

Responding to Customer Aggression



Customer aggression is a common challenge in hospitality. This script helps supervisors support staff before, during, and after difficult customer interactions.

Why This Matters

- Customer behaviour directly impacts staff wellbeing
- Aggression and incivility are recognised psychosocial hazards under WHS law
- Staff need clear guidance, support, and reassurance

Before A Shift: Set Expectations

Supervisors can say:

- *“If a customer becomes aggressive, your safety comes first.”*
- *“You never have to tolerate abuse — let me know immediately.”*
- *“If you need to step away after a difficult interaction, that’s okay.”*

Reinforce:

- *Zero tolerance for abuse*
- *Staff wellbeing > customer satisfaction*
- *Teamwork during pressure*

During An Incident: Supervisor Response

Use this approach to intervene safely and confidently.

1. Stay Calm & Step In

"Thanks, I'll take it from here."

"Let me help resolve this with you."

2. Set Clear Boundaries

"I want to help, but I can't do that if the conversation is aggressive."

"We're happy to assist when we can speak respectfully."

3. Offer A Path Forward

*"Here's what we *can* do..."*

"Let's find the best solution."

If abuse continues:

"We will need to end this interaction if the behaviour continues."

If aggressive behaviour escalates:

- Ask the person to leave
- Seek security or management support
- Prioritise staff safety

After The Incident: Support Your Staff

Once the customer leaves or the situation stabilises:

1. Check In

“Are you okay? That was a lot.”

“Do you need a minute outside or a quick breather?”

2. Validate

“You handled that really well.”

“That behaviour wasn’t acceptable — thank you for flagging it.”

3. Debrief

“Anything you want to talk through?”

“Would swapping tasks help for a bit?”

4. Reset

- *Deep breath together*
- *10-second release*
- *Water break*

Supervisor Guidelines

- Never blame staff for customer behaviour
- Redirect responsibility to the supervisor or manager
- Step in early, not after staff feel overwhelmed
- Reinforce team solidarity: “We’ve got your back”
- Record repeated incidents if needed

Signs Staff May Still Be Affected

- Quietness or withdrawal
- Shaking or agitation
- Tearfulness
- Difficulty focusing
- Visible distress

Follow up later in the shift:

“How are you feeling now?”

“Let me know if you want another task rotation.”

When to Escalate

- Customer threatens harm
- Customer refuses to leave
- Staff feel unsafe
- Staff are highly distressed

In these cases:

- Prioritise safety
- Follow venue protocol
- Contact security or police if needed

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healthymindmenu.org.au