

# Aggressive People

Whilst the vast majority of attendees and visitors are polite and friendly to deal with, violent outbursts that occur inside a church or other church property can result in physical injury to staff, volunteers and visitors. The offender can also cause damage to property. It may be useful to keep photocopies of the Description Form (also included in this pack) in a convenient location within the office area for quick and easy reference and use by people to identify aggressive people and help Police with any investigations.

## Prevention

Educating staff/volunteers about conflict resolution can be a useful investment in avoiding aggressive situations and potential risks. Staff/volunteers should be skilled to tell the difference between assertive, aggressive and potentially violent people. In all instances of dealing with aggressive people, the main priority is to ensure the safety of yourself, your staff/volunteers and your visitors. Every situation is different and as such there is no one, absolute set of procedures in dealing with aggressive people. Following some basic steps however, may assist people to respond to such situations.

### Basic Security Tips

1. Assess the situation and remain calm at all times.
2. If onsite security officers are employed, ensure staff are aware of when and how to contact them.
3. If it appears that the safety of staff/volunteers or visitors is at risk, the police should be called immediately on Triple Zero '000'.
4. Do not respond to bad behaviour in the same manner.
5. Remain respectful. Try to restore a sense of justice for the person. Explain what options are available and encourage them to try one of these.
6. Patience is usually a good strategy and this can be achieved by not only listening to the person but by acknowledging their problem or situation:
  - Staff/Volunteers should not take insults personally - they are being delivered by a person who appears unreasonable and may relate to policies and procedures as opposed to the church attendees personally
  - Listening can be useful to allow the person to 'let off steam'
  - Remember that over a period of time anger can diminish.
7. Other staff/volunteers not involved in the incident should not become an audience; however they should monitor the situation for any possible escalation.
8. If the person is not able to be calmed and they continue to be offensive or obnoxious, politely request the person to leave the church's property.
9. If having been politely requested to leave, a person refuses, contact the police and await their arrival. Do not engage in any further unnecessary dialogue.

## Violent Offenders

1. Do not enter the person's physical space as this can escalate the situation. Holding your stance can appear aggressive to the offender - consider stepping back etc.
2. Discreetly remove any items that could potentially be used as weapons.
3. Counter areas or pews can be discreetly used to create natural barriers and distance between staff/volunteers and the aggressive person.
4. Employees and volunteers alike are entitled to protect themselves from violence. The amount of force used however to deter the violence, must be reasonable and proportionate to the harm that is being sought to be avoided. Excessive force is not justified and can result in a counter claim of criminal assault or civil litigation.