

Training for NHS trust staff in the management of threatening and challenging situations

An overview of a training programme that aims to help NHS Trust staff gain a greater understanding of how to deal with threatening, aggressive and abusive situations that may develop in the workplace.

Staff who will benefit:

- Medical Staff
- Reception and Administration Staff
- Therapists
- Department Managers
- Other Staff who interface with the Public

It is our belief that training in NHS Trust settings should be throughout the entire service. This requires different tiers of training to be put in place, each designed to meet the specific needs of the different staff groups concerned. At one end of the scale might be the management of threatening situation for staff who work at the front line in General Hospital Departments. At the other end of the scale, more specialised training is likely to be needed for those who work in, for example, Mental Healthcare or services for people with Learning Disabilities. Whilst Studio 3 provides training in all these areas, it is the remit of this booklet to outline the training which the organisation provides for general front staff who face aggression and potentially threatening situations in their everyday work.

In a recent BMA survey, more than a third of respondents reported that they had experienced some kind of violence in the workplace in the last year. Almost all of these had been victims of verbal abuse, 44% had experienced threats and 22% physical assaults. All too often, untrained staff are increasingly being asked to deal with confrontational incidents some of which escalate into aggression and challenging situations. Our research shows that,

using our approaches, it is possible to reduce the chance of a confrontational situation escalating into violence or aggression.

Studio 3 Training Systems is a specialist research and training organisation, founded in 1989, specialising in the management of challenging behaviour within the caring and counselling professions. Studio 3's philosophy is based on a [\[\[Low Arousal\] LINKTO la page\]](#) approach to dealing with threats and aggression. Within NHS Trust settings, this approach would commit us to managing threatening situations with a minimal breakdown in trust between staff and patients, whilst ensuring that staff facing threatening situations maintain high levels of personal safety yet still operate completely within the law and the policies of their own Trust.

Studio 3 provides a unique fusion of skills between academic researchers, specialist trainers in the art of Jitsu, applied clinicians, doctors, lawyers and clinical and educational psychologists. The technical director of Studio 3 is Andrew McDonnell BSc, MSc, a consultant clinical psychologist with numerous research publications. Studio 3 trainers are experienced professionals with many years experience of work in a diverse range of areas including: Primary and Secondary healthcare, learning difficulties, mental health, education, residential and non-residential youth work, substance misuse and geriatrics.

Research shows that staff training in the management of threatening situations builds confidence, helps reduce the number of threatening situations that become violent and leads to a better service for patients. Given that staff stress, discontentment and resentment may stem from how confrontational incidents are dealt with, an additional benefit from training can be greater job satisfaction and lower staff turnover. Studio 3 will as part of the training programme also work with the Trust to develop or refine existing policies to ensure optimum levels of support for staff involved in such incidents.

Our research also informs us of the most common situations that staff have to deal with. Consequently, we only teach the skills that are relevant rather than overburdening staff with so many techniques that they are unlikely to remember them let alone practice them safely. In short, we teach the minimum number of techniques and teach them well.

Course Outline

Although each course we run is service specific, areas covered will include:

- Violence and aggression
- Fears, myths and realities
- Participant's experiences
- Understanding and predicting threatening situations within the workplace:
 - Causes of aggression
 - Cue behaviours
 - Triggers
- Working within the law and your Trust's policy
- The "Low-Arousal" approach to managing threatening situations:
 - Eight factors which will affect the outcome
 - How our behaviours affect the behaviours of others
- Verbal defusion:
 - Dealing with verbal abuse
 - Dealing with aggressive telephone calls
- Debriefing skills
 - Counselling and support strategies for staff exposed to violence and aggression.
 - Review and/or development of policies
- Recording incidents
- Establishing a safe working environment
- Physical skills
 - Physical avoidance
 - Disengagement

- Reactive planning
 - Strategies for working with patients with known challenging behaviour
 - Risk assessments
- Role plays
 - Defusing threatening situations using the Low Arousal approach

Training the Trainer

We run programmes in which Trusts can nominate staff to undergo training to become in-house trainers. This is a competency led scheme and we seek to have an involvement in the selection of suitable candidates. Full details are available from our [Head Office](#) or on [Train Trainers Scheme](#)