TOOLBOX TALK AWARENESS PACKAGES

HAZ-PAT · Dealing with Aggressive Customers Awareness

Product Overview

Audience: Front-of-house, bar, counter and retail staff who serve customers in hospitality venues, shops and service counters · Duration: 20–30 minutes

Version 1.0 · 17 November 2026

For front-of-house, bar, counter and retail staff: the warning signs, staying calm, refusing service safely, intoxicated customers, getting to safety and calling for help, and support after an incident.

Staff who serve customers in cafes, restaurants, pubs, clubs, takeaways and shops are sworn at, threatened and sometimes assaulted: by a customer who is drunk or affected by drugs, angry about a wait, a price or a mistake, or refused service. Abuse from customers is not part of the job. WHS or OHS laws require the business to manage it like any other risk, starting with how the venue and the work are set up.

This talk covers the warning signs, what to say and do to calm a situation, refusing service safely, intoxicated customers, keeping a barrier and an exit, calling for help and the police, and reporting and support afterwards. It is awareness, not security or restraint training, and it does not set out your state or territory's liquor laws.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the session participants will be able to:

- Recognise the early warning signs that a customer is becoming aggressive, and act before it escalates
- Use simple de-escalation: stay calm, listen, acknowledge, explain and give options, while keeping a safe distance
- Refuse service safely, with a manager or a second worker where possible, and know that your state's liquor laws set their own rules
- Keep a barrier and an exit, never restrain or chase, and move to safety when a situation turns threatening
- Call for help using the venue's arrangements, and call 000 when anyone is at risk
- Report every incident, take part in a debrief, and know the support available afterwards

What it covers

Module	Covers
Why customers become aggressive	Waits, mistakes and refusals; Alcohol and drugs; Warning signs
Controls that work	House rules, staffing and layout; De-escalation and refusing service; Calling for help
Your part	Getting to safety; Reporting every incident; Debrief and support

Activities

- Say it calmly: workers practise what to say to an angry customer and when refusing service

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- Stay or go: workers decide what to do in four front-of-house situations, from a complaint to a threat

What is in the package

Item	File
Editable PowerPoint presentation with speaker notes, plus PDF	02_TRAINING_PRESENTATION/Training Presentation.pptx and .pdf
Facilitator guide with a running sheet, discussion prompts and model answers	03_FACILITATOR_GUIDE/Facilitator Guide.docx and .pdf
Participant handout with the key points to take away	04_PARTICIPANT_HANDOUT/Participant Handout.docx and .pdf
Attendance record form, to capture who attended, when, and who facilitated	06_RECORDS/Attendance Record.docx and .pdf
Excel attendance register	06_RECORDS/Attendance Register.xlsx
Multiple-choice theory assessment, to record understanding if your business wants to	05_ASSESSMENT/Theory Assessment.docx and .pdf
Answer key for the assessment	05_ASSESSMENT/Assessment Answer Key.docx and .pdf
Certificate template	06_RECORDS/Certificate Template.docx
Start here: Read Me First, Product Overview, Permitted Use Terms, Version Information	01_START_HERE/ (four PDFs)

What you need to deliver it

- A facilitator such as a supervisor, leading hand or WHS adviser who has read the facilitator guide and knows your site's arrangements for the topic
- A screen or projector, or printed slides or handouts: it works in a crib room, site office or on a video call
- Your own site procedures for the topic, to point to during the session

Questions

Is this security or crowd control training? No. It is awareness for everyone who serves customers. It does not train staff to restrain or remove anyone, which is security work with its own licensing, and it does not set out your state or territory's responsible service of alcohol rules, which are covered by RSA training.

Can we add our own site procedures and photos? Yes. The slides, handout and guide are editable, and the facilitator guide marks the places to add your own procedures, contacts and photos of your workplace.

Do we have to use the assessment? No. It is there if your business wants a record that each worker understood the key points. The attendance record on its own shows who attended and when.

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TOOLBOX TALK

Dealing with Aggressive Customers Awareness

Warning signs, calm words, refusing service, getting to safety and support afterwards

20–30 minutes · Front-of-house, bar, counter and retail staff who serve customers in hospitality venues, shops and service counters

[Company name] · [Date] · [Facilitator name]

PAT

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What this talk is, and is not

This talk covers

- ✓ Why customers become aggressive
- ✓ Warning signs and calm words
- ✓ Refusing service safely
- ✓ Getting to safety, calling for help, support

This talk is not

- ✕ Security or restraint training
- ✕ RSA training or liquor laws
- ✕ Armed robbery response in detail
- ✕ Our rules: **[Our house rules and procedure]**

Awareness only. Removing or restraining a person is security work, with its own licensing.

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Why customers become aggressive

Most aggression builds. There are usually warning signs.

- Waits, queues, mistakes with orders, prices or bills
- Being refused service, entry or a refund
- Alcohol or drugs, which lower inhibitions and raise tempers
- Groups egging each other on; late nights; crowded spaces
- Signs: raised voice, swearing, pacing, staring, clenched fists, invading space

A composite example

- A customer waits 40 minutes for a meal and starts swearing at a young waiter in front of the room.
- Nobody tells the manager. When the waiter apologises again, the customer throws a glass.

Call the manager early. It is not overreacting.

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Duties under WHS or OHS laws

The business must

- Manage the risk of aggression from customers
- Set house rules and back staff who apply them
- Provide staffing, layout and a way to call for help
- Train staff, record incidents and support them

You must

- Follow the venue's procedure and house rules
- Not put yourself at risk
- Call for help early
- Report every incident, even with no injury

Victoria's OHS laws set similar duties in their own terms. Liquor laws set their own rules too.

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The order of controls for customer aggression

1. **Elimination** Fix the triggers: realistic wait times, clear prices, no cash on the counter
2. **Substitution** Table or app ordering, card payments, food and water available
3. **Isolation** A counter or bar between staff and customers; a safe place to retreat to
4. **Engineering** Duress alarms, radios, CCTV where used, good lighting, clear exits
5. **Administrative** House rules, enough staff, a manager to call, training, incident records
6. **PPE** Rarely relevant: staff safety comes from the controls above

HIGHER ORDER

Higher order controls remove or control the hazard at the source, or put a barrier between people and the hazard.

LOWER ORDER

Lower order controls rely on people to do a thing or wear a thing, every time, tired, distracted or rushed.

Behaviours are not on the hierarchy, but behaviours and culture decide whether every control on it actually works.

A counter between you and the customer is a control. 'Keep them happy' is not.

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Dealing with Aggressive Customers Awareness

Participant handout · keep this

Abuse, threats and violence from customers are not part of the job. Most aggression builds, so notice early, stay calm, keep your exit and get help. Keep this page.

The order of controls

1. Fix the triggers: waits, prices, cash
2. Table or app ordering, card payments
3. A counter between you; a safe place to go
4. Alarms, radios, CCTV, lighting, clear exits
5. House rules, staffing, a manager, training
6. Your own safety comes first

Calm it down

- Low, slow voice; open hands; safe distance
- Listen, acknowledge, explain, give options
- Refuse early, politely, with the manager

Never

- Restrain, block, grab or chase
- Stay where you feel unsafe

Every shift

- ☐ Do I know who the duty manager is this shift?
- ☐ Do I know the code word, alarm or radio call for help?
- ☐ Is there a counter, bar or table between me and the customer?
- ☐ Do I know my way out, and is it clear?
- ☐ Do I know the house rules, and what to say when refusing service?

Get help

- Call for help: **[How to call for help here]**
- Anyone at risk, a weapon, or they will not leave: 000
- Manager: **[Who to call for help here]**

After it

- **[Who to report to here]**
- Record it; debrief; support: **[Support service]**

Notice early, stay calm, keep your exit, call for help, report it.

This is awareness training. It is not a licence, a ticket, a permit or a competency. It is not security, restraint or RSA training.

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