

Individuals may intimidate others by verbal threats, non-verbal messages such as tone of voice, eye contact and invading another's personal space. This behavior can range from being very subtle to being obviously physically threatening. The severity is in the eyes of the beholder or recipient of the behavior.

Provoking of anger is another step of the continuum of aggression. This can be interpreted in two ways. First, the perpetrator may become loud and angry themselves, blaming their reaction on the circumstances or others in the workplace. They behave in intimidating and threatening ways in an attempt to change the situation. Provoking of anger can also be a tactic that the aggressive employee uses to justify his or her own escalation. Interaction with others is tense and the perpetrator pushes that interaction to elicit an aggressive response from the recipient of their anger. Once the recipient expresses anger, the perpetrator views this as a green light to continue to escalate since the aggressive pattern of interaction has begun.

Rough language and "ism's" are still other aspects of aggression in the workplace. If these problems are not addressed they will result in employees feeling that they are working in a hostile environment and they may escalate further into physical aggression. Prejudice and discrimination in the workplace go hand in hand with aggression. Racism, sexism and ageism cannot be tolerated under any circumstances. If this behavior is not addressed the workplace will almost certainly become a hostile environment.

Exertion of force is the next step on the continuum of aggression. At this point, a person's frustrations are expressed by physical means. Slamming of doors, pounding on

furniture, use of company property in threatening ways and subtle physical aggression toward others are examples of exertion of force.

Swift, hurtful physical force is the final stage of aggression on the continuum. At this point, the perpetrator is rarely concerned about being subtle. Anger and egocentrism interfere with rational problem solving behavior. At this point, the concern of others in the workplace should be their own safety. It is unlikely that intervention to stop the violence at this point will be effective. It certainly is not safe.

We have spent some time now talking about what violence is, why it happens and where potential dangers may come from. At this point, we'll turn to diffusing a hostile situation and personal safety.

The most important thing to remember is that early intervention will yield the best results. If an employee or customer is frustrated and angry, a careful and appropriate approach to the situation will be much more likely to diffuse the situation than intervention at a point when physical aggression is taking place.

Keep your eyes and ears open. Understand the continuum of aggression mentioned previously and look for ways to intervene in the early stages. If you are not comfortable dealing with a person who is aggressive, have a plan. Know whom you can ask for assistance in that situation. Is a manager or supervisor available? Does anyone in the office have experience and confidence in dealing with these types of situations? Know where your resources are and don't be afraid to ask for help!

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