

## **300.15**

### **Disruptive Participants**

#### **Overview**

##### **Introduction**

There are no secret techniques that are guaranteed to work to deal effectively with disruptive participants. Ideally you will want to avoid confrontations. Your agency should develop clinic policies that address ways to avoid confrontation and deal with disruptive participants. This policy provides guidelines for developing clinic policies.

##### **In this Policy**

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## **Avoiding Confrontation**

### **Introduction**

Following are suggested policies to help avoid confrontation in the clinic.

### **Establish basic rules and inform participants**

Because participants **sometimes** become disruptive when they believe they have been treated unfairly or differently from others, it is important for your agency to establish rules on common issues, such as missed appointments, **the use of foul or abusive language**, and **arriving** late for appointments, and communicate these rules to participants. Post the rules for participants to read, and explain the consequences of breaking the rules.

### **Have the clinic belong to the people it serves**

Participants will defend “their clinic and staff” much more readily than if they see you as “outsiders.” Work hard to have your clinic and the WIC Program belong to the people it serves. Refer to the WIC clinic as “your clinic.” Help the participants take pride in “their” clinic. Where applicable, get your participants’ input into clinic operations, either through a survey **or** suggestion box.

## Dealing with Disruptive Participants

### Introduction

If you find yourself in a situation where you must deal with a verbally abusive, physically threatening, belligerent, drunken, demanding or psychotic person, the following guidelines will help you through the situation.

### Have a formal system to communicate emergencies

Set up a signal to communicate emergencies within your clinic so other staff can help if needed. This can be a whistle, buzzer or an oral code. Tell staff when to use the signal, how to use it, what it means, and how to respond to it. **Have an exit strategy planned before you start your appointment. If at any time you fear for your, or someone else's, safety call for help which may include calling 911.**

### Primary goal is safety

You need to remain calm to keep the situation calm. Your primary goals are:

- **Maintain the safety of yourself, co-workers, and others.**
- Calm the person down enough to complete the clinic visit, or
- Persuade the person to leave the clinic without harming someone or causing a major uproar.

All the comments you make should be aimed at calming the person down.

### Validate the person's feelings

Always attempt to understand the person. Reflect their feelings by re-stating them.

### Examples

- "I understand you are upset because we cannot fit you into our appointment schedule today..."
- "I realize you have been waiting a long time..."

### Actions to avoid

In order to keep control of a confrontational situation:

- Do not return the verbal abuse, lose your temper or get into an argument,
- Do not become involved if you are not directly dealing with the participant, or
- Do not take the participant into a closed room by yourself. This can increase the danger to you. You do not know what the participant will do to you.

### Inform the person of your feelings

If the disruptive person has not calmed down:

- Tell them that you do not appreciate their attitude, voice, etc.
- Explain their choices and the results.

### Example

"You can calm down and we can finish, or you can leave and come back when you are calm. If you choose not to do either of these two things, I will call the police."

**Call the police if these suggestions do not work**

Call the police (911) if you feel you or someone else in the clinic could be in danger. If you feel you need to call the police try to exit the area the threatening person is occupying. Do not threaten to call the police as this could agitate the person more. If you decide the police are needed call 911. Stay calm, state your name, occupation, where you are and phone number you are calling from. Explain the situation to the 911 telecommunicator and answer all of their questions. If you do not have a phone nearby, have someone else call 911.

**File an incident report**

Following each incident, file an Incident Report according to your agency's policies (see policy 300.15A for sample of the report). The report should be completed only by the people who had direct contact with the participant. Place the report in the participant's chart. Complete the state fraud and abuse report and forward it to the state Integrity Coordinator so they can investigate the incident.

**Hold staff meetings after difficult encounters**

Hold a staff meeting soon (preferably the same day) after an encounter with a disruptive participant. Discuss feelings about the situation, how the situation developed, how each person responded, and what other ways of coping with the participant may have been more effective. Avoid being judgmental or "blaming the victim." If staff need more training on how to deal with disruptive participants, work on ways to provide the training.