United Heartland has developed this guide to provide customers with an overview of the best practices contained in an effective Behavior Management Program. Our Loss Control team has created these resources for organizations within the social services, nursing home and health care industries as staff within these business sectors often interact with individuals that exhibit combative, aggressive or violent behaviors. This guide and its supplemental materials are intended to be an informational resource to help reduce workers’ compensation injuries resulting from physical altercations with individuals served by these types of organizations.
Understanding the Terminology

The individuals served by organizations in the business sectors mentioned above are often referenced in different ways based on the type of services provided. These references include clients, patients, residents, care receivers, consumers and individuals served. For clarity, this guide will use the terms “individuals” or “individuals served” when referencing those receiving care and services from an organization. The term “staff” will be used when making reference to those people providing the care or services to individuals served, which some organizations refer to as staff, nurses, counselors, caregivers and other designations.

Finding Success

Employees working in these fields often have responsibility for the care and welfare of individuals that may exhibit aggressive or violent behaviors, which places both parties at risk of injury. How staff recognize and interact with an individual entering the “crisis cycle” will ultimately define the outcome of the interaction. Many organizations have adopted different behavioral or crisis management programs with varying degrees of success.

Success of the program is predicated on factors, such as positive attitudes of staff, building trust and meeting the needs of the individuals served, showing empathy and respect for individuals, providing comprehensive staff training, and continually reinforcing the techniques implemented. Programs that had limited impact or failed altogether generally lacked key elements of an effective behavior management system, had inconsistencies with fundamental work practices and fell short on full program implementation.

The Process

We believe a comprehensive, structured and interactive behavioral management program is the most effective tool in controlling situations where behavioral problems may arise. The process of developing or improving a current behavior management system starts with a commitment by the senior leadership team within your organization.

The program development process:

- Examines the current behavioral management system in place.
- Analyzes the type of behavioral problems commonly encountered in the workplace.
- Focuses on the methods being used to hire, train and evaluate staff.

A behavioral management program contains several key elements that must occur each day on a consistent basis for the program to be successful. Managers and supervisors need to clearly communicate their expectations to staff on how to interact with and manage the behaviors of the individuals they serve. In addition, behavior management work practices and procedures should be implemented to reduce the frequency of staff injuries resulting from assaults and violent acts.
Why It’s So Important

The health care and social assistance (HCSA) industry is expected to grow significantly in the near future, so it’s critically important for management teams to develop and continuously improve their behavior management programs. According to the most recent information available from the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), the Healthcare and Social Assistance (HCSA) industrial sector represents about 11% of the U.S. workforce – approximately 17.4 million workers in 2006.

The HCSA sector — consisting of four sub-sectors including ambulatory healthcare services, hospitals, nursing and residential care facilities, and social assistance — contains 12 of the 20 fastest-growing occupations. In fact, its projected growth through 2014 exceeds that of any other industrial sector.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the incident rate of non-fatal occupational injuries and illnesses involving days away from work for assault or violent acts for the health care and social assistance sector was 9.7 days vs. 2.7 days for private industry.

To assist organizations in the health care, nursing home and social services industries, we’ve developed this Behavior Management Best Practices Guide to help control workers’ compensation injuries related to violent behavior incidents. The remaining sections of this document will outline the key elements of an effective behavior management program.

Program Goals and Objectives

The goals and objectives that should be the foundation of your Behavior Management Program are:

1. Reduce the potential for injury to both the individuals served and staff. This is accomplished by focusing on the needs and care of individuals during interactions, rather than focusing on physical restraints.
2. Facilitate a positive and proactive relationship with individuals served that treats them with dignity and respect.
3. Create an atmosphere that builds the trust and self-esteem of individuals served while decreasing episodes of aggressive behaviors.
4. Present an objective, understandable and consistent means of assessing the individual’s needs.
5. Emphasize the importance of staff training and use of the behavior support plan as a guide for interactions and care for individuals served.
6. Suggest a focus on proactive interventions with individuals who may be showing early signs of escalating into a crisis. To de-escalate negative behaviors before the individual physically acts out.
7. Create a culture that consists of a mission (what we do), vision (where we are going), and most importantly, values (how we get there). The organization’s values are reflected in its company policies, work practices, decision making and the behavior of its staff.
The following are key elements of a comprehensive Behavior Management Program. Each element, including specific details, is critical to successfully implementing a comprehensive program.

A formal program is a tool management develops and uses as a means of documenting their process of working with the individuals they serve. Staff, as well as the individuals served and their family members, can review the program to view its comprehensive nature and how it offers a systematic and consistent approach to care.

**Written Program**

A written program contains many components, which together outline the core policies and procedures your organization needs in place to ensure proper care of individuals served. It’s a summary of the key elements of the behavior management system that is in place at your organization and provides for the consistent application of program methodology. The written program serves as a guide for the processes needed within an effective Behavior Management Program to promote a positive and caring relationship for all involved. The following are the core elements which should be included within a written program.

**Statement of management commitment** — Begin the written program with a statement outlining management’s commitment to program excellence and focuses on positive staff interaction with the individuals they serve. The statement embodies the philosophy and methods used to foster a positive and proactive relationship with individuals. This focus sets an enriched dynamic tone for the individuals as a whole, building a rapport based on trust, dignity, and empowering self-esteem within the individuals served.

**Hiring practices** — The methods used by your organization to attract, select and hire new staff should be formalized into specific procedures. You should consult with legal advisors for guidance on all aspects of hiring and employment. Major components of the hiring process often include:

- Formal job descriptions
- Interview guidelines
- Selection guidelines
- Facility tours
- Reference checks
- Driver’s license & motor vehicle record (MVR) checks
- Criminal background checks
- Personality and behavior profile surveys
- Pre-employment physical and drug testing
Orientation program — A good orientation program is essential to assimilating new staff into your organization. The orientation process may take place over a period of a few days and should communicate information about your mission, services provided to individuals, general policies and procedures, and responsibilities of the position. The key elements of the orientation process are included below.

- Welcome meeting
- Facility tour
- Job responsibilities
- Interactions with individuals
- Company policies
- Behavior management program
- Behavior support plans
- Training and job shadowing
- Information technology
- Sequential steps and timetable
- Checklist and staff signoff

Training requirements — This section of the written program outlines training requirements for employees, including new hires and those returning from extended leaves. The program should outline various items, such as the roles and responsibilities for employees coordinating the training programs, the means of documenting the training and who will retain training documentation. The training program should be reviewed at least annually for opportunities to improve its content, as well as to address shortcomings noted during incident reporting and debriefing reviews.

Training should be provided as follows:

- New hire — The initial training required for all new staff.
- Periodic in-service — Monthly training topics, state-required and others, as needed.
- Post-incident — Training performed after reported behavioral incidents.
- Extended leave — Training for staff on leaves exceeding 90 days.

Incident reporting requirements and procedures — At a minimum, your organization should require staff to report any instances where an individual served becomes aggressive and if there are any injuries or property damage to individuals, family members, staff or others involved in the behavioral incident. The incident reporting procedures should outline the steps involved, the type of data collected, the timeliness of the report (for example, within eight hours of the incident) and a sample copy of your organization’s reporting form.

Debriefing process — A debriefing meeting with your staff and the individuals they serve should be held following any instance where an individual becomes aggressive or causes an injury or property damage due to a behavioral issue. The written program should outline who will be involved in the debriefing, the purpose of the debriefing and how to follow-up on the corrective actions developed from the debriefing.
Trending/tracking — There should be a detailed process for tracking individual behavioral incidents that occur. Management should evaluate the data for trends on a routine basis. A summary of the data should be shared with staff during meetings to provide findings, outline modification of individual behavior plans or develop new training topics for staff.

Behavior support plan — A behavior support plan is a written document outlining important medical and care information about individuals served. The plans are generally state- or county-mandated and contain information, such as the name of the individual served, diagnosis, medical conditions or issues, medications, crises and safety concerns, rights and restrictions, goals, and general care plans for the individual.

Behavior analysis process — The behavior analysis process is a method of reviewing the behaviors of the individuals served on an ongoing basis and updating the behavior support plan as needed. The analysis process allows staff to proactively evaluate the methods that will best support the needs of the individuals served and facilitate a positive relationship. Organizations use the analysis process to develop positive behaviors within the individuals they serve while fostering a relationship based on respect, trust and dignity. The behavior support process should, at a minimum, include the following elements:

- Antecedents — Identification of past history, triggers or stimuli that could lead to behavioral incidents of the individuals served.
- Behaviors observed — Perform observations of individuals to gather information on personal characteristics and behaviors that would help develop the support plan.
- Intervention strategy — Develop behavioral support strategies staff can utilize to intervene to prevent continued escalation and promote empowerment and self-confidence in the individual served.

Quality assurance — An effective quality assurance program ensures the success of a behavior management program. This should provide a detailed outline of the process your organization will use to continuously monitor staff interactions with individuals served. The primary mechanism will involve supervisors completing unannounced observations of staff interacting with individuals served, with the focus of the observation on the staff’s use of effective communications, providing appropriate personal space, developing positive trusting relationships, body positioning and use of the behavior support plan. Quality assurance is an important process because it provides a continuous assessment of the behavior support plan to ensure that it’s meeting the needs of the individuals served.

Coaching staff — Coaching is a communication method for management to provide positive reinforcement to staff when their work is being performed in a satisfactory manner. It provides encouragement, improves morale and increases the likelihood they will repeat the desired behaviors. Coaching can also be used to address simple or non-routine breakdowns within staff performance and adherence to the behavior management program. The processes of incident reporting, using an Antecedent Behavior Consequence (ABC) chart, debriefing sessions and quality assurance practices allow for the identification of deficiencies that can be corrected.
**Performance improvement process** — When verbal coaching fails to correct performance issues, or staff work performance continues to deteriorate, management may need to develop a more formal performance improvement plan (PIP). Traditionally called disciplinary action, the PIP process is a more positive and constructive way of communicating what the deficiencies are, and directs staff in a way where they can be more effective in the job. The goal is to provide positive feedback and constructive coaching as a means to ensure the needs of the individuals served are being properly met and improve the effectiveness of the behavior management program.

**Management review** — On at least an annual basis, the organization should evaluate the performance of the behavior management program. This is to ensure the process is meeting the goals of creating a positive and proactive relationship with the individuals served, while decreasing episodes of behavioral issues. A part of the written program should state who will complete the assessment, how the program will be assessed, and who in senior management will review the report.

United Heartland believes the elements above describe the key components of an effective behavior management program. The program is based on meeting the needs of individuals served while building trust and showing empathy during the course of providing care.

Although there may be some instances where physical restraint and self-defense techniques may be needed, a behavior management program should focus on the use of de-escalation techniques that don’t involve physical restraints. A behavior management program’s primary focus should be on creating an environment that diffuses any behavioral issues that may arise prior to entering the crisis cycle.

**Note:**
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References: