

The CALM Paradigm

“There is nothing more practical than a good theory”. The literature on aggression management and successive national reports have continually stressed the need for agencies supporting challenging service users to develop a workforce of “reflective practitioners”, able to look beneath presenting behaviours and understand the underlying dynamics and needs.

The need to make the concerns and practice theories underpinning what staff actually do, is a key part of this process. Training in aggression management is a crucial and often costly agency responsibility and can be highly influential in shaping practitioner understanding and agency cultures. Yet few training programmes make their underpinning theoretical frameworks or underpinning evidence explicit. In so doing they tend to reinforce unhelpful perspectives with consequent problems (see Training Delivery strategies on Training page).

At the heart of the CALM paradigm lies the evidence based belief that the safety of staff and service users in human services can only be addressed by a holistic, whole organisation, systems based approach to the problem. The emergent research conclusion that traditional aggression and violence training programmes often tend to reduce, rather than increase safety, is wholly consistent with this view. It is our belief that traditional “reductionist” approaches which reduce and over simplify a complex problem fail to address the causes and solutions to workplace aggression indicated by the research literature and national reports. These often relate to organisational dynamics. Whilst CALM programs always contain rigorous coverage of the interpersonal skills and staff responsibilities required to work with challenging behaviour, they place the problem in its proper organisational context.

CALM programmes are based on a range of specific, cutting-edge, theoretical perspectives. Some are common to all programmes, whilst some are service specific. These include:-

PUBLIC HEALTH MODEL:- This assumes that effective practice requires:-

Action at all levels of the organisation - A Before – During – After response to challenging behaviour

TRAUMA THEORY:- This recognises that :-

a) **Service users:-** Life trauma is often a crucial factor leading to violent behaviour and challenging behaviour. This can be worked with constructively given empathic, person centered approaches.

b) **Services:-** Human services service organisations are not machines. They are more like people. When they become stressed (e.g. by “challenging behaviour”) they do unhelpful things which increase the problem. Recognition of these processes is therefore a crucial pre requisite of safety and constructive practice.

POSITIVE BEHAVIOURAL SUPPORT:- Recognises that “challenging behaviour“ in many client populations (e.g. leaning disability etc) is a “functional“, learned response. It can be unlearned and replaced by systematic analysis of behaviour patterns and the teaching of alternative pro social skills.

For further discussion of these concepts see CALM philosophy; articles; publications.