

Defusing Hostile Customers



**Richmond Centre for Disability
Volunteer Training
September 23, 2017**

Learning Objectives

What You Will Learn:

- ✓ How to identify hostile or violent behaviour in customers
- ✓ How to defuse or de-escalate situations
- ✓ How to use these techniques in different customer service situations



Section One:

Recognizing Hostile Customer Behaviours



Customer Service Has Its Challenges

- ✓ Be aware of human behaviour and interpersonal styles
- ✓ Workers in all types of customer service roles need to recognize the warning signs and know how to defuse behaviour that doesn't seem right



Customer Service Challenges Scale



Upset

Angry

Hostile

Violent



Why Do Customers Become Hostile?

- ✓ Wide variety of reasons
- ✓ Frustrated with level or service or faulty product
- ✓ Treated unfairly
- ✓ Just having a bad day



Observe Customer Behaviours

Look for Preliminary Signs of Hostility or Aggression:

- ✓ Clenched fists
- ✓ Tense muscles
- ✓ Hunched shoulders
- ✓ Red face
- ✓ Fidgeting, pacing around, restless
- ✓ Staring or avoidance of eye contact
- ✓ Rapid movement; waving hands in air
- ✓ Raised voice and choice of words
- ✓ Angry tone of voice /language

Observe Customer Behaviours

Look for Physical or Verbal Signs of Hostility:

- ✓ Yelling or screaming
- ✓ Swearing/cursing
- ✓ Threatening
- ✓ Shaking fists in air
- ✓ Physically threatening someone
- ✓ Physical violence



Telephone and E-mail Behaviours

Telephone and Email Challenges:

- ✓ Inability to observe behaviours or physical signs
- ✓ May require different defusing approaches



Prevention Is the Key

What You Can Do Ahead of Time:

- ✓ Prevent hostile situations from escalating
- ✓ Learn defusing techniques
- ✓ Know when to get help and protect yourself and others



Review of Section One





What is a behavioural cue? Select all that apply.

- a) Physical signs a person displays
- b) A device used to improve billiards performance
- c) Something you should try to observe in your customers
- d) A verbal warning



Which of the following is a sign of preliminary hostile behaviour?

- a) Yelling and screaming
- b) Swearing/cursing
- c) Fidgeting, pacing around, or restlessness
- d) Threatening

Section Two: Defusing Strategies



First Step—Prevention

Strategic Steps:

- ✓ Recognize warning signs
- ✓ Observe changes in behaviour
- ✓ Assess overall situation



What to Do If the Situation Escalates

Initial Steps:

- ✓ Take a deep breath
- ✓ Stay calm
- ✓ Listen to the customer
- ✓ Reassure them



Non-verbal Techniques (In-Person)

Techniques:

- ✓ Act professionally
- ✓ Use non-threatening body position
- ✓ Calm, open posture
- ✓ Reduce direct eye contact
- ✓ Allow for personal space
- ✓ Avoid sudden movements



Communication Techniques

- ✓ Speak in a friendly manner and ask how you can help
- ✓ Use the customer's name if possible and introduce yourself
- ✓ Use active listening skills and acknowledge what the customer is saying
- ✓ Explain your purpose or intention
- ✓ Give clear instructions



Phone and E-mail De-escalation Techniques

- ✓ Always remain calm
- ✓ Let the customer vent
- ✓ Let them know you are there to help
- ✓ Never say “I’m only following the rules”
- ✓ Run your email response by your manager



Plan for Personal Safety

- ✓ Follow policies and procedures outlined in emergency plan
- ✓ Notify your manager
- ✓ Immediately contact emergency personnel if needed



Section 2 Review



Best Practice Scenario

Josh is a clerk who works at a 24-hour gas station and variety store. He has been on the job for about three months. One night on his shift, he notices a customer at the back of the store who is becoming increasingly agitated. The customer is yelling and cursing to himself as he paces back and forth near one of the aisles. Josh feels like his personal safety is at risk.

What should Josh do in this situation?

- a) Yell at the customer to keep it down
- b) Get the employee handbook & read through the policies
- c) Stay silent and sit with good posture
- d) Call the police, as outlined in the emergency plan

Best Practice Scenario - Answer

The correct answer is D.
Call the police, as outlined
in the emergency plan.



Section Three:

Responsibilities of Employers



Provide a Safe Workplace

Duties of Employers:

- ✓ Ensure workplaces are free of violence
- ✓ Employees have all tools they need
- ✓ Training and education on defusing hostile customers
- ✓ Prepare employees for emergencies



Working Alone

For Employees Who Work Alone:

- ✓ Ensure hazards are identified, controlled or eliminated
- ✓ Arrange for proper security, locked doors, etc.
- ✓ Provide training



Provide Ways to Properly Report & Document Incidents

Employers are obligated to:

- ✓ Ensure proper training on incident reporting and documentation
- ✓ Incident reporting tools must be in place at all times



Responsibilities of Workers

Workers Must:

- ✓ Be aware of policies and procedures related to defusing hostile customers
- ✓ Attend required health & safety training
- ✓ Report and document all incidents in a timely manner



Closing Notes



Wrap Up

**Thank you for participating
in this training!**

We trust you have enjoyed learning more about knowing how to spot hostile or potentially violent customer behaviours, and how to defuse a tense situation.



Defusing Hostile Customers Training

1. Where might you be unlikely to encounter a hostile customer?
 - A. Over email
 - B. On vacation
 - C. In person
 - D. Over the telephone

Defusing Hostile Customers Training

2. People who work in the retail industry rarely ever encounter an angry customer. True or False?
- A. True
 - B. False

Defusing Hostile Customers Training

3. Complete the following scale.

Upset _____ Hostile Violent

- A. Satisfied
- B. Noncompliant
- C. Angry
- D. Rude

Defusing Hostile Customers Training

4. Why do customers sometimes become hostile?
- A. They are having a bad day
 - B. Frustrated with your service
 - C. Experienced a faulty product
 - D. All of the above

Defusing Hostile Customers Training

5. Customers who are irritated or angry will usually show signs of hostility even before they speak to you. True or False?
- A. True
 - B. False

Defusing Hostile Customers Training

6. Which of the following behaviours could be a sign of preliminary hostility?
- A. Wide grin
 - B. Asking strange questions
 - C. Tensed up muscles
 - D. Drinking too much coffee

Defusing Hostile Customers Training

7. How can you prepare yourself mentally and emotionally in a tense customer service situation?
 - A. Say to yourself “I’m better than the customers”
 - B. Stay calm and in control
 - C. Pace around the room
 - D. Recite poetry in your head

Defusing Hostile Customers Training

8. Which of the following is an example of hostile customer behaviour?
- A. Hugging the clerk
 - B. Returning a faulty product and asking for money back
 - C. Yelling and screaming profanities
 - D. Failing to say “thank you” after a transaction

Defusing Hostile Customers Training

9. If a customer situation starts to become hostile, you should try your best to remain calm and what else?
- A. Tell them about your current promotions
 - B. Call the police
 - C. Make rapid hand movement
 - D. Listen to the customer

Defusing Hostile Customers Training

10. You should never stare directly in the eyes of an angry customer. True or False?

- A. True
- B. False

Defusing Hostile Customers Training

11. One of your customers has just vented his frustration regarding the poor service he received. After you've listened patiently to his rant, you then express empathy for his bad experience by letting him know that you understand how he feels. Then, you negotiate some options with him. What type of technique did you use in this situation?
- A. Non-verbal
 - B. Communication
 - C. Therapeutic
 - D. Escalation

Defusing Hostile Customers Training

12.If you are confronted with a violent customer during a potential robbery, you should first document the behaviour on an incident report. True or False?

- A. True
- B. False

Defusing Hostile Customers Training

13. Which of the following is the most effective option for employers to reduce the danger to their employees presented by hostile customer situations?

- A. Offer free karate lessons
- B. Provide a safe workplace
- C. Provide full body armour
- D. Give them a panic button

Defusing Hostile Customers Training

14. How could an employer help to ensure the safety of an employee who works alone at night?

- A. Make sure all hazards are identified, controlled, or eliminated before work starts
- B. Leave doors unlocked
- C. Give them a laptop
- D. Bring in guard dogs

Defusing Hostile Customers Training

15. What is not a responsibility of the worker when managing hostile customer situations?
- A. Wear protective clothing
 - B. Attend training courses
 - C. Document incidents
 - D. Understand policies and procedures