Aggression Control:

Recognition, Proactive Approaches, and Diffusion

Developed and copyrighted by Ce-Classes.com (2010)
This Course Will Cover

- Definitions of aggression
- Facts about workplace violence
- Warning signs of aggressive behavior
- Strategies for diffusion of aggressive situations
- Steps to take to reduce risk of aggressive behaviors
- Staff & Managerial Responsibility after the event
Definitions of Aggression

- In psychology, as well as other social and behavioral sciences, aggression (also called combativeness) refers to behavior between members of the same species that is intended to cause pain or harm.

Wikipedia
Definitions of Aggression

Aggression takes a variety of forms among people based upon culture, personality, psychosocial history, gender and situation. Aggression can be physical, mental, or verbal.
Definitions of Aggression

- Aggression should not be confused with assertiveness, although the terms are often used interchangeably among laypeople, e.g. an aggressive salesperson.
There are two broad categories of aggression. These include hostile, affective, or retaliatory aggression and instrumental, predatory, or goal-oriented aggression. Empirical research indicates that there is a critical difference between the two, both psychologically and physiologically.
Definitions of Aggression

- Some research indicates that people with tendencies toward "affective" aggression, defined in this study as being "impulsive, unplanned, overt, or uncontrolled" have lower IQs than those with tendencies toward "predatory" aggression, defined here as being "goal-oriented, planned, hidden, or controlled". Behar et al
Definitions of Aggression

- Culture is a distinctly human factor that plays a role in aggression.
- Empirical cross-cultural research has found differences in the level of aggression between cultures.

Wikipedia
In one study, American men resorted to physical aggression more readily than Japanese or Spanish men, whereas Japanese men preferred direct verbal conflict more than their American and Spanish counterparts (Andreu et al. 1998)
Within American culture, southerners were shown to become more aroused and to respond more aggressively than northerners when affronted. There is also a higher homicide rate among young white southern men than among white northern men in the United States.

(Bowdle et al. 1996 & Nisbett 1993)
Aggression in Media

Behavioral like aggression can be learned by watching and imitating the behavior of others. A considerable amount of evidence suggests that watching violence on television increases the likelihood of short-term aggression in children. (Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 2005)
Aggression in Media

- Individuals may differ in how they respond to violence. The greatest impact is on those who are already prone to violent behavior. Adults may be influenced by violence in media as well.

(Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 2005)
Aggression and Gender

- Gender is a factor that plays a role in both human and animal aggression. Males are historically believed to be generally more physically aggressive than females.

- This is one of the most robust and reliable behavioral sex differences, and it has been found across many different age groups and cultures.

(Coie & Dodge 1997, Maccoby & Jacklin 1974)
There is evidence that males are quicker to aggression (Frey et al. 2003) and more likely than females to express their aggression physically (Bjorkqvist et al. 1994).
However, within families, these beliefs have been reevaluated (Richardson, 2005). When including indirect forms of aggression, such as the influence of power well as relational aggression and social rejection, females and males are equally aggressive (Archer, 2004; Card, Stucky, Sawalani, & Little, 2008).
Aggression and Gender

Although females are less likely to initiate physical violence, they can express aggression by using a variety of non-physical means to inflict harm on others.
Aggression and Gender

- The different methods women use to express aggression varies from culture to culture.
Types of Aggression

- Relational aggression is exhibited in females and includes harming others through damaging the peer relationships or threatening of peer relationships.

(Dettinger & Hart, 2007)
Types of Aggression

- Social aggression is directed towards damaging another’s self-esteem, social status, or both, and may take direct forms.

(Dettinger & Hart, 2007)
Types of Aggression

Rational types of aggression include interrupting, criticizing and questioning the judgment of others.

(Dettinger & Hart, 2007)
Types of Aggression

- Social manipulation is defined as insulting the personal life of another, negative glances, and backbiting.

(Dettinger & Hart, 2007)
Types of Indirect Aggression

- Rational-appearing aggression is more often used by men.

- Women were more likely to express aggression in the form of social manipulation.

(Dettinger & Hart, 2007)
What is Workplace Violence?

- Any act against an employee (or client) that creates a hostile work environment and negatively affects the employees or other clients.

- Acts include physical or verbal assaults, threats, coercion, intimidation, and harassment.

(Manila, 2008)
Aggression & Violence in the Workplace

- Americans spend a little over 1/3 of their waking hours at work.

- Aggression and violence frequently occur in the workplace.
Aggression & Violence in the Workplace

- In work environments that include clients who have:
  - fewer social skills
  - multiple legal and social problems and
  - a history of substance abuse

- There is a greater possibility of violence in the workplace
Workplace Violence Is More Likely In Jobs That:

- Deal with criminals
- Deal with overwrought people
- Work alone and/or late at night

- All of these conditions exist in a drug treatment environment
This may be why drug treatment centers are required to conduct annual training on aggression control.
Workplace Violence Facts

- One in six violent crimes in the United States occurs at work.

- Workplace homicides are the number one cause of death for women in the workplace.

(Manila, 2008)
Workplace Violence Facts

- One in four employees will become victims of workplace violence.

- More than 1 million workdays are lost each year because of workplace assaults.

(Manila, 2008)
Workplace Violence Facts

- 37% of the U.S. workforce has been bullied now or some time during their work life
- Incidents have tripled since the 1970s

(Bryner, 2008; Manila, 2008)
Workplace Violence Facts

- Workplace violence includes robberies; acts of violence by disgruntled co-workers, clients, customers, or patients; and domestic violence involving ex-spouses or family members.

(Manila, 2008)
Workplace Violence Facts

- Workplace violence costs American businesses billions of dollars every year.
Also, workplace violence can cause damage to an employer's reputation, as the U.S. Postal Service found when "going postal" became shorthand for workplace violence.
Workplace Violence Facts

- Workplace violence is preventable
- Both staff and management share responsibility in preventing workplace violence and controlling aggression
Workplace Violence Prevention

- Administrators can help to prevent workplace violence by:
  - Requiring training
  - Establishing policies and procedures
  - Creating a safe work environment
  - Screening clients for a history of violence
  - Establishing clear rules and boundaries
  - Requiring all employees to follow the rules
Staff can help to prevent workplace violence by:

- Attending trainings
- Learning all policies and procedures
- Monitoring the work environment and informing managers of potential problems
- Being aware of each client’s history
- Following the rules and boundaries established by management
- Treating all clients fairly and with respect
Workplace Violence Prevention

- There are other tactics that can also help, for example:
  - use formal contracts
  - consider the timing of the bad news you must deliver
  - have other staff nearby when you have to tell a client something you know will create an angry response
Workplace Violence Prevention

• Also, strategies such as:
  • acknowledge an angry client’s concerns,
  • allow the person to express their feelings
  • use non-confrontational language
  • speak in a soft tone of voice
  • avoid yelling or speaking loudly
• let the client know you are there to help
Recognize the Warning Signs of Aggressive Behavior

- When violence occurs at work, staff may say the violent [client] "just snapped."

- But the truth is, people usually don't snap.

(Specialist, 2007)
Potential Triggers for Violent or Aggressive Behavior:

- Recent relapse
- Severe stress
- Violent history
- Social isolation
- Significant loss or frustration (e.g. losing a pass or parental rights)

(Specialist, 2007)
Warning Signs for Violent or Aggressive Behavior:

- Poor peer relationships
- Poor personal hygiene
- Drastic changes in personality
- Fascination with weapons

(Specialist, 2007)
Warning Signs of Violent or Aggressive Behavior:

- Making threats of violence, getting back at someone, etc.
- Intimidating others
- Getting very angry easily or often
- Using abusive language

(Specialist, 2007)
Warning Signs of Violent or Aggressive Behavior:

- Talking about violent crime (except when therapeutically appropriate – like in group)
- Believing others are out to get him or her

(Specialist, 2007)
Warning Signs of Violent or Aggressive Behavior:

- Blaming others for their problems
- Holding a grudge
- Being rigid and inflexible

(Specialist, 2007)
Staff Should Avoid

- Letting threats go
- Ignoring aggressive behavior or warnings signs of aggressive behavior
- Failure to report abnormal client behavior to other staff members
Staff Should Avoid

- Failure to follow established rules and procedures
- Treating clients differentially (playing favorites)
- Treating clients disrespectfully
Staff Should Avoid

- Speaking in very loud or aggressive tones of voice
- Expressing their own frustration to a client inappropriately
- Ignoring client requests, frustrations or angry feelings
Be Alert to Situations That Could Lead to Aggressive Behavior

- Staff awareness of client behaviors, personalities and coping styles is key to identifying situations that could lead to aggression
The earlier staff intervenes, the easier it is to de-escalate a potentially dangerous situation.
Situations That Could Potentially Lead to Aggressive Behavior

- Clients may be more likely to behave aggressively when they:
  - Receive a warning about their behavior
  - Believe they’ve been treated unfairly or disrespectfully
Situations That Could Potentially Lead to Aggressive Behavior

Clients may be more likely to behave aggressively when they:

- Fail to receive a privilege they expected or counted on
- Have a hostile relationship with another client
Situations That Could Potentially Lead to Aggressive Behavior

Clients may be more likely to behave aggressively when they:

- Hear news (from courts or DCF) that they didn’t want to hear
- Feel they have nothing to lose
Take Action to Spot and Reduce Aggressive Potential

- Follow and enforce workplace security rules
- Report any direct threats of violence, retaliation or aggression
- Be alert for signals that a potentially violent person’s problems are getting worse
Take Action to Spot and Reduce Aggressive Potential

- Don’t ignore troubling client behavior, statements, or attitudes
- Be aware of clients’ personal situations that could trigger an aggressive reaction
Take Action to Spot and Reduce Aggressive Potential

- Have another staff member present when you have to give bad news to a client if you’re concerned about possible violence

- Model calm and appropriate behavior for clients
Alcohol impairs judgment, making people much less cautious than they usually are (MacDonald et al. 1996).

It also disrupts the way information is processed. A drunk person is much more likely to view an accidental event as a purposeful one, and therefore act more aggressively. (Bushman 1993, 1997; Bushman & Cooper 1990).
Situational Factors

Although the studies focused on acute impairment, it is likely that similar impairment occurs during drug treatment, especially during the detox phase.
These means that people in the early stages of recovery are more likely to misinterpret events and become angry or aggressive.
Situational Factors

- Pain and discomfort also increase aggression. Even the simple act of placing someone's hands in warm water can cause an aggressive response.

(Carlsmith & Anderson 1979)
Hot temperatures have been implicated as a factor in a number of studies. One study completed in the midst of the civil rights movement found that riots were more likely on hotter days than cooler ones.

(Carlsmith & Anderson 1979)
Situational Factors

- Drivers in cars without air conditioning were also found to be more likely to honk their horns.

(Kenrick & MacFarlane 1986)
Situational Factors

- Frustration is another major cause of aggression. The Frustration Aggression Theory states that aggression increases if a person feels that he or she is being blocked from achieving a goal.

(Aronson et al. 2005)
One study found that the closeness to the goal makes a difference. The study examined people waiting in line and concluded that the 2nd person was more aggressive than the 12th one when someone cut in line. (Harris 1974)
Situational Factors

- Unexpected frustration may be another factor.

(Kulik & Brown 1979)
Dealing with Clients

- How staff treats clients who are angry and/or frustrated has a direct impact on the probability of aggressive or violent behaviors.
Dealing with Angry Clients

- When faced with an angry client:
  - Focus on acknowledging the feelings of the client
  - Speak slowly and softly (use a calming voice)
Dealing with Angry Clients

When faced with an angry client:

• Be aware of your own body posture – stay relaxed (not stiff and rigid)

• People read body language to decide how to act – if you appear relaxed and in control of yourself the client is much more likely to calm down
When faced with an angry client:

- Move to solving the problem if at all possible
- Offer alternatives if at all possible
Dealing with Angry Clients

- Here are a few phrases you can use:
  - It seems like you're pretty upset about . . . Let's see what we can do
  - It has to be frustrating to have to . . .
  - Most people would be angry if . . .

  . . . [insert what they are upset about]

- These are active listening skills
Dealing with Angry Clients

- Don’t say no without offering an alternative - for example:
  - No, you can’t go on pass now, but maybe you can go later
  - No, you can’t have a visit now, but maybe when you . . .
Listening as Intervention

- Listening is a tool that allows you to:
  - Ensure your understanding of the situation
  - Get and give information
  - Build trust
  - Achieve what you want with clients
Levels of listening

- Active Listening
- Paraphrasing
- Acknowledging
Active Listening

- Active Listening is not just an automatic response to sounds.

- It requires a listener to understand, interpret, and evaluate what he or she heard.
Active Listening

- The ability to listen is an important therapeutic skill.
Active Listening

◆ It improves inter-personal relationships by
  – reducing conflicts
  – strengthening cooperation
  – fostering understanding
  – calming others (it is comforting to be understood)
Active Listening

- Active listening is a structured way of listening and responding to others.

- It focuses attention on the speaker.
Active Listening

- Suspending one’s own frame of reference and suspending judgment are important in order to fully attend to the speaker.
Active Listening Strategies

- It is important to observe the other person's behavior and body language.

(Atwater, 1981)
Active Listening Strategies

- Having the ability to interpret a person's body language allows the listener to develop a more accurate understanding of the speaker's words.

(Atwater, 1981)
Active Listening Strategies

- Having heard, the listener may then paraphrase the speaker’s words.

(Atwater, 1981)
Active Listening Strategies

- It is important to note that the listener is not necessarily agreeing with the speaker—simply stating what was said.

(Atwater, 1981)
Active Listening Strategies

- In emotionally charged communications, the listener may listen for feelings.

(Atwater, 1981)
Thus, rather than merely repeating what the speaker has said, the active listener might describe the underlying emotion ("you seem to feel angry" or "you seem to feel frustrated, is that because...?").

(Atwater, 1981)
Benefits of Active Listening

- The benefits of active listening include getting people to open up, avoiding misunderstandings, resolving conflict and building trust.
In a medical context, benefits may include increased patient satisfaction, improving cross-cultural communication, improved outcomes, or decreased litigation.
Barriers to Active Listening

- Barriers include
  - Distractions (physical & emotional)
  - Trigger words
  - Vocabulary
  - Limited attention span
  - Emotions
  - Noise
  - Cultural differences
Overcoming Listening Barriers

In order to use the Active Listening technique, one must:

- Put personal emotions aside during the conversation
- Overcome all types of environmental distractions
- Concentrate your focus on the speaker
How to Use Active Listening

- In order to use the Active Listening technique, one must:
  - Maintain appropriate eye contact
  - Use appropriate body language
  - Ask questions and . . .
In order to use the Active Listening technique, one must:

- Paraphrase back to the speaker in order to clarify understanding.
How to Use Active Listening

In order to use the Active Listening technique, one must:

- Consider the speaker's background, both cultural and personal, to improve the communication process
Cognitive Distortions Associated with Aggression

- Blaming
  - Not accepting personal responsibility
- Catastrophizing
  - Magnifying the problem
- Overgeneralization
- Demanding
Reframes for Cognitive Distortions

- Present the facts without making judgments
- State them calmly and simply
- Provide 3\textsuperscript{rd} party examples to illustrate your point
Reframes for Cognitive Distortions

- End with a question to gain agreement – for example

- Is it possible that . . . [state the facts without cognitive distortion]
When Aggression Happens

- Sometimes, even if staff react to warning signs and use appropriate de-escalation techniques

- Violence and/or aggression occurs anyway
When Aggression Happens

- First, call other staff (who are on site) for assistance

- Second, remove other clients from the area
  - Send them to another area of the facility
When Aggression Happens

- Scan the area for potential weapons
  - Chairs
  - Other large objects

- If possible, keep them away from the aggressive person
When Aggression Happens

- Verbally attempt to calm the violent person down

- Avoid becoming physical
  - Maintain a safe distance

- Call 911 if needed
Once the Incident is Over

- Notify supervisors
  - Use your agency’s established policy
  - Provide the supervisor with enough detail to be able to advise you well
Once the Incident is Over

- Assess the other clients
- An aggressive incident can lead to problems with other clients such as:
  - Aggression/violence
  - Sadness
  - Grief
  - Anxiety
Once the Incident is Over

- Complete required documentation

- Do not leave the agency until you have filed an incident report and made whatever notes are required by your agency’s policies and procedures
Report the Event

- Use the agency’s incident report
- Follow established protocols and procedures
When writing the incident report:
- Be as specific as possible
- Do not use vague pronouns or emotional language
- Do use concrete language
- Write in simple, straightforward sentences
- Identify the perpetrator and victim/s
- Explain behavior clearly
- Identify any known precipitating events
After the Event

- Be sure to inform the next shift of what happened
- Clients who were victims or witnessed the event may be upset or agitated
- Aggression often leads to more aggression – therefore staff on subsequent shifts should be alert
After the Event

- The event should be processed by supervisors or managers
- Identification of precipitating events is important
- Root cause analysis may be done
- If possible, identify steps to take or changes to make to prevent a similar incident from happening again
Preventative Tips

- Complete training
- Be knowledgeable about warning signs for aggressive/violent behavior
- Treat all clients fairly
Preventative Tips

- Follow established policies and procedures
- Be aware of client histories, personalities and coping styles
- Pay attention during change of shift reports
Preventative Tips

- Watch clients’ behavior and affect
- Intervene as early as possible to prevent incidents from escalating
- Use common sense
Preventative Tips

- Make sure that movies/TV shows etc are appropriate for the therapeutic environment

- Speak in soft and calm tones when confronting a client
Preventative Tips

- Have another staff member present or nearby when you have to give information that you believe may trigger an aggressive response.
Preventative Tips

- Instruct clients who are arguing to keep away from each other
- Pay attention and respond to threats of aggression, violence or retaliation
Preventative Tips

- Review your organization’s policies and options for reporting concerns about a potentially violent client or behavior
Policy Against Aggression/Violence

The policy should:
- Define aggression and violence
- State that aggression and violence are not tolerated
- Include examples of prohibited conduct
- Provide that appropriate corrective action will be taken

(www.ache.org, 2005)
Standards for Corrective Action

- Essential part of any plan to prevent aggression or violence
- Disciplinary action should be proportionate to the severity of the behavior
- Avoid providing specific punishments for specific actions (it isn’t possible to think of every situation in advance)

(www.ache.org, 2005)
Workplace Learning and Performance Professionals

- Adopt a zero-tolerance policy
- Take each threat or warning sign seriously
- Promptly investigate all threats of violence or acts of aggression
- Implement tighter security measures to protect employees and clients when necessary
In Summary

- Aggression is broadly defined
- It can be physical, mental or verbal
- Aggression and violence in the workplace are common
In Summary

- Violence in the workplace is serious and has serious consequences for employees, clients and businesses.
In Summary

- Aggression and violence are preventable
- People do not “just snap”
In Summary

- There are warning signs for aggression
- There are also triggers for aggressive behavior
In Summary

- Knowledge of:
  - Policies and procedures
  - Client history
  - Warning signs / triggers

- Are required to adequately anticipate potential aggression
In Summary

- Active listening and cognitive restructuring can be used to de-escalate an angry or potentially aggressive client.
In Summary

- If aggression or violence occurs:
  - Call an on site staff member to assist you
  - Remove the other clients from potential harm
  - Speak calmly
  - Call 911 if needed
In Summary

- After the incident:
  - Notify supervisors immediately
  - Complete an incident report
  - Document well
    - Be clear and specific
  - Attempt to identify what could be done to prevent a similar incident in the future
References

References

- Silverberg, James; J. Patrick Gray (1992) Aggression and Peacefulness in Humans and Other Primates
References

- Somit, A (1990) Humans, chimps, and bonobos: The biological bases of aggression, war, and peacemaking. Journal of Conflict Resolution 34:-582