

Managing Aggressive Behaviour

Try not to over-react. Take time for a deep breath and try to keep calm. Remember that the violent behaviour is a symptom of the illness. This is not easy but it is worth working at as your reaction is likely to be reflected in the other person. Your self control in the first few moments could defuse the situation and completely alter the direction the episode takes.

Do not attempt to remove a weapon from anyone threatening to use it. Delusions and hallucinations are very real to the people experiencing them. There is a need to acknowledge this without agreeing to believe in it. Try to keep the person in touch with your reality while not rejecting their experience. However, it is important to realise that the ill person may not, at that moment, recognise you as you: they may believe you are someone who may harm them.

Do not argue. You will need to judge from your knowledge of the person whether to stay and talk calmly, or leave the situation as quickly as possible. If you stay (and you may have no choice), do what you can to let the person know you are trying to understand how they are feeling. Showing fear to a potentially violent person may spur them on. On the other hand, there is a chance that making you fearful is just what the other person is striving for. In that case, admitting your fear could well calm the situation. Only you will know what is likely to work best with your relative in the situation - to hide your fear or to admit it.

Do not make promises you may not be able to keep. It is important to maintain the person's trust. Aim towards having the ill person decide to 'cool it'.

Do not say things like 'Now don't do anything silly' or 'Everything will be all right. Everything may *not* be all right.

Allow the person to retain some dignity. The person may wish the episode to end, but is unsure how to go about it, so they need to be given the opportunity to save face. Once again, try to concentrate on the person's feelings rather than the action. This is time-consuming but well worth the effort if you can encourage a decision to refrain from violence by giving up a weapon or not striking out.

Your last resort is to involve the police. Do not hesitate to do so if lives are threatened. Do not use police action as a threat in trying to control the situation.

If you anticipate the possibility of violence, a friendly chat with local police officers about the disorder your relative suffers *before* the need for their help arises may be helpful. Offer them some information on the disorder. ARAFMI will provide information for this purpose. This gives the advantage of preparing the police in advance about the possibility of violence (to self and others), creating a more informed and sympathetic approach should an incident arise. You, in turn, will be more comfortable about involving police officers to whom you have previously spoken.

Set up a plan of action for your own protection in the event of your relative or friend threatening violence. The plan may simply be to notify a friend to make a pre-arranged phone call on your behalf. To contact your friend, you could phone on the pretext of cancelling an appointment, and mention a code word or phrase, so your friend need not be involved, other than passing on your pre-arranged message.