The principles of conflict management
Work related violence

It is vital that both *employers* and *employees* understand the importance of:

- **Policies**
- **Guidance**
- **Procedures**

These are put in place to help keep everyone safe at work.
Workplace violence

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) provides a definition of workplace violence. It defines it as:

‘any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work’.

HSE logo
Employers

Section 2 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act of 1974 places a legal responsibility on employers to...

‘ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all his/her employees’.

(Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978)
Employers

Employers must provide:

- Policy statements
- Risk assessments
- Procedures detailing what to do in conflict situations
- Procedures to check and review safety precautions
- Appropriate training
- A safe environment
- Safe working practices
- Support for concerns about abuse and aggression
- Support following violent incidents
Employees

Employees, including security operatives, also have responsibilities under the legislation. Section 7 of the act says that an employee must...

‘take reasonable care for the health and safety of himself/herself and of other persons who may be affected by his acts or omissions at work’.
Employees must:

- Familiarise themselves with their organisation’s policies and procedures
- Follow those policies and procedures
- Be aware of what might trigger a risk situation
- Be prepared to gather, share and discuss information on risk situations
- Attend appropriate training
- Use risk assessment systems
- Plan, with others, what to do in risk situations
- Report violent incidents in the workplace correctly
Reporting workplace violence

It is best practice to report all incidents of violence in the workplace, even where only abuse or threats are involved.

Proper reporting:
- Picks up trends or particular triggers for aggression in the workplace
- Ensures that their policies and procedures are up to date and effective

- Provides information for insurance and/or investigative purposes
- How to report will be detailed in the organisation’s policies and procedures
- Sets the expectations for both staff and customers as to what behaviour is and is not acceptable.
Conflict

Conflict: A serious difference between two or more opinions, principles or interests.
Conflict management:
The practice of recognising and dealing with such conflict in a rational, balanced and effective way.
Conflict management

Security operatives will come across conflict as they carry out their roles. Security staff often have to enforce rules and regulations, and sometimes have to control the behaviour of others.

Security operatives must understand:

• How conflict arises
• How to recognise
• How to deal with it.

Preventing or reducing conflict in the workplace will go a long way towards making our working lives safer and easier.
Using communication to avoid conflict

The effective use of communication skills can:

- Reduce the chances of conflict arising in the first place
- Help us to deal with difficult situations when they occur
Communication

As professional security operatives, it is vital that we always act in a **positive** way.

We can do this by being:

- Approachable
- Positive and constructive
- Professional
- Calm
- Clear
- Polite
- Smart
- Helpful
- Fair
- Honest.
Communication skills

Communication skills are all to do with:

- The effectiveness with which we communicate meaning, guidance and intention to others
- How we can influence behaviour
Encounters

Each time that security operatives deal with a customer or a member of the public, it is called an ENCOUNTERER.

We need to:
• Be aware of the appropriate attitude to adopt when dealing with various types of people
• Take care in how we talk to them in different situations
• Achieve a reasonable response
• Reach a conclusion that is satisfactory to all parties concerned.

Not all encounters will end happily. Good communication skills should keep incidents of conflict and aggression to a minimum.
How we think

Imagine we have two sides to our brain

The RATIONAL side, and the EMOTIONAL side.
Responding to a threat

A person's ability to think and feel is usually balanced.
Responding to a threat

- Angry, upset

The early stages of conflict

Rational (thinking)

Emotional (feelings)
How we think

The RATIONAL side helps us to:

- Think things through
- Plan what we are doing
- Sensibly consider options before we make decisions.

The EMOTIONAL side helps us to:

- Feel things like affection, love, sadness, fear and anger.

When things are normal the brain is pretty evenly balanced, because we are normally both feeling and thinking things at the same time.
How we think during conflict

During conflict, where we might get upset, angry or even frightened, the balance in our brain is disturbed, and we start to use the emotional side more than the rational side. This is a perfectly natural response to the situation, but it can be controlled.

If we ourselves become too emotional in a situation it will:

• Reduce our ability to think rationally
• Cloud our judgement
• Cause us to make unhelpful decisions.
How we think during conflict

The RATIONAL side

If we can calm ourselves down, though, then the rational side of the brain can pick up, and we can start to deal with the situation more effectively.

The EMOTIONAL side

Likewise, if someone we are dealing with at work becomes too emotional in a situation, then they may become very difficult to deal with unless we can calm them down first.
Fight or flight

When we become frightened our bodies will automatically go into what is called **fight** or **flight** mode. This is because of the basic natural animal instinct in us all to help us survive potentially dangerous situations.

**Fight or flight prepares our brains and bodies to:**

- Stand and physically **FIGHT** off an attack
- Run away from the situation, **FLIGHT** to keep ourselves safe
Fight or flight

- A response to a threat
- A natural, basic instinct
- Prepares our body for action
During fight or flight

The body releases the hormone adrenaline into our system to increase our physical ability to fight or run away.

This adrenaline rush:

- Increases our heart rate
- Pumps extra blood and oxygen to the muscles we need to use
- Widens our eyes to take in as much of the situation as possible
- Intensifies our sense of hearing
After fight or flight

Once the situation ends, whether that is by us having halted or fought off the threat, or whether we have been able to get away from it, then our brains and bodies begin to calm down again, in an attempt to get back to normal.

Our bodies slowly return to their natural relaxed states, and as we calm down our brains return to thinking with the rational side again.
Don’t trigger a person into fight or flight by

1. Intimidation
2. Touching.
Don’t trigger a person into fight or flight by

3. Standing too close or square on

4. Inappropriate gestures.
Don’t trigger a person into fight or flight by

5 Blocking their exit

6 Cornering them in.
Shock

If our brains and bodies DO NOT return to their natural conditions as they should following a conflict situation, then we can go into a state known as SHOCK.

This normally only happens after a particularly threatening or frightening situation though.
Triggers:

A trigger is an action towards you that can cause you to completely lose your temper, and causes you to resort to aggression or even violence.

KEY POINT

It is important that security operatives are aware of this, and do not allow themselves to be triggered by another person into using unnecessary aggression themselves.
It is also important that security operatives do not accidentally trigger the person they are dealing with, causing them to lose their temper and react with violence towards them.

Bear in mind that people are often easier to trigger if they are:

- Under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- Emotional for other reasons.
Triggers

What might you do to someone that may trigger them into using aggression towards you?
Common triggers

People can be *triggered* if they feel that they are being:

- Ignored
- Rejected
- Disrespected
- Patronised
- Embarrassed
- Ridiculed
- Insulted
- Threatened

- Sworn at
- Blocked in
- Confused
- Let down or being hard done by
Inhibitors

If during a conflict situation we are unable to calm the other person down, we may need to use an inhibitor to stop the person from being triggered into reacting aggressively or violently towards us.

**Inhibitors:**

An inhibitor is something that PREVENTS someone from acting in an unnecessary, unreasonable and negative way because they are in an emotional state.

An inhibitor is basically the opposite of a trigger.
Triggers vs inhibitors

**TRIGGERS**

Negative actions ... unhelpful in conflict situations.

**INHIBITORS**

Positive actions ... helpful in conflict situations.
Inhibitors

When people are under the influence of drink or drugs, they often ‘lose their inhibitions’. This means that they may try to do something that they wouldn’t normally do if they were thinking rationally and calmly.

If you give an emotional, angry or aggressive person an INHIBITOR, it may cause them to think about the consequences of their actions, and PREVENT them doing something that they may later regret.
Common inhibitors include:

- Personal values
- Self-control
- Fear of loss or damage
- Fear of retaliation
- Social consequences
- Legal consequences
Common inhibitors

Personal values

Most people know deep down that it is unnecessary and wrong to use aggression and violence towards others.

‘Now I know you don’t want to do anything you’ll feel bad about later, so ...’
Common inhibitors

Self-control

Most people, when they think about it, can usually calm themselves down if they want to in a conflict situation.

‘Let’s just both calm down and see if we can sort this out together’
Common inhibitors

Fear of loss or damage

People do not generally want to run the risk of damaging their clothes or losing personal items of property during a violent incident.

‘Now neither of us want to ruin our clothes or break anything by fighting, do we’?
Common inhibitors

Fear of retaliation

There is always the chance that if we fight with someone, we may come off second best.

‘We don’t want anyone getting hurt here, do we, so…’
Common inhibitors

Social consequences

People all worry about any risks to their personal reputations and their lifestyles.

‘I know you don’t want people to think badly of you, so …’
Common inhibitors

Legal consequences

People do not normally relish the idea of being arrested and going to court over something bad they have done. Neither do they like the idea of being fined or imprisoned.

‘This is all on CCTV, and I know you don’t want to get yourself arrested, so...’
Using inhibitors

The timely and appropriate use of inhibitors can greatly reduce the chances of someone being triggered into using aggression or violence towards us.

By the same token, we also need to consider the consequences of our own actions in heated, frightening or threatening situations too, so that we don’t do something that we later regret or get ourselves into trouble over.