

Behavioral Cues For Violence

Anger responses vary widely as any other personality trait. There is no way to determine with any certainty whether or not a disgruntled client will escalate to anger and whether the anger will escalate into violence. The following guidelines were put together for mental health care workers for use with their clientele. While counselors who deal regularly with the mentally ill experience a higher degree of angry and violent responses, it is wise to remember how rapidly emotions can change. When judging a client's violence potential, look for verbal and nonverbal congruency. Are the words, vocal tones, and body language logical and consistent? Is the client losing control or not making sense?

View the following as indicators for potential violence but not as absolutes:

NONVERBAL CLUES:

1. Facial Expressions

- * Jaws tense, clenched teeth, biting lip, pursed or quivering lips.
- * Frowning
- * Eye contact vigilant, staring with no break, dilated pupils.
- * Skin flushed red or blanched looking (more obvious with lighter skin tones).
- * Facial sweating, especially if it is not warm weather.
- * Pulsing carotid artery or temple.

2. Breathing Pattern Changes

- * Breathing becomes shallow or rapid.

3. Body Language

- * Attitude changes.
- * Is the client "squaring off?" (Facing you confrontational style?)
- * Does the client appear to be making him/herself "ready for action?"
- * Does he/she show signs of restlessness?
- * Is he/she pacing?
- * Is he/she becoming "stony" or withdrawn?

4. Extremities

- * Learn to watch hands, and note tension.
- * Clenched fists or white knuckles indicate fear, anger, or frustration.
- * Is there a noticeable shift from a relaxed to a tense or "tight" position?
- * Is the client hiding his/her hands, perhaps trying to "hide" his/her anger?
- * Are you noticing discharge movements like pounding fists, stomping feet, pushing, or kicking objects?