



WHITE CLOUD
FOUNDATION

VIOLENCE & AGGRESSION POLICY & PROCEDURES

Policy number	WCF18	Version	VAP001
Drafted by	Melissa Cohen	Approved by Board on	12/10/2022
Responsible person	Adam Scott	Scheduled review date	November 2024

SCOPE

This policy applies to all volunteers, employees & Board members of the White Cloud Foundation (WCF).

PURPOSE

This policy serves to support WCF staff in identifying and managing incidents of client aggression and violence in the context of a tele-health setting. It outlines obligations in responding to and preventing these events to keep staff, volunteers, contractors, students and clients safe.

For the purpose of this policy, hereon in, staff, volunteers, contractors and students will be referred to collectively as employees.

DEFINITIONS

Client/caller aggression and violence in the Tele-Mental Health Service are defined as incidents where employees are abused or threatened in circumstances related to their work, involving an implicit or explicit challenge to their safety, wellbeing, or health.

In the context of tele-health, examples of aggressive or violent behaviors include, but not limited to:

- Verbal aggression (including rudeness, yelling, swearing);
- Intimidation and threats;
- Abusive letters, phone calls or emails;
- Online trolling;
- Acts of indecency; and
- Stalking or loitering.

POLICY

WCF has a zero-tolerance policy towards violence and abusive or threatening behavior. WCF aims to identify and eliminate or control all risks associated with patient aggression and violence, as far as is reasonably practicable.

PROCEDURES

RESPONSIBILITIES

Under Workplace Health & Safety laws in Australia, WCF is responsible for providing a safe work environment for all employees, and visitors.

Members of the senior executive team, including the General Manager and Tele-Mental Health Service Manager, must exercise their responsibilities in preventing and monitoring exposure to violence and aggression in the workplace. They should also support the building of a supportive, safe work culture that promotes incident reporting.

All staff must comply with organisational policies and procedures, report all incidents of violence and aggression, know their options when they are confronted or feel threatened and know that they will be appropriately supported in doing so.

PROCEDURES

It is firstly important that all employees and volunteers should:

- Not disclose their location or arrange face-to-face meetings with a client or caller.
- Not disclose their personal contact details.
- Ensure no team member is alone in office premises at any time after usual working hours.

Where possible, employees, should recognize signs of escalating aggression, such as:

- Threatening language
- Swearing, verbal abuse
- Pacing, inability to sit still
- Refusal to communicate or withdrawal
- History of violence

The employee should employ de-escalation strategies where possible. These include:

- Appearing calm and remaining respectful, controlled, and confident.
- Using reflective questioning to demonstrate that you are listening (e.g. "You are frustrated that no one can help you, is that correct?").
- Being clear and direct in your language, assuring the client/caller your actions are in their best interest.
- Try and engage the client/caller by asking questions where they are likely to answer 'yes'. A sequence of answering five or six 'yes' questions is a powerful way to increase the likelihood that an aggressive person will see you as being on their side, even if they remain angry.
- Acknowledge distress while remaining solution focused. Ask the client/caller to identify as many solutions as possible to their presenting problem and then repeat these solutions back rather than arguing the pros and cons of each option. This may lead to a compromised solution.

If an employee feels unsafe or threatened and they have been unable to de-escalate the situation, then they must follow the following steps:

1. Immediate response

- Calmly ask the client/caller to stop.
- End the call/video appointment.
- Contact 000 if you believe the client/caller to be at risk to themselves or others or the employee feels that are at risk to their personal safety.
- Refer client / caller to 1300MHCALL on the grounds of safety and possibility of deteriorating mental health.

2. Follow up response

The wellbeing of our employees is paramount; therefore, all individuals experiencing violence and aggression in the workplace should be offered a debrief session with the Tele-Mental Health Service Manager. This debrief will help ensure the impacted employee or volunteer has access to the support they require but will also help identify any triggers and possible future safeguards.

An incident form must be completed and forwarded to the Service Manager as soon as reasonably possible. Completed incident forms will be managed according to the White Cloud Foundation Incident Reporting Process.

All communication with registered or potential clients should be documented in the relevant set of progress notes.

3. Create an alert in the client's record

The purpose of creating an alert in a client's record is to protect the health and safety of employees and volunteers who may work with the client in the future.

Following an investigation into the incident, it is at the discretion of the Service Manager to determine if an alert is necessary and when this should be reviewed.

4. Consider ongoing care options

When determining ongoing care arrangements for the client, options include:

- Sending a formal warning letter (see sample template, Appendix 1)
- Placing the client on an acceptable behavior agreement (see sample template, Appendix 2)
- Discontinuing care for the client (see sample template, Appendix 3)

Discontinuing care for the client should be at the discretion of the Tele-Mental Health Service Manager and should only occur if there are genuine concerns for the safety of WCF employees or it is felt that the client no longer meets the eligibility for WCF service provision. In the instance of client/caller safety, WCF should transfer the duty of care to 1300 MH CALL.

In discontinuing care, if appropriate, the Tele-Mental Health Service Manager should have a discussion with the patient and follow this up with a letter, email or text message.

REVIEW

The Service Manager should conduct an annual audit of the Violence & Aggression Alert process.

REFERENCES

<https://www.racgp.org.au/FSDEDEV/media/documents/Running%20a%20practice/Practice%20management/Preventing-and-managing-patient-aggression-and-violence.pdf>

APPENDIX 1

SAMPLE LETTER OF WARNING

Dear xxxx

I have been advised of an incident involving yourself and XXXX, when you recently contacted the White Cloud Foundation Tele-Mental Health service on the XXXX. On that occasion it was reported that..... *(briefly describe the incident)*. During the call, the staff member felt threatened by your language and behaviour.

White Cloud Foundation have a duty to protect the safety of all our staff, and therefore, will not tolerate any abusive, threatening, or aggressive behaviour.

We are happy to continue providing our services to you if you agree to address and change your behaviour towards the call staff. A WCF Caller Code of Conduct agreement will be established outlining when calling the service, you will respect staff and not engage in any threatening, aggressive or abusive behaviour. We will ask that you sign this agreement and put in place strategies to ensure that you abide by it.

Please contact our Tele-Mental Health Service Manager on xxxxx if you agree to discuss this letter. If you do not agree, we will be unable to continue providing you with our services.

Yours sincerely

Tele-Mental Health Service Manager

APPENDIX 2

SAMPLE CALLER CODE OF CONDUCT

I, xxxx, agree to enter into an agreement with White Cloud Foundation based on the following conditions.

As a condition of the practice agreeing to continue my treatment, I will not while I am in contact with the service:

- Swear at or intimidate staff
- Make offensive remarks
- Make verbal or physical threats
- Attend appointments when intoxicated with alcohol and/or drugs
- *Xxxxxxxxxx (include additional relevant behaviours as required)*

If I breach this agreement, I understand that my future ability to access White Cloud services may be discontinued and I may have to seek healthcare elsewhere.

DECLARATION

I confirm that I understand and agree to the conditions outlined above.

I acknowledge that the consequences of breaching these conditions have been explained to me.

Signed:

Date:

APPENDIX 3

SAMPLE LETTER TO DISCONTINUE CARE

Dear xxxx

I have been advised of an incident involving yourself and XXXX, when you recently contacted the White Cloud Foundation Tele-Mental Health service on the XXXX. On that occasion it was reported that..... (*briefly describe the incident*). During the call, the staff member felt threatened by your language and behaviour.

White Cloud Foundation have a duty to protect the safety of all our staff, and therefore, will not tolerate any abusive, threatening, or aggressive behaviour.

We have decided that we are no longer able to offer you our services at White Cloud Foundation. We ask that you no longer contact our service.

If you feel you need ongoing support for your mental health and wellbeing, please contact the Queensland Health Acute Care Team on 1300 MH CALL (1300 64 22 55).

Yours sincerely

Tele-Mental Health Service Manager