

# Managing Clients Who Present with Anger

Social workers are often in the role of managing clients' feelings. At times, clients may present as angry, hostile or even violent. It is important that social workers are prepared to handle these potentially uncomfortable or unsafe situations with the highest level of professionalism and safeguards.

Below are a few tips and questions to help guide your technique when managing clients who present with anger.

**STAY CALM** – Remaining calm is key to managing most situations, especially when a client is angry. Role modeling calm composure for a client can be helpful. By portraying a calm demeanor, an atmosphere of safety and comfort is provided to help the client relax.

In the moment, it is important to be mindful of your own body language and breathing. Both should remain in cohesion with being calm. Standing while not leaning forward, having minimal arm or hand movements, and breathing deeply can all reveal calmness. You can also relay to the client that you are better able to hear and help when they present in a calm manner. Giving specific suggestions to the client can help.

**LISTEN** – Listening to the client can also be very helpful. The client may simply need to vent feelings or have their information heard by someone. Listening to the client can provide detailed information that may not have been known previously. It can also help to create effective communication and aid in essential relationship building.

## **REMINDE THE CLIENT YOU ARE THERE TO HELP** –

The client may be presenting as angry as a result of things out of your control or may simply be angry at the current situation. As the social worker, you may be seen as part of the problem. It can be helpful to remind the client of your helping role. Whether it is to advocate for the best interest of the client or children involved, it is important to remind the client that you are working together.

**EMPATHIZE** – Often clients are in need of social work services due to a stressful situation in their lives. Simply extending empathy can help bridge any gaps and foster a sense of safety within the relationship. Showing compassion and care can go a long way.

## **ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN BOUNDARIES** –

If yelling or profanity is used, it may be helpful to remind clients that you would like to hear all that they have to say, but that you need them to adhere to certain rules of communication, such as speaking in a calm voice and not using profanity. Reminding the client that, as a social worker, you will always use respectful communication and the same is expected of clients. Creating an agreement and directly stating what kind of communication is



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expected throughout the professional relationship at the initial meeting may also be helpful.

## TAKE PRECAUTIONS TO ENSURE SAFETY –

If you are aware that a client may be angry before the meeting, it is important to take necessary precautions. Meeting in an open area with other people present, alerting supervisors and

colleagues of meeting with a potentially angry client ahead of time, and even requesting the presence of security or law enforcement can all prove helpful. It is important not to take risks when working with clients who are angry as anger can create unpredictability. Safety should always be your first priority. Review agency policies with supervisor and create a plan ahead of time.



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# Checklist

FOR MANAGING  
CLIENTS WHO  
PRESENT  
WITH ANGER



- What is my temperament? Do I feel calm?
- What does my body language say to others? Am I leaning forward? Are my arms and hand moving? How is my breathing?
- Have I encouraged and guided the client to calm him/herself?
- Am I listening to the client and paying attention to what is said?
- Am I reminding the client that I want to listen to what they have to say?
- Is what the client saying new information?
- Does the client feel we are working together?
- What role does my client appear to think I play? Helpful? Harmful?
- Does the client have accurate information about the situation?
- Does the client feel that I care?
- Does the client feel safe in the relationship to communicate honestly?
- Have I expressed empathetic statements such as, "I can imagine that is difficult," or "I am sorry you are upset"?
- What kind of communication am I using in the moment?
- Have I previously discussed with the client my expectations of our communication?
- If so, have I reminded the client about what they agreed to regarding communication? If not, how can I effectively communicate boundaries in the moment?
- Have I assessed risk factors before meeting with any clients?
- Do I have an effective safety plan in place?