

Identifying warning signs

- Prolonged eye contact
- Facial colour change - perhaps gets darker, red
- Stands tall in an aggressive way - maximising height
- Movements become larger
- Breathing rate accelerates
- Tapping of fingers, fidgeting.

If these signs are noticed, the person is becoming distressed and could become **aggressive or violent**.

Danger signs are more than warning signs. This is when we need to be aware that the person could lose control physically and become violent. When this occurs, their physical signs are significant and spontaneous. It is vital that you recognise these signals in order to be prepared for possible imminent violence:

- Clenching of fists, hands rise above the waist
- Facial colour pales, lips tighten over teeth, head drops.
- Shoulders tense, stance changes, person breaks their stare and looks at intended body targets
- The final sign will be a lowering of their entire body before moving forward to attack.

When you notice these signals it is vital you take action be either creating space between you and the aggressor or making a noise to attract attention.



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The Road Centre Ltd

Counselling Training Wellbeing

Conflict Resolution

**Responding to potentially violent
and aggressive patients**

www.theroadcentre.com

Communication skills

At the heart of **conflict resolution** lies good communication and listening skills. These involve:

- A willingness to listen to what the other person has to say
- Being aware of the messages we give, verbally and non-verbally and the effect of these on other people
- Being aware of our prejudices and preconceived ideas and beliefs and their impact on how we communicate with others

Where communication skills fail, or where there is no communication, there is almost inevitably the recourse to a physical confrontation. Only in **6%** of arrest situations do the police use physical restraint, **94%** of the time conflict is avoided by the use of good communication.

Body language

7% of our message is communicated in our words
38% is in the tone, speed and quality of our voice
55% is in our body language, even on the telephone

Where body language and the spoken word agree there is a much better chance that the person on the receiving end of the message will believe it. Where body language and the spoken word are at odds, believe the body language. This is because the body language is controlled unconsciously and it is much harder for an untrained person to lie, unlike the spoken word.

The more we practice listening and communication skills, the less we have to worry about remembering them in stressful situations.

The skills of active listening and effective communication include:

- **Empathy** - the ability and willingness to understand the situation from the other person's point of view
- **Paraphrasing** - sometimes it is helpful to tell the person what you heard them say to demonstrate your understanding of what they see as a problem
- **Clarification** - when you don't understand, ask questions as this will help to further communication
- **Admitting mistakes** or misunderstandings
- Providing **options** and being **assertive**

There tends to be three types of people:

Normal - caring, considerate, not out to cause trouble

Difficult - loud, aggressive, make their presence known

The Unknown - not obvious how they might respond

When considering your response to a potentially aggressive or violent patient, the following should be considered:

- Sex, age and size of aggressor
- What is your skill/confidence level?
- How many people are involved?
- Are they under the influence of drugs or alcohol?
- Could they be carrying anything that could be used as a weapon?
- Do they feel in a position of disadvantage? Are they looking for something which cannot be provided for them?

It is important to be aware of the space between you and to know how you can escape if necessary.