



## Preparing for the Potential of Violence

### Violence and Threats to Harm

All staff working in supportive housing should be trained to immediately seek police intervention and to contact the building management, supervisory staff, and/or other designated personnel, if there is physical violence, threat of immediate violent acts, or the presence of or stated intent to use a weapon. If the situation has not yet erupted into active violence, all staff should be trained to solicit involvement of other on-site staff to help de-escalate the situation.

Intervention by trained professionals who are on site or quickly accessible may be the best strategy to employ in de-escalating crises, instead of or in addition to contacting law enforcement.

Building management should maintain an updated list of emergency service providers at the Front Lobby/Desk Station for staff to use in emergencies. Trained professional providers available to respond in emergency may include:

- Specially trained Police Officers via 911.
- An emergency detox team to assist publicly intoxicated persons.
- Mental health emergency teams
- County Hospitals' Psychiatric Emergency Personnel

#### Sample Policy and Procedure for Intervening in Potentially Violent Situations

*The following represents an example of a protocol. Policies and procedures for an individual program must be consistent with local laws and regulations and should take into account staffing levels and other conditions specific to that program.*

If a tenant is exhibiting threatening or homicidal behavior towards other(s), this information must be communicated to the supervisor and the rest of the team immediately. This should be done both verbally and in writing (in a logbook or progress notes). The reporting staff should attempt to gather as much information from the tenant as possible in order to determine the urgency of the situation and accurately share information with the rest of the team.

- Every staff member must always notify his/her supervisor and coworkers of his/her whereabouts in the building during a crisis. No staff member should enter a tenant's unit alone in a violent or potentially violent situation.
- Establish who will intervene with the tenant(s), who will call the police or 911, and who will perform crowd control with the rest of the community before entering the situation. **If a situation is violent, a staff person should call the police immediately.**

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Note: This document is included within the *Housing Operations* section of CSH's *Toolkit for Developing and Operating Supportive Housing*, which is available at [www.csh.org/toolkit2](http://www.csh.org/toolkit2). This document has been adapted from CSH's *Supportive Housing Property Management Operations Manual* and *Developing the "Support" in Supportive Housing*, which is available at [www.csh.org/publications](http://www.csh.org/publications).

- Try to stay as calm as possible and not show fear or agitation. Avoid conveying impatience or annoyance with the tenant and try to remain neutral.
- When approaching an agitated tenant, staff members should be aware of their body language and remain a minimum of a leg's distance away. The workers should respect the tenant's physical space, avoid positioning themselves between the tenant and the door, and be conscious of and positioned near the exit if possible.
- Clear the area of potential weapons such as sharp instruments or household/office items that could be used as weapons.
- Do not intervene with a tenant who is clearly drunk or high except to curtail disruptive behavior. If a person is not posing an immediate threat by engaging in disruptive behavior, allow him/her to sleep off the effects of the drugs or alcohol. Check for signs of overdose or withdrawal. If a tenant is disruptive, the police or 911 should be called.
- Avoid using humor or sarcasm, which could be misunderstood.
- Do not engage in power struggles; instead reflect the tenant's concerns.
- Attempt to offer appropriate options. Most people respond negatively when they experience someone attempting to limit their personal freedoms and dictate or demand certain behavior. On the other hand, too many choices, particularly when a person is disorganized or agitated, can be confusing.
- Adopt a supportive yet firm stance, as an alliance is crucial when working with an agitated person. Try to approach the situation as a problem that can be solved together.

## Instructions for Staff Responding to Incidents of Violence

*Note: These instructions are adapted from a protocol for responding to incidents of violence generously provided by Tenderloin Housing Clinic in San Francisco, California.*

If an actual incident of violence occurs in your workplace, how well you and your co-workers respond will depend largely on how well you have prepared. Each incident is different and each response will be different. However, some common actions to take are:

Call 911 immediately. If you can't speak freely, just calling and leaving the receiver off the hook may allow a dispatcher to hear noises that will clarify the nature of the incident.

Remember to use your panic button if one is installed. If you don't have access to a panic button, you may be able to use the phone or an intercom system to alert co-workers.

Give the perpetrator what he or she wants. Don't try to be a hero by denying a request for such items as money, keys, documents, or equipment. These can be replaced, lives cannot. Flee if you can. If you can't, try to find a hiding place.

Cooperate fully with police officers on the scene. These are the professionals who know how to handle such situations and may be acting on information that you do not have.

If you witness an act of workplace violence that does not directly involve you, your actions will depend on your assessment of the situation and your judgment. In some cases, your involvement may help a co-worker; other times it may be better to simply slip quietly away and call 911.

### After the Incident

As soon as you can do so, write down all the details of the incident, including who, what, when, how, and where. Give this information to your supervisor.

Find a way to debrief. It may be enough to talk to your supervisor, HR, or your colleagues. You might also want to make an appointment to see a counselor.

Hopefully, you will never be involved in an incident of workplace violence. But due to the types of services we provide, and the violent nature of modern society, it is important to understand how to help prevent, prepare for, and respond to such incidents.

### Instructions for Calling 9-1-1

The following page of this document may be printed out to post near the telephone at the front desk of each supportive housing site, to assist staff in communicating essential information to emergency services.

# 9-1-1 CALL SHEET

**IF YOU THINK THERE IS AN IMMEDIATE RISK OF HARM, CALL 9-1-1.**

**Be prepared to:**

**IDENTIFY YOURSELF:**

- My name is \_\_\_\_\_, I am at this address \_\_\_\_\_, I work here as \_\_\_\_\_.

**DESCRIBE THE SITUATION.**

- “A client is breaking a door.”

**DESCRIBE THE PERPETRATOR.**

- Name, if you know it
- Physical Characteristics such as race, sex, age, height, weight, hair, and eyes
- Clothing
- Weapons
- Remarks – What is the perpetrator saying
- Means of escape – Vehicle or foot, what direction

**STAY ON THE PHONE** if at all possible until the police arrive.