every department to have a Violence Prevention and Management Plan in place. Each department should evaluate its physical security policies, its crisis management policies, and develop a plan for preventing and managing potential violence from employees and/or outsiders. Sound plans include training to identify potential perpetrators, and to instruct managers, supervisors, and staff to follow departmental procedures. Detailed instructions for handling the aftermath of a violent incident and the ensuing trauma and chaos should be included. Open communication between management and employees is encouraged.

*UC Davis Police Department
Crime Prevention Unit
530-752-6589*



Crimes in Progress: **9-1-1**
Non-Emergency UCD: 530-752-1230
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