A Guide to Managing Aggressive Behaviours

General good practice principles

- Stay calm
- Do not see a person alone (if concerned)
- Do not see people in isolated offices/areas – relocate temporarily
- Always have the office door open
- Always have an agreed protocol and code should a potentially aggressive situation arise

Use positive communication strategies

Clearly explain information. If the person does not appear to understand, repeat the message in different ways – do not simply repeat the same words over and over.

You may consider asking:
- ‘How can I help?’ Paraphrase their words to clarify your understanding of their request.
- ‘Can you tell me what we have agreed?’
- ‘What is your understanding of the outcome of our conversation?’
- Have you understood me?’

Check for discrepancies between what they say and what they do.

What to do if the person does not understand or accept the information provided

Check that your information is accurate with a colleague/supervisor or brainstorm options and advise the person accordingly

- Suggest that the person takes time to think through and consider your discussion and come back to you
- Explain that you are unable to assist further and ask if they would like to meet with your supervisor or another appropriate person

Contacts and resources

Security
When there is an urgent situation requiring immediate assistance.
Emergency phone: (02) 4736 0300 (ext. 2300)
Email: security@uws.edu.au
Web: www.uws.edu.au/security

Counselling Service
Phone: (02) 9852 5199 (ext. 5199)
Email: counselling@uws.edu.au
Web: www.uws.edu.au/counselling_service

Mental Health Coordinator
Phone (02) 9852 5199

Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
Phone: 1800 818 728 (24 hours)
Web: www.uws.edu.au/policies

Mental Health First Aid Training
You can learn to recognise the signs and symptoms of mental health problems, first aid strategies for dealing with mental health crises and where to get help.
www.uws.edu.au/mhwb
These guidelines have been developed by Student Support Services to assist UWS staff in dealing with people with threatening and aggressive behaviour.

The University of Western Sydney aims to provide a safe, supportive and healthy environment for students and staff. This is a shared responsibility for all members of the UWS community. However, from time to time, staff may be confronted with having to deal with a person who exhibits behaviour which is threatening and aggressive and can make you feel uncomfortable or ill at ease.

Examples of threatening or aggressive behaviour

Early warning signs that behaviour may become threatening or aggressive include increased fidgeting, limited eye contact or staring, sweating, increased pacing, invasion of personal space, swearing, attention or contact that leaves you feeling uncomfortable, increased breathing rate, changes in tone, volume and content of speech.

Examples of aggressive behaviour may include raised voices, yelling, general verbal abuse, loss of control, threats of physical violence to harm others, physical displays of anger to others or property, producing a weapon/using day to day items in ways that make you feel uncomfortable or stalking.

Aggressive or challenging behaviours may also include ongoing repeated comments or actions which are intended to cause psychological or emotional harm, as well as those of a physical nature. These behaviours could be classed as ‘bullying’.

Responding to early warning signs and/or aggressive behaviours

- Listen to your own intuition or cues and take action to manage the situation
- Demonstrate concern and suggest the person seek help from the appropriate services available
- Be clear about your role and boundaries
- Seek advice from your supervisor, Security, the Counselling Service, Human Resources (if staff related)

![Do stay calm Establish some ground rules Focus on positive outcomes Uncover what the person wants Speak slowly and listen Encourage the person to seek options](image)

If the situation deteriorates, use the SUDS principle:

- Stay calm
- Use open, non aggressive body language
- Do not raise your voice
- Security should be contacted immediately on ext. 2300 or 02 4736 0300

Consider leaving the environment to ensure your safety.

What to do when responding to threats of harm to others or damage to property

- Expressions of harm to self or others should always be taken seriously
- If the threat is imminent contact Security immediately on 02 4736 0300 or extension 2300
- If the threat is not imminent use the DEFUSE and/or SUDS principles

- Consult with or refer students to the Counselling Service and staff to the Employee Assistance Program

What to do when responding to acts of violence, property damage or production of a weapon

Acts of violence, property damage or production of a weapon will not be tolerated at UWS. This should lead to immediate termination of an interview or conversation.

- Staff members should immediately withdraw if it is safe to do so and relocate to a safer place
- Campus Security should be contacted immediately and/or a duress button pressed if available
- Contact the police by calling 000
- Other staff in the vicinity should be alerted and asked to relocate
- If unable to leave safely, treat the situation seriously and respond accordingly

General guidelines

- Use common sense
- Always alert your Head of School/Manager/Supervisor about any behaviour that is causing you concern
- Keep a record of any incidents, including time, date, what occurred, outcomes, and provide a copy of this to your Head of School/Manager
- Minimise the potential for confrontation. For example, if a student requests to meet with you immediately upon receiving a poor grade and you are concerned (based on previous history) about a possible aggressive response, postpone the meeting until the student is calm. If you expect the person to be aggressive, do not meet with them alone and inform Security
- Always keep a record of any meetings and what has been decided and send a copy to the person.