



CROSS-SECTOR DEFINITIONS OF VIOLENT & AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR

The purpose of these definitions is to establish a unified language across agencies for describing and communicating incidents of violent and aggressive (V&A) behaviours. By doing so, we aim to enhance inter-agency collaboration, share best practices and in future phases, improve our sector-wide reporting and monitoring systems.

These definitions have made a distinction between **intentional (I)** and **unintentional (U)** behaviours, which is particularly relevant when comparing different sectors, such as healthcare versus regulatory compliance. For example, in healthcare, unintentional aggression might be more prevalent due to the conditions of the individuals being cared for.

Understanding these distinctions can help agencies determine the appropriate interventions and support systems for their staff. It also encourages a more empathetic approach, particularly in scenarios where frontline workers may be hesitant to report unintentional aggression due to the circumstances of the individuals involved.

These definitions are not intended to alter any legal definitions of violence and aggression. They are a tool for comparison and communication between agencies. Should discrepancies arise between these definitions and legal requirements, agencies should continue to adhere to the legal standards while using these definitions as a complementary resource



Designed for:

Heads of Health and Safety and Practitioners

DEFINITION MATRIX:

		Index	Description	Index	Description
Physical		I-1	a) Assaultive physical contact with person with weapon or other object, including spitting, with a believed intent to cause harm to a person.	U-1	a) Reactive or involuntary physical expression involving hitting out or grabbing at a person, involving an object (including spitting), without an intent to harm.
			b) Assaultive physical contact with person with no weapon or other object involved, with a believed intent to cause harm to a person.		b) Reactive or involuntary physical expression involving hitting out or grabbing at a person with no object involved, without an intent to harm.
			c) Non-assaultive physical contact with person with a believed intent to threaten or intimidate.		c) Reactive or involuntary non-assaultive but unwanted physical contact with person, without an intent to threaten or intimidate
Non-verbal (Body and gesture)		I-2	a) Non-verbal in-person intimidating or threatening behaviour with a weapon or other object, directed towards a person or agency.	U-2	a) Reactive or involuntary non-verbal in-person intimidating or threatening behaviour with an object, including spitting, without an intent to threaten or intimidate.
			b) Non-verbal in-person intimidating or threatening behaviour without a weapon or other object, directed towards a person or agency.		b) Reactive or involuntary non-verbal in-person intimidating or threatening behaviour without an object, without an intent to threaten or intimidate.
Verbal		I-3	a) Verbally intimidating or aggressive behaviour directed in person towards a person or agency.	U-3	a) Reactive or involuntary verbally intimidating or aggressive behaviour towards a person, without an intent to threaten or intimidate.
			b) Verbal threats or aggression directed towards a person or agency made via phone or a recorded message.		b) Reactive or involuntary verbal threats or aggression directed towards a person or agency made via phone or a recorded message, without an intent to threaten or intimidate.
Written Communication		I-4	a) Aggression or threats made through written communication directly to an individual or individuals.	U-4	a) Aggression or threats made through written communication directly to an individual or individuals but where the assessment is that no real threat is intended.
			b) Generic aggression or threats made through written communication to a group or agency.		b) Generic aggression or threats made through written communication to a group or agency but where the assessment is that no real threat is intended.

The definitions outlined here are designed to complement existing policies and procedures within each agency. They are not intended to replace or modify current approaches to managing violent or aggressive behaviour. Instead, they serve as a common framework to facilitate better communication when agencies collaborate. For example, when agencies share information on incidents, they can more clearly describe which types of violence or aggression their policies address and consider how these might apply to other organisations.

This standardised language should allow agencies to better share and describe their risk management strategies specific to their operational contexts. For instance, a call centre might primarily deal with verbal and written aggression (I-3 and I-4), while frontline workers engaging with people may more frequently encounter non-verbal threats or physical aggression (I-1 and I-2).