

# Customer Incivility & Managing Emotional Labour

## Fact Sheet #2

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 Back of House, Front of Mind Podcast

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Customer incivility and emotional labour are two of the most significant stressors in hospitality.

They directly affect staff wellbeing, service quality, and workplace culture. This fact sheet helps employers understand the risks and implement practical solutions.

# What is Customer Incivility?

Customer incivility refers to low-intensity negative behaviour from customers such as:

- Rudeness, impatience or dismissiveness
- Speaking disrespectfully to staff
- Ignoring boundaries or instructions
- Complaints delivered aggressively
- Blame-shifting or unrealistic demands

These behaviours may appear “minor” but have a cumulative impact on staff mental health.

# What is Emotional Labour?

Emotional labour is the expectation for staff to remain calm, friendly and composed – even when facing stress, aggression or personal difficulties.

In hospitality, emotional labour is constant:

- Smiling through pressure
- Managing difficult customers
- Staying patient when exhausted
- Regulating emotions under scrutiny



# The Impact on Staff

- Burnout and emotional exhaustion
- Increased anxiety and presenteeism
- Reduced job satisfaction and confidence
- Heightened turnover and absenteeism
- Poorer sleep and increased fatigue
- Safety risks due to stress and distraction

## Why this Matters for Employers

- Customer treatment is directly linked to staff wellbeing and retention
- Emotional labour is recognised as a psychosocial hazard under WHS law
- Unmanaged incivility leads to errors, conflict, and reduced service quality



# Practical Actions for Venues

## Support Staff Immediately

- Use “Please Respect Our Team” customer kindness posters
- Allow staff to step away after an abusive interaction
- Debrief with staff after difficult shifts

## Create Clear Expectations

- Discuss how you might manage escalating situations
- Reinforce zero-tolerance policies for abuse
- Encourage staff to report incidents without fear

## Reduce Emotional Labour Load

- Rotate tasks to reduce burnout
- Check in before and after busy periods
- Avoid back-to-back doubles or high-pressure sequences

## Train & Equip Your Leaders

- Register for the HMM Leadership Training
- Train supervisors to intervene early
- Model calm, respectful behaviours

## Build a Culture of Psychological Safety

- Openly acknowledge the challenges of customer-facing work
- Celebrate teamwork and resilience
- Normalise staff asking for support

## Quick De-Escalation Script:

- *“I want to help. Let’s work together to sort this out.”*
- *“I understand you’re frustrated. Here’s what I can do...”*
- *“I can’t allow abusive behaviour. If we continue respectfully, I can assist.”*

## FOR MORE SUPPORT

Download posters, scripts and emotional labour tools from the Healthy Mind Menu Online Hub.

[healthymindmenu.org.au](https://healthymindmenu.org.au)