

# Dealing with threats and threatening situations

These guidelines<sup>1</sup> serve to recognize threatening situations resulting from conversations or physical attacks and to react appropriately. It applies to both students and employees of the Department of Geosciences, University of Bremen. It can also be used in part for dealing with threats via email and on social media platforms.

**When do we speak of a threat?** Whenever the behavior of the one or other person triggers fear, we speak of a threatening situation. A threat is understood to be verbal and non-verbal communication with people who put others under pressure, behave disrespectfully, harass or attack others.

**What should you do in such a situation?** The main focus should be on de-escalation, but also on a certain demeanor and conscious action. Here are some brief tips, which are explained in more detail below:

- Try to remain calm in tone and behavior
- Avoid touching the aggressor
- Keep your distance from the aggressor
- Try to talk to her or him calmly but firmly
- Be clear about your role - don't take on the role of victim
- Do not provoke, threaten or insult
- Make the public aware of the situation
- Make witnesses aware of the situation
- Use escape routes if you can't do anything with words
- Notify the control room (inside University buildings, extension: 07), or the police (extension 3620 or 110)
- Document incidents and report them to your superior
- Report the perpetrator to the police

The rules of conduct are described in more detail below, followed by examples that describe threatening situations:

**Keep calm:** Do not panic. Instead, try to remain calm and act as calmly and relaxed as possible towards the attacker. Avoid quick movements that can trigger uncontrolled reactions in the other person.

**Do not allow yourself to be influenced ('pushed into a corner'):** Try to make contact with the person. Look at him or her with a steady gaze. Try to speak clearly,

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<sup>1</sup> This guideline has been adopted in part from the information sheet 'Wie reagieren Sie am besten, wenn Sie bedroht werden?' des National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI), Schweiz, <http://www.ncbi.ch>

at an understandable pace and in a loud voice. Listen carefully to the person. If there is a group of aggressors, speak specifically to one person. If there is a leader figure, it is best to concentrate on this. Be aware of your role and behave accordingly towards the aggressor. Do not try to win the argument, but de-escalate the situation. If you seek confrontation, you increase the escalation.

**Do not threaten, insult or touch:** Do not defend yourself with threats and insults. This can only encourage the situation to escalate. Instead, try to remain objective and defuse the situation. If possible, address the aggressor as a first name. Outsiders will then recognize that this is not a conversation between friends. Avoid touching the aggressor. Keep a safe distance and place a table, chair or bag between you and the aggressor.

If you are physically attacked and cannot evade, it is still necessary to defend yourself physically. In any case, try to protect yourself as well as possible without unnecessarily irritating the aggressor.

**A few thoughts about weapons:** Knives, pepper spray or gas pistols - they may feel good and give you a sense of security. In an emergency, however, weapons are much more of an additional risk than protection. In a scuffle, it can quickly happen that you suddenly have your own knife at your neck. Using pepper spray in enclosed spaces can also do you more harm than good.

Instead, we recommend whistles or alarm devices that are positioned so that they are easy to reach/switch on and produce a deafening noise.

**Get help:** Experience has shown that it is better to address one person specifically than to address many people unspecifically. Equally important, you should make a specific appeal to potential helpers. "You with the red cap, help me!" "You with the black leather jacket. Call the police!"

Always inform your superior after an incident and document the attack/assault. If you are physically attacked, inform the control room by calling 07 if you are in a university building or dial the police emergency number: 3620 or 110.

**Measures:** The [Aachen Model](#) classifies risk situations into different escalation levels and defines responsibilities. It has been supplemented by the conditions at the department.

Level	Hazard situation	Responsibilities	Measures	Assistance/ Reference
0	normal to controversial communication situation	personal responsibility of employees/ students	clarification expected, no further action necessary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Code of Conduct<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• <a href="#">Complaint management of the department</a></li> </ul>
1	verbally aggressive, inappropriate social behavior, damage to property	conflict resolution by the employee, support by superior or other suitable persons	call in witnesses, call in the control room or police if necessary, document the incident, inform superior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Code of Conduct</li> <li>• AGG<sup>3</sup></li> <li>• Aachen Model</li> <li>• <a href="#">ADE</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">PBS</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Statutes for dealing with and protecting against discrimination (UB)</a></li> </ul>
2	threats, coercion, assaults, physical violence	Control room or police	make the public aware of the situation, involve witnesses, control room, call in the police, press charges if necessary, document the incident, inform superior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Code of Conduct</li> <li>• AGG</li> <li>• Aachen Model</li> <li>• <a href="#">ADE</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">PBS</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Statutes for dealing with and protecting against discrimination (UB)</a></li> </ul>
3	use of weapons/tools, bomb threat, rampage, hostage taking	police	Clarification of the facts / averting danger by the police	

These guidelines are based on the [Statutes for dealing with and protecting against discrimination](#) of the University of Bremen and on the [Aachen Model „Reduction of threats and assaults in workplaces with public“](#), which was developed by Unfallkasse NRW and the Aachen police. The legal basis for many cases is the [General treatment act](#) (AGG).

<sup>2</sup> Code of Conduct FB 05: is signed by every first-year student.

<sup>3</sup> [General treatment act](#)

### Case studies and possible solutions:

1. An international student comes to your office and complains about his grade. After you have calmly and objectively explained the reasons for his grade, he accuses you of being racist and discriminating against him. You take your time, refer to the fact that you are acting in accordance with the AGG and calmly explain again the criteria you used to assess ALL the work. If the student cannot be placated and does not make any effort to leave your office, take a witness with you, even if you have to leave them alone in your office for a short time. Repeat your reasons for the note again with witnesses and then firmly ask him to leave the office now. Document the incident and inform your superior.
2. You are the lab supervisor and are female. A student is not working there in accordance with safety regulations. After you point this out to him, he replies that he is only responsible to his god and continues to ignore your advice. Try to talk to him, make sure you make direct eye contact and give him a firm look. Remind him of the code of conduct that he has signed and that he has thereby confirmed that he will behave carefully and respectfully towards all employees. Draw his attention to the fact that you are authorized to issue instructions in the laboratory and that he must comply with your instructions. If he does not comply, issue him with a temporary ban from the laboratory. Document the incident and inform your superior.
3. As a student, you often have lessons together in a classroom with another student from your home country. During the course, he insults you in your home language so that no one else notices what he says to you. Make yourself public and inform both teachers and fellow students. Let the student know that you will not simply put up with the abuse. Contact counseling services such as the Study Center or the ADE in confidence. On the streetcar, the student then starts to get violent (shoving). Make this public as well. Look for witnesses and have the incident confirmed in writing by witnesses. If the situation deteriorates further, call the police and inform your counseling services.
4. You leave the office building in the dark and are confronted by a group of people in the forecourt/parking lot or similar, one of whom accuses you of not having been admitted to an examination. Another member of the group then insults you loudly. Focus on the student who caused the conflict and explain that you will be happy to talk to them again, but at a different time and in your office. If necessary, make an appointment and use a cell phone. If the threatening situation has still not been defused, dial the police emergency number on your cell phone.
5. You work in the building until late in the evening. There is hardly anyone else in the building apart from you. Suddenly the door to your office opens and an employee comes in and closes the door. He engages you in a trivial conversation

and gets uncomfortably close to you. Try to keep your distance and put objects between you and the visitor by handling folders, bags or similar. Pretend that you have to leave the room and then inform the control room on 07. If you leave the building and feel that you are being followed, you should call the emergency number. The incident should also be documented and brought to the attention of your superior.

6. You leave your office for a short time and when you return you find a stranger in your room. When you speak to the person, the person pulls out a knife and threatens you. Under no circumstances should you try to corner the person, rather give them a chance to escape. Back away and remain as calm as possible. Try to get to safety yourself and warn others who are nearby. If possible, contact the control room or the police. Be sure to report the incident to the police.

These examples are intended to show which threatening situations could arise and provides examples of behavioral patterns. The list does not claim to be exhaustive, but can be expanded and supplemented.