

## POLICIES AND PROCEDURE MANUAL

<b>Chapter:</b>	<b>Human Resources</b>		
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Encountering abusive/threatening interactions with providers, vendors, or members of the public procedure</b>		
<b>Policy:</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Review Cycle:</b> Biennial	<b>Adopted Date:</b> 1.12.2021	<b>Related Policies:</b>
<b>Procedure:</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Page:</b> 1 of 3	<b>Author:</b> Chief Executive Officer	<b>Review Date:</b> 07.01.2025	

### Purpose

The purpose of this procedure is to provide guidance for MSHN staff on handling situations when they encounter abusive or threatening interactions with providers, vendors, or members of the public. Interactions with individuals who are receiving services or seeking information about services involve different clinical considerations and are specifically not addressed in this procedure.

### Procedure

In their professional capacities, Mid-State Health Network (MSHN) personnel may encounter individuals or groups of individuals that behave in ways that the staff member finds abusive or threatening. As public servants, MSHN staff are expected to have a certain degree of tolerance for anger, negativity, or belligerence. However, MSHN employees are not expected to tolerate abuse from anyone in any form.

For the purposes of this procedure, verbal abuse is *generally* categorized and defined as including belittling, screaming, threatening, blaming, name calling and may include physical gestures that are threatening or abusive in nature.

MSHN recognizes that it is the perception of abusive/threatening behavior by an individual employee that determines whether the behavior is abusive. As such, MSHN relies on the employee to determine whether the encounter with a provider, vendor or member of the public is abusive *to them* and report this behavior through the appropriate channels.

MSHN's general approach, which is described in more detail below, includes the following steps:

1. Warn offending individual that continued escalation of behavior or abusive behavior of any kind will not be tolerated.
2. If the behavior continues or becomes abusive, terminate the phone call or interaction as safely, quickly, and professionally as is feasible under the circumstances.
3. If behavior continues or future interactions are unavoidable, escalate to supervisor.
4. If you feel that supervisor resolution is not sufficient, escalate to Deputy Director and/or Chief Executive Officer.

MSHN staff members frequently have discussions with or convey information or decisions to providers, vendors or others that may be unsettling or unexpected. MSHN staff members are expected to tolerate anger, resentment, or other non-abusive behaviors and to assist the people involved in the encounter with deescalating and depersonalizing these reaction(s). If the situation appears to be escalating MSHN encourages staff to calmly acknowledge the individual's upset feelings (so they feel heard) and then offer to reschedule the meeting for a later time.

In any situation where interactions become adversarial or confrontational, MSHN staff members are encouraged to assess that encounter for potential violence. If potential violence is determined to be a viable threat, the MSHN staff member should remove him/herself from the encounter as quickly and safely as possible and contact a supervisor immediately. Supervisors are not expected to physically intervene but are expected to assist the MSHN staff member once safety and distance from the individual/group of individuals encountered has been established. The supervisor will work with the employee and other members of leadership to develop an appropriate response plan, or if warranted, an official action by MSHN.

If potential for violence is not assessed as a likely escalation of the encounter, MSHN staff are encouraged to set firm limits regarding how the remainder of the interaction is to be handled by the offending party(ies) in a manner that is as professional and non-confrontational as is feasible under the circumstances. MSHN staff should calmly acknowledge the individual's upset feelings (so they feel heard) and then offer to reschedule the meeting. It should be rare that MSHN personnel need to unequivocally state (warn) that they will not tolerate any further abuse (being as specific as possible) and indicate what action(s) will be taken if the behavior is repeated. Making these kinds of statements do tend to escalate the other party and should be considered only in extreme circumstances. Any reasonable action may be taken to conclude the encounter (such as ending the meeting/encounter; reporting the behavior to the offending individual's supervisor; referring the matter to a MSHN supervisor, and similar responses).

If the abusive behavior continues, MSHN staff should terminate the encounter as safely, professionally, non-confrontationally, and as quickly as possible. The employee should seek supervision to discuss the matter and develop a plan for an appropriate response by the supervisor, or, if warranted, an official action by MSHN, which may include reporting the interaction the provider/agency leadership.

The involved MSHN employee should be involved in any decision over whether there are future interactions between the involved party and MSHN employee, and if so under what circumstances. MSHN may offer or require conflict resolution/de-escalation training depending upon the circumstances of the situation at hand. It may be necessary to have other staff members (or a group of staff members) temporarily carry out any remaining business with the offending individual or group for the protection of the MSHN staff member involved.

If the involved employee feels the response(s) of the supervisor is insufficient, escalation of the matter to the Deputy Director and/or Chief Executive Officer should occur.

MSHN recognizes that staff members encountering abusive providers, vendors or others can be traumatic and significant. MSHN will support our workforce through ensuring appropriate organizational responses to the offending individual or group, and supportive assistance to our staff, such as coaching for the involved employee(s) and access to the Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

#### **Applies to**

- ☒ All Mid-State Health Network Staff
- ☐ Selected MSHN Staff, as follows:
- ☐ MSHN CMHSP Participants: ☐ Policy Only    ☐ Policy and Procedure
- ☐ Other: Sub-contract Providers

**Definitions**

EAP: Employee Assistance Program

MSHN: Mid-State Health Network

Verbal Abuse: For the purposes of this procedure, verbal abuse is *generally* categorized and defined as including belittling, screaming, threatening, blaming, name calling and may include physical gestures that are threatening or abusive in nature.

**Other Related Materials**

N/A

**References/Legal Authority**

N/A

**Change Log:**

<u>Date of Change</u>	<u>Description of Change</u>	<u>Responsible Party</u>
11/04/2020	New Procedure	Chief Executive Officer
02.2021	Biennial Review	Deputy Director
02.2023	Biennial Review	Deputy Director
03.2025	Biennial Review	Deputy Director