

## Dealing with Conflicts or Crisis

### Medical emergencies

The following action should be taken in the case of a medical emergency:

- Inform a staff member/workshop trainer if present, seek assistance from a person trained in first aid if present.
- Follow first aid instructions on wall of training area
- Call 000 if an ambulance is required
- There is a duty of care by the workshop trainer to make the final decision in an emergency if an ambulance is required (this conflicts with previous point)
- Women's Circus strongly recommends that all members have private ambulance cover or are covered by an ambulance subscription. Women's Circus does not cover members for any ambulance services.
- **The closest emergency department is Western Hospital, Gordon Street, Footscray, 8345 6666.**
- All medical emergencies must be documented on the crisis/injury/incident form located above the trainers folders, placed in a sealed envelope and lodged at the office.
- The Training & Membership Manager must be notified ASAP.

### Dealing with a psychiatric emergency

Women's Circus recommends taking the following action in the case of a psychiatric emergency:

- If an individual is showing symptoms of psychosis or is expressing ideas of self-harm or harm to others, notify staff members if they are present. If possible, ensure at least two people stay with the person in case the situation escalates.
- For psychiatric advice and assistance, and only if you feel safe to contain the individual onsite, call Werribee Psych Triage 1300 657 259 (24hrs)
- If the triage staff feel it is appropriate, they will either talk with the individual and/or send out a CAT team to assess the individual. This may take hours, so if you are unable to maintain a safe space for the individual until the CAT team arrives, other alternatives will need to be looked at:
- Take the individual to an emergency department (either by ambulance or driven by staff/members). An emergency doctor will see them initially who will then refer them on to a psych doctor. The Western in Footscray is the only hospital in metropolitan Melbourne that doesn't have 24-hour on-site psych staff, but they are on-call.
- If the person's behaviour becomes violent, call the police on 000.
- Any psychiatric emergencies must be documented on the crisis/injury/incident form, placed in a sealed envelope and lodged at office. The Training & Membership Manager must be notified ASAP.

## Dealing with threatening/aggressive behaviour

Aggressive behaviour can often be anticipated and skilful intervention may prevent potential aggression becoming violent. Checking in with someone if they seem distressed, allowing the individual to verbalise any anger or frustration, and reducing environmental stimuli may diffuse the situation. No one should ever approach a potentially aggressive person alone.

If an individual behaves in an aggressive/threatening manner

- Inform staff if they are present
- Stay calm; focus on your behaviour, try to document what is happening and being said by all involved
- Try where possible, appropriate and safe for all parties to remove the person from public or remove the public from the person. If possible, two other people should support the person managing the situation at all times by staying in close proximity, eg: if the outburst occurs in the training space during a class, move the woman and at least two others (for safety and witness) into the office. Close doors to other areas/ rooms where possible
- Ask the person to stop the threatening behaviour. If the person ignores this request, ask them to leave the premises.

If you feel it is safe to do so:

- Listen to the person's issue (contents and feelings): use 'mmms' and 'I see' to enable them to get the issue off their chest, allow silences to occur. Don't interrupt or cut short; don't say anything that may further inflame the person
- Specify what you hear the issue to be
- State what you propose to do about it
- If the person starts to disagree or get angry, repeat calmly what you intend to do
- If the person is still not satisfied, state firmly that you cannot assist them any further, but that they can:
  - a) Put their complaint/concern in writing and deliver, post or email it to The Board & Staff of the Women's Circus, [info@womenscircus.org.au](mailto:info@womenscircus.org.au). They can expect a written response within one week of the letter being received.
  - b) Make an appointment to see the Board or the staff, designate who they would like to attend the meeting, and every endeavour will be made to fulfil this request as soon as possible, and where appropriate.

If the situation escalates and the person refuses to leave the premises, or if there is a real perceived threat of self-harm or harm to others, or if the person managing the situation asks you to do so (identify who is managing the incident as it occurs), call the police on 000 after informing the person that you will do this.

- State your name
- The number you are calling from
- The address the situation is occurring at

- Explain what is occurring – the state of the individual and what you need to occur
- Stay on the phone
- Arrange someone to meet police at the door

Any instances of threatening/aggressive behaviour must be documented on the crisis/injury/incident form, placed in sealed envelope and lodged at office. The Head of Circus Training staff must be notified ASAP.

See also “What do you do if you experience discrimination, harassment or bullying in the Women’s Circus” [above] and “Disciplinary Procedures” later in this document.

### **Dealing with excessive alcohol or other drug consumption**

If a Circus member is so excessively drunk or so under the influence of non-prescribed drugs that they are at risk to themselves or others:

- Inform a staff member, if one is present
- Seek assistance from person trained in first aid, if present.
- Discourage her from further consumption and risk-taking behaviour
- Under the OHS policy (see Section 8.2 of this document), she can be asked to leave the premises.
- Arrange for the woman to get home safely
- For drug and alcohol advice and assistance, call Western Hospital 8345 6682 (24hrs)

Any instances of dangerously excessive drug and alcohol consumption must be documented on the crisis/injury/incident form, placed in sealed envelope and lodged at the office. The Head of Circus Training staff must be notified ASAP. See also “Disciplinary procedures” in this document.

### **Resolving personal conflicts**

Given the diverse nature of Women’s Circus and its membership, conflict of some sort is sometimes impossible to avoid. But by dealing with it effectively we can greatly improve the outcome for all involved. The aim should always be to achieve the most positive outcome possible.

In the spirit of good, open communication, problems are best brought out into the open where they can be effectively and appropriately addressed. But remember – open communication does not mean anyone has the right to speak in an aggressive or disrespectful manner, or to force a confrontation at a time that is inappropriate for others.

Think before you speak:

- How do I achieve a positive outcome?
- Is this the most appropriate time/context to raise a concern?

If you have an issue with another woman in the Circus, deal with it positively and openly.

- Meet the person involved and discuss your concerns – resolve!
- If the outcome of the above is not satisfactory, or you do not feel comfortable doing this, ask another woman to act as an intermediary to facilitate a meeting and assist in reaching a resolution.
- If your personal conflict is with a member of staff, try to resolve it following the steps above. If this fails, talk to another member of staff.

**The Board** – The Board is not a forum for dealing with personal conflicts. If you have general concerns, raise them with your Member Ambassador. If the Ambassador decides the issue warrants attention by management, then in the first instance contact the Training & Membership Manager. If you are not happy with the outcome, you can raise the matter with the Executive Director depending on the nature and potential impact of the issue, the Executive Director, at her discretion, may make the Board aware of the issue.

### **Dealing with personal crisis**

One in five Australians experience mental illness at some time in their lives and a large number of women experience sexual, emotional or physical abuse as children or adults. Physical training can trigger distressing feelings, body memories or flashbacks. Occasionally women have experienced depressive episodes or panic attacks. If something like this happens to a friend during training, take her somewhere quiet, sit with her, listen to her, and make her a cup of tea. If this happens to you during training, don't panic. You are not weird and you are not alone. Don't be afraid to talk or ask for what you need.

Women's Circus will attempt to support and assist members but within the limits of our role as a community arts organisation. We can refer you to other organisations that are set up to support women with trauma and mental health related issues.

### **Debriefing**

Women's Circus will ensure that any Circus member who has been involved in a crisis situation should have the opportunity to debrief. You should discuss this with your workshop trainer and the Head of Circus Training if you think you need debriefing.