



centre for psychotherapy and counselling

## **POLICY & GUIDELINES ON HANDLING VIOLENT AND AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR**

*To be read in conjunction with Wellspring's Health & Safety Policy and Practice and Guidelines for Lone and Off-Site Working*

Wellspring has an obligation to promote the safety of Wellspring's staff, volunteers, service users and any others within our work environment. The purpose of this Policy is to try to minimise the risk of violent incidents or the threat of violence and to offer guidelines as to how to respond should such incidents occur.

While violent and aggressive behaviour is rare at Wellspring, there are times when an angry, distressed, disturbed or ill client may openly demonstrate his or her feelings through physical and verbal aggression and violence.

### **AIMS OF THIS POLICY**

This policy seeks to ensure that

- safe working policies and arrangements are in place to protect both Wellspring workers and service users
- appropriate guidance is provided in identifying the risks and responding to violence
- workers are aware of their responsibilities
- there is a system for reporting and recording all incidents of violence
- arrangements are made to support anyone who is exposed to violence within Wellspring

### **RISK ASSESSMENT**

Clients attending for the first time, clients known to be attending because of difficulties with anger management or aggression, borderline clients or those vulnerable to psychotic episodes represent the most obvious risk. It is the responsibility of all therapists to be alert to possible risk and to inform colleagues when necessary, so that protective vigilance can operate.

Where clients are known to have a record of violence, or of turning up intoxicated, or of seriously disturbed, threatening behaviour, there needs to be consultation at the therapists' Meeting and/or with the Co-ordinator of Clinical Services so that decisions can be made as to how best to ensure safety, what safeguards should be put in place and indeed, to consider the advisability of seeing such a client within Wellspring.

It is Wellspring's policy that clients who arrive for an appointment under the influence of non-prescribed drugs or alcohol are told that they cannot be seen in this condition.

## **TRAINING**

Wellspring undertakes to ensure that at the induction of a new administrator or therapist guidance is given on how to manage a potentially aggressive or violent situation (such as recognition of volatile situations, de-escalation techniques and break away techniques). This input may be incorporated into a team workshop on the management of challenging situations and on safe practice.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES OF WELLSPRING WORKERS**

Those working within Wellspring are expected to:

- take reasonable care of their own safety and the safety of others who could be affected by what they do or omit to do
- co-operate with recommended precautionary measures and ensure that guidelines in this policy are followed
- bring to attention any perceived risk of a violent situation
- report any incident of violence in accordance with the guidelines below
- report any shortcomings that might increase the risk, or exacerbate the consequences of violent behaviour

## **REPORTING, RECORDING AND RESPONDING**

- A worker who is the victim of a physical assault in the course of his or her duties will report the violent incident as soon as possible to the Safety Officer and to the Co-ordinator of Clinical Services. Workers experiencing other violent incidents such as abusive or threatening behaviour or persistent and serious harassment which they feel threatens their personal safety should also report this.
- The reported incident must be recorded in the Incident Book as soon as possible after the event.
- The Safety Officer, with the Co-ordinator of Clinical Services, will investigate the incident promptly and in an appropriately confidential manner.

- The above procedure will be followed should a physical assault or threat of violence be made against a service user within Wellspring.
- Once the incident has been investigated, systems, policies and guidelines will be reviewed and amended as necessary.

## **SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE**

Wellspring acknowledges that those who have been exposed to threatening and violent behaviour may experience complex feelings of shock, shame that the situation got out of hand, and may feel responsible for its having done so. There may also be a sense of loss of competence and control.

Wellspring undertakes to be alert to the needs of anyone who experiences violence within the agency and to offer whatever support is reasonably within its power to provide.

## **GUIDELINES ON PROTECTING AGAINST AND RESPONDING TO VIOLENT BEHAVIOUR**

### **PROTECTION**

- Wellspring workers should be familiar with and should follow the *Guidelines for Lone and Off-Site Working*.
- Workers are recommended to avoid working alone in the building, especially in the evening. Trainees must **never** work alone.
- Therapists should not see a client for the first time if there is no-one else in the building.
- If a therapist is aware of a possible risk of violence they should consider what safety precautions may need to be put in place and whether or not Wellspring is the appropriate environment in which the client should be seen. Consultation at the Therapists' Meeting and/or with the Co-ordinator of Clinical Services is essential.
- Clients arriving for a session under the influence of non-prescribed drugs or alcohol should be told that they cannot be seen in this condition, as it undermines the benefits of counselling.
- The proximity of a colleague should be arranged and Administration alerted if a therapist undertakes an initial assessment of a client who is considered to be possibly potentially violent.

- Any therapist working with a client known to be or suspected of being violent should alert a colleague to the time sessions end and confirm afterwards that the session is safely over.
- Therapists working with such clients should ensure that there are no objects in the room that might lend themselves to being used as weapons.
- Therapists should give thought to the seating arrangements in therapy rooms and prioritise ease of escape in deciding where to place themselves.
- Workers should ensure access to a portable phone and should carry a personal alarm if they identify a situation in which they may be at risk. They should be alert to dangers outside the building as well as within it.

### **ACTION IN A VIOLENT SITUATION**

- Workers should make every effort to avoid confrontation and to defuse difficult situations.
- Retaliation by using physical force must be avoided: a minimal level of force may be used in order to break away from a physical exchange.
- Steps should be taken when appropriate to protect clients and staff by locking or barring doors.

***Fears for safety: Call Police on 999.***

**Where there is risk to the violent person or to others, police should be called.** This will result in the arrival of uniformed police officer(s) and, in a situation of breach of the peace, an arrest. If the person calms down and staff do not wish to make a formal complaint, the police would suggest that the person leaves the premises or waits until their therapist is available, if this is appropriate. If the person is displaying clear psychological problems the police *might* take them to the Royal Edinburgh Hospital (it is not a police function to transport people to hospital by police car). **See below re referral to the Psychiatric Emergency Team.** If the hospital refuses to accept them the person might then be locked in a cell for their own safety, kept overnight and appear in court the next day.

***Disruptive, but not damaging behaviour. Call GP or Duty Social Worker (553 2121; out of hours 554 4301)***

- The GP would be the first point of contact if there is no risk to safety.
- If the GP cannot come out, the Duty Social Work department may agree to assist in a crisis assessment, but are likely to instruct us to call the police as an immediate response to violent behaviour, or if there were immediate risk to persons.

***Behaviour clearly requiring hospital admission: Call GP and/or Psychiatric Emergency Team on 537 6000.***

PET will take referrals from us, but will not come out. If the client can be sent in a taxi it is **helpful for us to phone in advance to say that we are advising the person to attend for assessment.** It is possible that if police are involved they might be willing to transport the client to the Royal Edinburgh Hospital. **NB it is current policy that PET does not come out. This situation may change and should be monitored.**

**Phone client's Emergency Contact Number or significant other when appropriate.**