Creating Caring Communities

A Guide to Addressing Social Aggression in Older Adult Communities

JF&CS
Jewish Family & Children's Service

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About Jewish Family & Children's Service (JF&CS)

For 160 years, Jewish Family & Children's Service (JF&CS) of Greater Boston has been helping people build a strong foundation for resilience and well-being across the lifespan, from infancy to old age. By providing a wide array of integrated social services under one roof, we improve the lives of over 15,000 people a year throughout Greater Boston, the North Shore, and the South Shore.

To learn how you can benefit from and/or support our work, please visit www.jfcsboston.org

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Table of Contents

1 Foreword: why a guide on "bullying" and social aggression for older adult communities?

At Jewish Family & Children's Service (JF&CS), we are committed to promoting connection and social engagement, as well as increasing awareness of and access to resources that support aging in community. When we noticed that social aggression (i.e., bullying) was a significant barrier for older adults toward these goals, we knew we wanted to respond. As a result, we developed a training curriculum for direct service and housing professionals with the goal of creating more caring and safe environments for older adults and staff alike.

Research on the impact of social aggression among older adults is limited. Most of what we know about social aggression comes from stories told by our own workshop participants, and from anecdotes about bullying in other communities.

What we do know from research is that 50% to 90% of older adults have been exposed to at least one type of traumatic event in their lifetime. While we don't want to assume that all residents have a trauma history, we do want to be aware that social aggression may be a reaction to trauma and community stress.

We are pleased to be able to offer this resource, in addition to our workshops and publications, to support your work in creating caring communities and reducing social aggression.

What We Know

- All behavior has meaning
- Aggressive behavior is often as much about fear as control.

A Word About Language

"Bullying" is the term most commonly used in research on school-based peer aggression and has also been widely applied in studies of peer aggression among older adults. However, participants in our bullying workshops for older adults have expressed that this term feels demeaning or condescending in their context, as it is strongly associated with younger populations. In response to this feedback, and to emphasize skill-building in community settings, we will use the terms social aggression and dominance, except when directly quoting from existing literature.

> "…use of the word bully with older adults is often met with resistance… Promoting anti-bullying programs within a positive framework may, therefore, be more effective with older adults. For example, using terms such as **civility, social wellness, and caring community** removes the shame associated with bullying and emphasizes the ultimate goals" –Bonifas, 2016

2   Who might benefit from this guide?

This guide is written for anyone who works with older adults in a community setting. It is not meant to be a "one size fits all" method of addressing social aggression in all its different forms. However, it is a resource and guide to help communities respond more effectively to aggressive, harmful behavior.

We hope that these resources and tools will create more civil interactions between community members and give staff greater confidence that change is possible. Perfection is not possible; rather, our goal is to promote knowledge and encourage consistent, informed responses.

Please note: This guide can also be used, with modification, to facilitate conversations about social aggression and community building among all members of the community—staff, residents, program participants, and/or volunteers.

3   What is social aggression?

Definition and Prevalence

Social aggression is a form of violence.
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines social aggression or "bullying" as "any unwanted aggressive behavior(s) by another person or group of people… that involves an observed or perceived power imbalance and is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated."

As a form of violence, social aggression can inflict severe distress on those involved, including physical, psychological, and/or social harm. Although the prevalence of social aggression in older adult communities has not been extensively researched, some estimate that up to half of all older adults experience peer social aggression, with communal settings showing higher rates of social aggression than institutional ones (Bonifas, 2016).

Research and interventions aimed at reducing social aggression have focused on school-aged children. More recently, research has begun to look at the impact of both social aggression and harassment in the workplace. The issue of social aggression in older adult communities is less often recognized or addressed.

Forms Of Social Aggression

There are three main types of social aggression:

1. **Verbal** aggression includes:
   - Inappropriate sexual comments
   - Taunting
   - Threatening to cause harm
   - Pointed jokes meant to cause harm
2. **Relational** aggression involves hurting someone's reputation or relationships. Relational aggression includes:
   - Shunning or exclusion
   - Spreading gossip & rumors about someone
   - Playing tricks or pranks on someone repeatedly
   - Embarrassing someone in public
3. **Physical** aggression involves hurting a person's body or possessions. Physical aggression includes:
   - Pushing & shoving
   - Blocking someone's path
   - Hitting/kicking/pinching
   - Spitting
   - Destroying someone's personal property
   - Offensive hand gestures

A Note About Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying presents unique challenges for older adults. Harmful messages, photos, or posts can reach individuals in the privacy of their own homes through social media, email, or other online platforms. Unlike face-to-face interactions, this form of social aggression can be persistent and difficult to escape. Additionally, the anonymous nature of the internet can make it hard to identify the source, while the rapid sharing of aggressive content can amplify its impact across the broader community.

What You Might See In Your Community

At a community meal, Ms. Kim approaches a table where six people are seated, with three empty chairs available. As she attempts to sit down, Ms. Mary—who has previously excluded Ms. Kim from other gatherings—says in an unwelcoming tone, "You can't sit here. I'm saving this seat for my friend who's coming later." No one at the table speaks up; instead, they glance nervously at not just one, but three empty chairs. Humiliated, Ms. Kim quietly walks away. Rather than finding another seat elsewhere in the room, she decides to return to her apartment. Over time, Ms. Mary continues to exclude Ms. Kim from sitting at her table, until eventually, Ms. Kim stops attending the community meals altogether.

A group of male residents gathers daily in the seating area near the mailboxes to play cards and socialize. Luis, a single gay man in his 70s who recently moved into the building, has made picking up his mail in the afternoon part of his daily walk. However, after several occasions where he overhears members of the group making derogatory comments about his gender and sexual identity as he passes by, Luis decides to wait until nighttime to collect his mail in order to avoid the group.

Frank has made several complaints to staff about noise in the hallway outside his door. Staff tried to address his concern to no avail. As Frank became more frustrated with the situation, he also began to focus on one BIPOC (a Black, indigenous or person of color) staff member who he believed was not taking his concerns seriously enough. Each morning, Frank left messages on her voicemail not only expressing his concern but also using racially charged and hurtful language. Fliers and posters placed in the common area about racial equity and community inclusion were torn down or destroyed.

Social aggression occurs for many reasons

- Difficulty tolerating differences, such as race, ethnic identity, gender identity or religious affiliation
- Lack of empathy and or interpersonal effectiveness
- Absence of healthy significant relationships to engage the older adult
- Desire for power and control over another
- Desire to gain status or attention from others

Identifying when, why, and how the behavior is occurring will help communities know how best to respond.

What social aggression is and isn't

It is important to be aware of possible dementia, behavioral health concerns, and harassment when assessing problem behavior in older adult communities.

A Word About Dementia And Mental Health

Symptoms of dementia can include difficulty filtering comments in socially appropriate ways and frustration from being unable to clearly express needs or desires. These challenges may lead to hurt feelings or even aggressive behavior.

Similarly, symptoms of various mental health conditions—such as anxiety, fear, or paranoia—can contribute to socially aggressive behavior in community settings. When people feel frightened or anxious, they may respond with hostility or aggression.

However, if a person's behavior is not intended to cause harm or discomfort, it is not considered social aggression. In cases where inappropriate comments stem from fear, confusion, or cognitive or mental health issues, a different approach may be necessary. De-escalation techniques, calming strategies, or redirection can be more effective in addressing reactions driven by stress or fear. For more guidance, refer to the JF&CS Guide: Tips and Techniques for Supporting Residents with Mental Illness. This free resource can be downloaded at www.jfcsboston.org.

If safety is a concern, seek help at once!

Distinction between Social Aggression and Harassment

The general definition of harassment is "aggressive pressure or intimidation". However, it is critical to note that in the workplace and housing situations, harassment refers to unwelcome conduct that is based on protected class status. There are both federal and state laws that define what is included in a protected class. In Massachusetts, protected class refers to: race, color, religion, national origin, marital status, familial status (i.e. children), sex (including pregnancy, childbirth and related medical conditions), sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, age (40 and older), ancestry, genetic information, military service and source of income (i.e. a Section 8 Voucher).

Not all problematic behavior qualifies as social aggression, and not all social aggression rises to the level of harassment. However, it is crucial to recognize when socially aggressive behavior does constitute harassment and to respond promptly and appropriately.

How can you tell if Social Aggression is Harassment? Ask yourself the following questions:

1. Is the aggressive behavior based on protected status? Does the behavior target someone because of their race, color, religion, sex, national origin, ancestry, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, familial status, presence of children, marital status, veteran status, membership in the armed forces, receipt of public assistance, or physical or mental disability? Or is it due to an unrelated reason?
2. Is the behavior creating a hostile environment for the resident?Does the behavior subject the resident to unwelcome conduct that is so severe or pervasive it interferes with their ability to use and enjoy their housing?

Legal Implications for Harassment:

If the social aggression rises to the level of harassment, there are important legal implications to consider:

1. The housing provider can be held liable for not having addressed the behavior.
2. Staff can be personally liable for failing to act.

Both staff and residents can be held personally responsible – not only for their own discriminatory behavior but also for failing to act quickly when witnessing discrimination by others.

Important Note: Aggressive behavior does not need to be repeated to be considered harassment. A single incident based on protected status can create a hostile environment, which may constitute a lease violation.

4 Why is social aggression a problem?

It's easy to underestimate the impact of social aggression or to ignore the behavior, hoping it will eventually fade. However, it's crucial to understand how deeply social aggression can affect an entire community. If this cycle is not interrupted, it fosters an environment of fear and disrespect—creating a space where no one feels comfortable living, working, or socializing.

In older adult communities, social aggression often takes place within the home, making its effects even more personal, harmful, and difficult to escape. This behavior can lead to widespread distrust, reduce the overall enjoyment of the environment, and instill a persistent sense of fear.

When social aggression escalates to harassment, it becomes even more serious, potentially resulting in a lease violation and raising liability concerns for the community or organization. Addressing these behaviors promptly is essential to maintaining a safe, respectful, and welcoming environment for all.

Impact On Individuals

Individuals targeted by social aggression may experience significant psychological distress. The feelings of rejection often lead to social withdrawal and isolation from the broader community. Social aggression has been linked to lower self-esteem, increased feelings of rejection, and depression (Bonifas & Frankel, 2012).

Moreover, social aggression can contribute to social isolation, a serious public health issue affecting more than 8 million adults aged 50 and older in the U.S. Social aggression doesn't just affect residents—it can also impact staff members. Employees may call in sick more frequently, feel increased stress at work, or even decide to leave their positions altogether. For both staff and residents, the only place that may feel safe is their home or room.

Targets of social aggression often experience a range of negative physical and emotional effects. These can include disrupted eating and sleeping patterns, increased physical complaints, heightened anxiety, and, in extreme cases, thoughts of suicide.

Individuals who have experienced past trauma—such as previous abuse or social aggression—may be particularly vulnerable to these harmful effects.

For example, a resident who is made to feel like a burden to the community because English is not their first language may withdraw from activities and avoid forming relationships with other residents. This can lead to severe social isolation. The impact in such cases may be compounded by a lifetime of exclusion or discrimination experienced in the broader community, deepening the emotional toll of social aggression.

Impact On The Community

When social aggression occurs in a housing setting, it can create a pervasive sense of insecurity among residents. People may fear becoming the next target or worry about losing their social standing within the community. Many older adults also report feelings of guilt for not stepping in when they witness socially aggressive behavior, adding to the emotional toll.

Staff members are not immune to these dynamics and can also become targets of social aggression from residents seeking to assert dominance or gain social control. In response, staff may, consciously or unconsciously, engage in socially aggressive behaviors themselves as a way to reassert authority. This creates a cycle of aggression that perpetuates itself within the community.

Social aggression can flow in any direction—top-down from management, bottom-up from residents, or laterally among residents and staff. Regardless of where it starts, it fosters an atmosphere of fear, prompting individuals to act aggressively as a means of self-protection, retaliation, or assert control.

For example, if a community fails to address complaints about a group of residents monopolizing the common area, other residents may begin to view staff as ineffective and the environment as unsafe. This lack of intervention can contribute to a culture of distrust, incivility, and further social aggression.

Social aggression, if not addressed, can negatively impact staff retention and satisfaction, resulting in financial loss. It can also be a lease violation and a liability concern not only for the individuals involved, but for the housing management itself. When social aggression affecting individuals or the community is ignored, it will eventually negatively impact the organization as well.

For example, social aggression against an individual or group of individuals could create a hostile environment and cause a resident to file a complaint against the housing management. If the behavior had not been addressed by housing, the resident's complaint could result in the organization being liable.

Social aggression is not just a personal or interpersonal issue—it is a housing issue. Addressing it promptly and effectively is essential for maintaining a safe, respectful, and legally compliant community.

Social aggression is a behavioral health issue. Behaviors such as threats, intimidation, or public humiliation can lead to significant physical and emotional harm, often resulting in social isolation for the targeted individuals. This not only affects personal well-being but can also strain the overall mental health climate within a housing community.

Social aggression is a community issue. Socially aggressive behavior often occurs in group settings as a means of seeking status or asserting dominance. When a group condones or ignores this behavior, it reinforces the aggressor's actions and allows the cycle to continue. Conversely, when a community collectively rejects such behavior, the person seeking dominance loses motivation, and the cycle of aggression can be disrupted.

Social aggression is a social justice issue. Those who engage in socially aggressive behavior often target individuals they perceive as vulnerable, focusing on differences such as disability, ethnicity, race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation. This creates inequities within the community and contributes to systemic discrimination and exclusion.

Social aggression is a legal issue. In residential communities, social aggression can violate lease agreements by infringing on a resident's right to the peaceful enjoyment of their home. In more severe cases, it may also constitute a civil rights or human rights violation, particularly if the behavior targets individuals based on protected characteristics such as race, gender, disability, or sexual orientation.

Social aggression is an organizational issue. Effectively addressing social aggression requires a proactive approach from housing organizations. This includes providing training, education, and resources for both residents and staff to recognize, prevent, and respond to socially aggressive behaviors. Creating a well-informed community helps foster a safe, respectful, and supportive environment, particularly in older adult housing communities.

In short, social aggression isn't just a personal issue—it has legal and organizational implications that require immediate and thoughtful action.

PAY ATTENTION!

Although suicide attempts are more frequent among adolescents and young adults, some of the highest suicide rates are among older adults. Risks factors for death by suicide among older adults include not only physical and mental illness, but also social exclusion, loss, and psychological pain. Social aggression can result in social exclusion and pain and increase the risk of suicide in our communities. See the JF&CS Suicide Prevention Guide at www.jfcsboston.org.

5   What can your community do?

Intervention can be effective. Research shows that social aggression and violence can be significantly reduced through simple, practical interventions. The most successful approaches address not only the individuals involved but also the broader culture of the community in which they live.

You don't need to be a mental health professional to respond effectively. By learning a few key strategies, you can play an important role in reducing both social isolation and social aggression within your community. Small actions can make a big difference in creating a more inclusive, respectful, and supportive environment.

Effective Interventions: Encouraging the Behavior You Want to See

Experience has shown that addressing social aggression early and effectively can save time and significantly reduce its long-term impact. However, many of us hesitate to intervene when we witness such behavior—often because we're unsure of what to say or do. By learning effective strategies for responding to social aggression, we empower ourselves to take action when it occurs. Interventions can vary in the level of time and commitment required, allowing for flexibility based on the situation. Since social aggression affects individuals, communities, and organizations alike, the most effective approach is a three-tiered response that addresses all levels of the community.

Tier One: The Organization
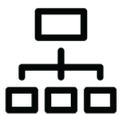
At the organizational level, it is essential to cultivate and reinforce a culture of civility, fostering an atmosphere of respect and trust throughout the community.

It's equally important to call social aggression what it is—a form of violence. Organizations should establish clear policies and procedures, both formal and informal, that not only discourage socially aggressive behaviors but also actively promote the positive behaviors they want to see.

Ensure that staff are thoroughly trained on organizational policies and strategies for fostering caring, respectful communities. Just as policies that emphasize civility and community-building are more readily embraced, trainings that are engaging, positive, and interactive tend to be better received and more well-attended.

When behavioral expectations and policies are not clearly communicated, residents, volunteers, and staff may feel unsupported and left to navigate social aggression or bullying issues on their own. Clear guidance and consistent messaging are essential for creating a unified approach to addressing these challenges.

For additional support, Appendix B includes a list of key concepts to consider when developing codes of conduct or policies, along with an example that has proven effective in older adult communities.

A NOTE ABOUT VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are vital part of our communities, whether they are residents, participants or members of the wider community. Volunteers are given not only responsibilities, but also power - power that can create civility or foster social aggression. Occasionally there are difficulties for example, a volunteer may show favoritism to certain residents by giving them preferential treatment or exclude residents based on their individual likes and dislikes.

Consider training volunteers on appropriate responses to social aggression and make sure they are aware of organizational policies and procedures. Monitor and provide supervision to volunteers so that if problems arise you will be aware of the concern and better able to respond effectively before the problem becomes a crisis.

☀ Bright Ideas That Work

- Make a commitment on the part of the organization to promote principles of equality, respect, and empathy for all residents/members and publicize the commitment throughout the community.

- Adopt and promote a policy on social aggression along with channels for reporting incidents and resolving them.

- Make it visual: post a simple code of conduct or posters about caring communities in public areas.

- If you suspect a problem, assess the severity of the problem using the problem-solving worksheet provided.

- Hold open discussions with residents, staff, and families about social aggression, its causes and consequences, and your organizations commitment to respond to this concern.

- Train staff and residents on how to effectively intervene, and to model problem solving and interpersonal effectiveness skills for other staff and residents.

- Listen to and support people affected by social aggression and empower them to effectively respond (e.g., by providing them with assertiveness training).

- Review and amend policies and procedures that may indirectly reinforce socially aggressive behavior (e.g., end reserved seating in dining room).

Remember Kim and Mary?

Posting a clear code of conduct in common areas, such as the community dining room, can empower volunteers, residents, and staff to address inappropriate behavior when it occurs. For example, if such guidelines were visibly displayed, others could remind Mary that saving seats to exclude others violates the community's code of conduct. It would be much more difficult for Mary to continue excluding Kim if this behavior is clearly identified as unacceptable and if expectations are communicated openly for all to see.

If the exclusion is based on racial or language differences, the community could take proactive steps to foster inclusion. Hosting special meals that celebrate the ethnic and cultural diversity of the community can encourage curiosity, understanding, and connection—helping to replace exclusion with engagement and acceptance.

The Big Picture

When assessing instances of social aggression and determining the best ways to respond, try to keep the big picture in mind. Focusing on your overall goal of increasing civility, rather than simply reducing harmful aggressive behavior, will produce long lasting results and a culture of caring.

9

💡 Bright Ideas That Work

- Post famous quotes in common areas that reflect the values you hope to promote. Enlist community members in choosing quotes!

- Connect residents by creating a volunteer communication tree or neighborhood watch.

- Promote prosocial activities within and outside your community (for example, have a clothes drive for families in a local shelter, take part in local charity events, send care packages to troops overseas, etc.)

- Create a bulletin board for residents to recognize acts of kindness.

- Use the whole community, both residents and staff, to create your "Code of Conduct" or "Guideline for Community Living" in a workshop or focus group setting.

- Schedule in-service trainings for staff, volunteers, or tenant associations on topics such as Interpersonal Effectiveness, or Bystander Response to Social Aggression.

- Hold a workshop or series of workshops on civility, creating peace, and/or getting to know your neighbor. Make the workshops fun with lots of activities to engage participants in brainstorming ways to create caring communities and combat social isolation.

- Hold music sharing parties to recognize and share different cultures and musical preferences. A playlist of community music can be shared with the larger community following the event.

- Schedule an art "contest" inviting community members to design a sign that promotes peace or caring. Post entries in common areas, hosting a viewing reception (complete with snacks!)

- Host diverse cultural events and decorate administrative offices based on all the holidays celebrated in your building rather than just those of the dominant culture.

- Foster space and time for residents to advocate for themselves with staff or the community by having regular open-door office hours.civility, rather than simply reducing harmful aggressive behavior, will produce long lasting results and a culture of caring.

Tier Two: The Community

How do we create Caring Communities?

What is the goal?

As professionals in housing, you lead the way in promoting civility and tolerance as well as fostering a sense of pride in our communities.

Helping older adult residents feel that they are part of a caring community has immeasurable mental and physical health benefits for both residents and staff. It is important to foster an atmosphere of care and concern in your housing site, ensuring that it is a place where all community members look out for each other and work to keep the peace.

While this work can be challenging, the positive effects of building a warm and welcoming community where each person can engage in purposeful activities and build connections with fellow residents and staff are invaluable and enduring.

Remember Luis?

Promoting inclusion and understanding of diverse groups represented in your community will go a long way toward decreasing social aggression— especially those acts that may go unnoticed otherwise. Recognize monthly observances such as Juneteenth by welcoming a guest speaker on racial equity or celebrate Pride Month with a screening of the documentary GenSilent. Encourage diversity and recognize and honor differences in the words you use and the events you feature in your newsletter or bulletin boards.

Housing communities are not static; they change constantly in sync with our wider community. Our housing communities are also diverse—if you have seen one housing community, you have seen one housing community. Each housing community has its own personality and needs. It is important to stay abreast of these changes and respond in ways that honor these differences. Differences in culture, ethnicity and language groups can lead to misunderstandings as well as discrimination based on these differences. Promote a culture of tolerance and respond at once to discrimination and derogatory statements expressed based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender, or sexuality.

Foster a curiosity about other cultures and the differences between the cultural groups in your community. Do your residents know how to greet each other in the languages represented in your community? Being able to properly greet someone sets a friendly tone and leads to greater connection.

Tier Three: Individuals: Getting Up Front And Not Personal

When confronted with a dispute or aggressive behavior at the individual level, first take a pause so that you can be sure you're responding to the problem, rather than reacting to the emotions expressed.

> *"Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom."*
> *–Viktor Frankl*

Assess The Situation

In order to respond to a situation effectively, you need to understand the problem. Without an adequate assessment of what is happening, you may find yourself responding to the wrong issue or missing valuable tools available to intervene.

Stay focused on the problem rather than the emotions or the personalities of the people involved.

The cycle of social aggression is perpetuated when the person being targeted becomes increasingly agitated and anxious, and the person being aggressive is reinforced by the bystanders (the people who witness the actions of social aggression) through their silence or support. In stressful or traumatic situations, human beings often react with one of four ways:

- attacking
- avoiding
- stalling
- or seeking support.

Have you heard of the fight, flight, freeze stress response? This is it!

The goal is to find the most effective response to the situation that reduces everyone's stress levels and increases feelings of safety—thus reducing the fight, flight response and hopefully the social aggression.

Speak up!

Be direct and keep it simple. We encourage bystanders (staff, residents, volunteers) to speak up. The most effective way to intervene is to focus on the problem in the moment rather than the behavior of either the person being targeted or the one being socially aggressive. Criticizing, attacking, and snide comments only increase someone's fight, flight, freeze response. Bystanders will be most effective if they remain calm and respectful, defer to the house rules or code of conduct and DON'T make it personal when discouraging socially aggressive behaviors.

saying, and why they feel that way, will save you time overall. Often a disgruntled person simply wants their concern to be validated rather than "solved" too quickly for them.

NOTE: IF THE AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR IS PHYSICAL OR SAFETY IS A CONCERN, GET HELP, ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO GET HELP, OR CALL 911.

"In the end we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends."
–Martin Luther King Jr.

WHY DOES THIS INTERVENTION WORK?

When a target of social aggression is supported, the negative feelings associated with social anxiety and peer rejection are greatly reduced. If the person who is trying to be aggressively dominant is not validated or successful, they are stripped of their power and this most often will interrupt the cycle of social aggression.

Learn and Use Interpersonal Effectiveness

Interpersonal Effectiveness, at its most basic, is the ability to get along with others. Problem solving is made easier when a community practices these skills together. The goal of interpersonal effectiveness is threefold: gain our objective, maintain a healthy relationship with the other, and keep our own self-respect. How we communicate these goals makes all the difference. Pay attention to both your verbal and nonverbal cues. Do you roll your eyes when frustrated with a resident? Do you find that you are often so overwhelmed by what needs to be done at once that you don't have time to listen to a resident's concern? Understanding what the other person is

💡 Bright Ideas That Work

Practice communicating what you want using DEAR MAN from Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (See Appendix B worksheet) by going through each step of DEAR in order:

What To Say:

D – Describe: use clear and concrete terms to describe just the facts, what you see the problem to be.

E – Express: let others know how a situation makes you feel by clearly expressing your feelings; don't expect others to read your mind.

A – Assert: don't beat around the bush – say what you need to say and state clearly what you want.

R – Reinforce: reward people who respond well, and reinforce why your desired outcome is in everyone's best interest

How To Say It:

M – Mindful: don't forget the objective of the interaction; it can be easy to get sidetracked into harmful arguments and lose focus.

A – Appear: appear confident; consider your posture, **tone**, **eye contact**, and body language.

N – Negotiate: no one can have everything they want out of an interaction all the time; be open to negotiation.

Remember the staff member and Frank?

Being clear about boundaries, expectations, and consequences is one of the best ways to address social aggression, even severe social aggression. Try using DEAR MAN to express your concerns when behavior needs to be addressed. For example, the staff member could state to Frank if the staff member is willing, "Mr. Frank you are using words to talk to me that go against our community guidelines and values. They are also hurtful. Please address me by my name and do not use those words in our community. I can help you with your problem only if we focus on that issue and treat each other with respect. If not, we will have to focus on discrimination and how those words and actions decrease the free enjoyment of our community, which is a lease violation."

What we learned during the Covid-19 pandemic about social distancing and social isolation

This guide began with the assertion that JF&CS is committed to promoting connection and social engagement, and to increasing awareness of and access to resources that support aging in community. This commitment was challenged by the physical distancing requirements and increased agitation in housing communities during the Covid-19 crisis. During our workshops on Social Isolation, Social Aggression and Coping with Loss, we heard stories of how housing communities have risen to this challenge in many creative and caring ways. We also came up with some of our own ways to support our housing communities and the self-care needs of housing professionals.

Here are just a few of the ideas we discovered and developed to create caring communities during a crisis:

- Check in on residents by phone on a regular basis. This can be done not only by RSC's but also residents and other staff members, including maintenance.
- Ask direct questions about social isolation and mood when talking with residents and other staff members.
- Connect residents to resources available for intergenerational support such as the Little Brother / Little Sister program or SagesandSeekers.org.
- Get your tech on by applying for grant money to increase access for residents to technology and virtual communication. 211 can also help find these needed resources.
- Expand opportunities for activities and programs that do not require residents to physically attend— such as letter writing campaigns or intergenerational painted rock scavenger hunts created by older adults for children in the broader community. Collaborate with your local COA or cable access station to broadcast your regular programming and classes via YouTube or local cable channel.
- Get together with staff from your own housing community or sister community for a virtual lunch, problem solving session or mutual aid and support.

Remember, we are all in this together, and small acts of compassion make communities stronger.

Building caring communities and decreasing social aggression takes time. We are not born with these skills. Rome was not built in a day and behavioral change often takes even longer. Pay attention to both the small successes as well as the long-term goal. We have included some space below to get you thinking about what you could do in your community to stop socially aggressive behavior and promote civility. Develop your own creative approaches or use some of the ideas listed in this guide.

Whatever you choose, don't wait. Try some of the ideas we shared even as you are creating your list. The problem assessment in Appendix A can help you apply and assess the effectiveness of your ideas and approaches.

My top 10 ideas to promote civility and decrease social aggression are:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

Don't stop! Keep this running list of ideas going so that you have a toolkit bursting at the seams to draw from when you need it the most.

Appendix A

Problem Solving Worksheet	
Step 1	Identify the Problem Break it down into smaller steps and decide what you need to action first
Step 2	Brainstorm and write down as many ideas as you can that might help solve the problem, no matter how silly they seem – don't dismiss any possible solutions.
Step 3	Consider the pros and cons of each possible solution, using a separate piece of paper.
Step 4	Choose one of the possible solutions that looks likely to work, based on the advantages and disadvantages
Step 5	Plan out step-by-step what you need to do to carry out this solution. What? When? How? With whom or what? What could cause problems? How can you get around those problems? Is this realistic and achievable?
Step 6	Do it! Carry out the plan
Step 7	Review how it went. Was it helpful? Did you achieve what you set out to achieve? If not, how could you have done it differently? Did you achieve any progress, however small, towards your goal? What have you learned?
Step 8	If you achieved your goal – consider tackling the next step of your original problem. If you didn't fully achieve your goal – make adjustments to your chosen solution, or return to steps 3 and 4 and choose another possible solution.

Guide to Writing a Code of Conduct:
Make Civility and the Organizational Values the Focus

A guideline for community living will be more easily accepted if reasons for the guide are clearly stated. Start with a vision or mission statement that names the goal of your code of conduct using language that is positive and not condemning. The guidelines for behavior that you list should also reflect these values. Rather than having a list of "DON'Ts" have a list of "DO's" and "WHY's."

For example, "At Glenview we value kindness. Swearing and profanity in common spaces is not allowed."

Specify who is covered:

Ideally, your code of conduct will be for the entire community— including staff, residents and outside volunteers—but make this clear. Include a passage describing the diversity you want to see in your community, taking care to recognize groups that tend to be targeted for exclusion. The list should include the classes of individuals legally protected from discrimination (known as protected classes), but it should not be limited to them.

Specify a process for reporting complaints:

When developing reporting procedures, keep liability in mind but also consider the resident who will want or need to report a complaint. Offer options for incident reporting to include anonymity, whether an action is requested, etc.

Residents should be given information on what to expect when they make a report. Who will follow up with them and when? In addition to making people feel valued, these follow ups will confirm that the community takes the code of conduct and related policies seriously; that as a group you are comfortable talking about specific problems and willing to work on solutions until the problems are solved.

Monitor the results of your code of conduct:

Check in with staff and residents regularly to see if the code of conduct is still relevant and effective. Ask whether people are aware of the code and conduct guidelines. Make sure these guidelines are clearly visible in public places. Offer yearly trainings on the code of conduct and how to enforce it in ways that lead to greater civility and safety rather than finger pointing and division.

Our Code and Pledge at _____

We Have Pride...

... in Our Mission:

_____ is a place of welcome that shows interest in and concern for the dignity of each person. We pride ourselves in providing an environment for residents and staff that is inclusive and safe. Join us in committing to and taking pride…

... in Our Code of Conduct:

_____ is committed to ensuring the enjoyment of the whole community. Mutual respect among residents and staff is our goal. Therefore, behavior that restricts another person's freedom or enjoyment of our community will not be allowed. Some examples of this type of behavior include:

> Smoking, using alcohol, or any other controlled substance in public spaces
> Stealing, damaging, altering, or other inappropriate use of facilities or another person's property
> Use of profanity or abusive or offensive language
> Restricting another person's use of common spaces or facilities
> Violent or threatening behavior to include verbal threats or yelling
> Sexual or other harassment
> False accusations or gossiping with the intent to harm

Residents who are experiencing a mental health problem or temporary loss of control but otherwise can manage and follow these standards will not be discriminated against. Your community will work with you to provide reasonable support, accommodation and assistance with access to needed services.

... in Our Commitment to Each Other

Any member of our community who believes they have been impacted by behaviors such as those listed above is urged to report their concern to _____ at _____. Reported concerns will be investigated and treated with respect within _____ days. A member of the community will follow up with you to check on progress and resolution of the problem. We will respect your confidentiality as well as that of the other community members involved and will not allow retaliation for reporting a concern.

DESCRIBE

Describe the situation. Keep just to the facts. Don't blame anyone for the situation.
"Saying what you did got her very angry and may have made her feel unwelcome."

EXPRESS

Express feelings and opinions about the situation clearly. Describe how you feel or how the situation affects you.
"It also made me very uncomfortable since I want and hope that everyone can feel welcome and have space here."

ASSERT

Assert your wishes. Ask for what you want clearly. Don't expect the other person to know what you want them to do if you don't tell them. Don't tell others what they "should" do.
"I wish you had said you were unhappy with the situation rather than saying something unkind to her."

REINFORCE

Reward people or let them know how working together will benefit them.
"I think we will all enjoy ourselves here a lot more and be a lot easier to be around if we can work together."

STAY MINDFUL

Keep your focus on what you want to happen and the situation.
Don't bring up the past or get distracted by needing to be "right" or make the other person say sorry.

APPEAR CONFIDENT

Look the person in the eye and tell them what you want without apologizing or threatening. You've got this! "I can only tell you what I noticed and feel. I think both of us just want what is best for everyone."

NEGOTIATE

Be willing to give to get. Offer and ask for their opinion or solutions.
"Sounds like you don't think what you said was mean, but do you think it helped?" "What made you say that and what did you hope to get out of acting that way? I really want to know because I want to be helpful."

Ways to Respond to Offensive Comments

Separate intent from impact The comment might have been unintentionally hurtful, and even if it was intentional you can't prove that. Instead, focus on the impact of the comment/ behavior; help the individual understand what happened and how it was hurtful or offensive to you as staff or your constituent in an accusatory way.	"I know you didn't realize this, but when you _____ (comment/behavior), it was hurtful/offensive because _____. Instead, you could _____ (different language or behavior.)"
Share your own process and preference Comments/behaviors can be addressed and modified directly; if the person perceives that you are calling them out, the conversation will likely end there.	"I noticed that you _____ (comment/ behavior). I used to do/say that too, but then I learned _____." It would be helpful to me if _____" "What I'd like is_____"
Ask for more clarification Asking the individual to explain their comment/ behavior is likely to lead them to the insinuation, which is based on stereotypes and/or prejudices	"Could you say more about what you mean by that?" "How have you come to think that?" "It sounds like you have a strong opinion about this. Tell me why." "What is it about this that concerns you the most?"
Reframe Reframing creates a different way to look at a situation.	"Could there be another way to look at this?" "Let's reframe this." "What would happen if ____?" "How would you feel if this happened to your ____?"

Adapted from Emory Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences Diversity and Inclusion Subcommittee (DISC) and Caring Communities. (n.d.). Anti-Racism Action Guide: Recognizing and Responding to Microaggressions. Emory University School of Medicine. microaggressions.pdf (emory.edu). Goodman, D. (n.d.). Diane Goodman Consulting. Responding to Microaggressions and Bias. Responding-to-Microaggressions-and-Bias-Goodman.pdf (dianegoodman.com). Nadel, K. (2014). A Guide to Responding to Microaggressions. CUNY FORUM, 2(1), 71-76.

7 Resources and Bibliography

Online Resources:

1. **StopBullying.gov:** This official U.S. government website provides comprehensive information on bullying, including definitions, prevention strategies, and resources for various audiences. The site is active and regularly updated.
2. **TheBullyLab.com:** This website is active and focuses on research related to healthy relationships and bullying across different age groups.
3. **CDC Violence Prevention:** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's violence prevention section offers extensive resources on understanding and preventing various forms of violence. The site is active and regularly updated.

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