

Managing difficult and complex behaviours

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Abstract

Clients may be in a state of crisis and considerable distress when presenting at alcohol and drug treatment services. They commonly have housing, financial, legal and relationship crises at this time and they may be agitated and disorganised. Clients of alcohol and drug treatment services may, therefore, present in a fragile, confused or emotive state, with a high need for supportive care and a low tolerance for frustration.

Critical to the development of effective strategies for managing difficult and complex behaviours is an understanding of the causes of the behaviours and likely stages of progression. The management of violent and threatening behaviours can be assisted with an understanding of the anger cycle, triggers of client anger and the phases of escalation that aggression generally moves through. Once these are identified and understood, strategies can be developed for breaking the cycle of aggression at an early stage. This includes preventing the occurrence of incidents likely to trigger 'difficult' behaviours and managing the escalation of such behaviour once feelings have been aroused.

The management of demanding and intrusive behaviours, emotional dysregulation and affective instability, difficulties with interpersonal communication and relationships, suspiciousness, social inappropriateness, impulsivity and irritability utilises a range of clinical and professional skills and practice.

By implementing clear strategies for the management of difficult and complex behaviours, organisations ensure that they support and resource sound clinical practice and fulfil their responsibility to minimise the harm to the client who is exhibiting the behaviours as well as clients and staff.