

# **VIOLENCE AT WORK**

## **Health, Safety & Wellbeing Guidance - Schools**

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# **Violence at Work**

## **Introduction**

Staff at work may find themselves faced with aggressive or violent behaviour. They may face such behaviour from colleagues, but it is much more likely to be from members of the public, pupils or service users.

The Local Authority believes that violence against its staff in any circumstance is wholly unacceptable and staff should not have to put up with or accept violence against them.

There is no simple solution to violence. This guidance is devised to help staff to avoid or reduce the risk of being subject to violence in the workplace.

## **What is Violence?**

Violence is the use of physical force against an individual. However, other forms of threatening behaviour can be perceived as violent conduct, including physical damage to property, verbal abuse, threats, and intimidatory actions such as staring.

The HSE defines work related violence as follows:-

“Any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work”

Verbal abuse and threats are the most common types of incidents. Thankfully physical attacks are comparatively rare, however even when there is no physical injury an incident of violence can result in considerable emotional stress. For example, threats which may indicate a risk of actual injury and malicious damage to an employee’s property can lead to distress. Both of these situations can cause an employee to be fearful of a future physical attack and this can certainly increase an employee’s stress.

The difficulty with violence is that whilst a physical attack is a very clear act of violence, the effects of non-physical acts of violence are subjective as people have different perceptions about what they find threatening or offensive. Something that causes distress to one person may only annoy someone else; and what one person finds threatening may be laughed off by another.

Therefore, the Local Authority will treat seriously any incident that is reported and encourages all employees to report any incident where they feel they have been abused, threatened, or assaulted.

All incidents of violence should be reported on the assault report form initially to your Manager / Headteacher. The form can be accessed via S4S on the Health and Safety page and called **Incident Form**. ([Incident reporting form](#))

Targeted attacks against property, both the councils, for example offensive or abusive graffiti, and individuals' property e.g. damage to cars is a form of violence and should be reported. Staff whose personal property is damaged as a result of their employment and through no fault of their own should not be disadvantaged and should contact the department's finance section for information on whether any costs incurred can be reclaimed.

All instances of damage to council property should be reported to the council's insurance section and to the police. Where there is damage to council property this should also be reported to your Local Property Services Business Unit particularly if emergency repairs are required.

### **Who is at Risk?**

Potentially, any member of staff could be at risk from violence. However, those whose job involves dealing with pupils, service users and/or members of the public are at highest risk. Within the Children's Services Department this includes, but is not limited to, staff who:-

- deliver education.
- give care.
- are a point of contact for members of the public.
- handle cash.
- represent the authority at public meetings.
- work alone.

The following statement outlines the Children's Services Departments commitment to reducing the risk of violent attacks on staff.

### **Policy Statement**

The Department will undertake to reduce to the lowest level reasonably practicable, the risk to health and safety of its employees and members of the public from incidents of violence connected with work activities by implementing the following measures:-

- i. Ensuring there are measures in place to allow managers to undertake risk assessments of workplaces and work activities that may expose employees to incidents of assault.
- ii. Provide adequate information, instruction, and training to reduce the risk in situations where it is identified that staff may be exposed to violence.

- iii. Provide support as appropriate to establishments and employees who have been exposed to violence.
- iv. Provide appropriate legal support to settings who have identified a risk of violence to prevent such violence occurring.
- v. The Authority will provide any necessary support to employees who are a victim of violence whilst carrying out the duties of their employment.

### **Implementing the Policy**

The person with responsibility for ensuring that appropriate arrangements are in place to meet the requirements of this policy and guidance shall be the Headteacher, within schools, the Manager within other settings or the Section Head within the Children's Services Department. This will include ensuring that suitable procedures are in place, that staff are aware of and follow them; and that any necessary staff training is carried out.

### **Managing the Risk of Violence**

There are five basic steps Headteachers, Section Heads and Managers need to take to manage the risk of violence in their area of control. These are as follows:-

1. Assess the risk of violence to staff/pupils at your premises.
2. Decide what measures you need to implement to deal with the problem.
3. Implement the measures.
4. Monitor the effectiveness of the measures.
5. Carry out a review of the measures on a regular basis or as the situation changes.

#### **1. Assess the Risk**

In order to do this, you will need to identify any situation arising from the work you do which might result in the exposure of employees or others to violence. This will then let you identify if current measures are sufficient to prevent harm.

You will need to consider any specific hazards arising directly from the work you are required to do, how you actually carry out the work and the physical aspects of the premises where you carry out this work including security.

The logical steps in this process are therefore:-

- a) Decide if you have a problem

You will need to identify any situations where staff or others could be harmed through exposure to violence. Some of these may be obvious through your knowledge of the premises or work carried out. You should also talk to staff and trade union representatives as they may have noticed things or have knowledge of situations that are not immediately obvious to you. This could be something that is asked in individual reviews or staff meetings. It will also be helpful to examine any accident and assault report forms for your area of control to see if any particular risks can be identified.

A premises security survey (using the County Risk Management Security risk assessment form issued annually) will be useful in identifying any other physical risk areas within your premises.

It is also important for establishments to pass on relevant information regarding potentially violent pupils, parents/carers, and any techniques they have used to reduce the potential risk from these people to other authority establishments that these people may also interact with. This will allow the other establishments to be able to effectively assess any risk. (Settings will need to be careful when passing on such information to ensure legislation such as the Data Protection Act 2018, Education (School Records) Regulations 1989, and Human Rights Act 1998 is not infringed. Nevertheless, relevant factual information can and should be recorded and shared).

b) Decide who may be at risk of being harmed and how.

You will need to think carefully about who may be exposed to the risk. This will include not just regular staff but visitors, contractors, and temporary and part time staff. You should consider any staff who may be at more risk because they:-

- work alone or late on site, e.g. caretakers and cleaners.
- are inexperienced e.g. newly qualified teachers / staff or supply staff.
- work specifically with difficult pupils / clients.
- are peripatetic workers who work at a place which is remote from the normal base.

c) Evaluate the risks and decide whether existing precautions are adequate or if you need to do more.

From the information gathered from (a) and (b) above you now need to decide which risks identified, if any, are significant. For these risks you should then decide whether you have taken appropriate precautions to reduce the risk or control it so that harm arising from the risk is unlikely.

Precautions may include changes to working practices or premises or provision of suitable instruction, information, and training.

For those risks where you decide the precautions taken are not adequate you will need to move on to stage 2 (Decide what action to take).

d) Record your findings.

The significant findings of the assessment must be recorded. These include the hazards identified, who could be harmed and how, the control measures in place to prevent this harm occurring and who is responsible for implementing these control measures.

The assessment will also need to record those risks identified as not currently being effectively controlled and what additional measures (identified in Stage 2) are to be implemented.

## **2. Decide What Action You Need to Implement to Adequately Control the Risk**

The first stage in this process is to consider whether staff need to be exposed to the risk at all. For example, is the work which causes the risk necessary. If not, then doing the work will eliminate the risk. If we have a parent/carer who is known to be violent, can that person be excluded from the site all together, again removing the risk?

If the risk cannot be eliminated you will need to ensure that risks which are not adequately controlled at present are evaluated, prioritised and appropriate control measures to deal with the risks are discussed and agreed. It is unlikely that one particular control measure will adequately control the risk and it is more likely that a combination of measures will be required.

You will probably need to consider a combination of issues to ensure the risk is adequately reduced. These are likely to include but not necessarily be limited to:-

- the physical environment.
- how the work is carried out.
- when the work is carried out.
- which staff are involved and their knowledge, experience, and training.
- what information is available from other services.

## **Physical Aspects**

The general design and physical environment of workplace buildings can sometimes be improved to reduce the likelihood of violent incidents.

An easily identifiable, accessible, and permanently staffed reception area, which allows office staff to receive visitors, direct them to their destinations, answer queries etc. can help reduce the number of unauthorised visitors wandering around the school / college or other premises. Other measures you could consider include:-

- The reception should be located close to the main entrance rather than visitors having to walk through the building to get to it. Ideally access to the rest of the premises from reception should be controlled. It is also a good idea to have access to the reception controlled.
- The route to the reception should be clearly signposted with easily understandable signs. There need to be sufficient signs to avoid visitors getting lost on route.
- The reception area should have good lighting, robust furniture and perhaps some reading material for visitors who may have to wait for attention.
- Measures need to be in place to prevent direct access to reception staff by visitors (counter / screen etc) and reception staff should have a means of summoning help if required.
- Access control, e.g. 'visitor' badges. Everyone, including parents and students, needs to know about arrangements for identifying visitors.

Where there is no reception area, which is the situation in many primary schools, locating the school office near to the entrance will help office staff see anyone entering the building. In these cases, access to the building should be controlled by remote locking or similar and visitors should be met or greeted when let into the establishment.

Other examples of building design that can help to reduce the risk of violence include:

- Ensuring that any landscaping does not act as a screen for potential intruders; make sure shrubs are cut back so people cannot hide behind them.
- Avoiding potential missiles on school/setting grounds, e.g. pathways of loose pebbles, detachable stones, or paving slabs.

- Ensuring prompt repair of minor damage and the removal of graffiti – the level of care for the working environment can affect the standard of pupils' and others behaviour.

### **Conducting Interviews with potentially violent Parents / Carers**

Very often staff have to meet with parents / carers at our establishments. Where there is a potential risk of violence either because the parents / carers are known to the service or due to the nature of the meeting then it is vital that systems are in place and appropriate facilities are available to meet with these parents / carers that are controlled by us. This may in some circumstances mean meeting at another county establishment if your building does not have appropriate facilities. In general, when conducting such meetings the following needs to be considered;

- Appropriate interview facilities should not contain loose objects that could be used as weapons (telephones, staplers etc). Hot drinks can become a weapon and should be avoided in interview rooms.
- The room should contain a substantial table and sufficient chairs for all in the meeting, again the chairs should be substantial such that they cannot easily be picked up and used as a weapon.
- The room should be set up, so the table forms a barrier between staff and the parents / carers and in such a way that staff are seated nearest the door with parents seated on the far side so staff have a clear escape route. Rooms where staff could be trapped in by an aggressor are not appropriate.
- Staff should take control of the seating arrangements (layout and numbers of chairs can help indicate who should sit where) directing the parents / carers to their allocated seats but not entering the room first so that they cannot become trapped in by those entering the room after them.
- The door should be fitted with a means of securing it easily should a member of staff need to escape quickly and prevent an aggressor following.
- The room should afford clear visibility of those within (e.g. windows on door panels) and should be close to permanently staffed areas such as reception.
- The room should ideally have a means of raising the alarm in an emergency (e.g. panic alarm) which is sounded in permanently staffed areas where help can be summoned.

- If there is not a fixed panic alarm then an agreed system of raising the alarm should assistance be required (shout, whistle, etc) should be communicated to key staff.
- Ensure staff are aware of procedures to be followed in an emergency, how to raise the alarm and key staff within the establishment are aware of their responsibilities and how to respond should the staff in the interview room sound an alarm.
- A system of regularly monitoring the safety of staff within the interview room should be put in place whilst being mindful of the need for privacy and not antagonising the parents / carers.
- Where problems are anticipated it may be appropriate for an additional member(s) of staff to attend.
- Parents / carers only to be seen at times when other staff are in the building and able to respond in an emergency and only ideally by appointment.

(In the most extreme situations it may require meetings to be held at other agencies establishments e.g. Police with them in attendance. This would normally only be in situations following serious threat meetings being held as part of the actions agreed at such a meeting)

## **Security**

If there is a history of violence caused by intruders, or your risk assessments indicate that this could be a problem then it is important that a suitable security risk assessment is carried out. This survey should identify any potential areas where security could be compromised or where staff could be vulnerable to assault. Once identified appropriate security measures should be implemented to reduce or remove the risk. Such measures could include:-

- restricting public access to the site and the use of security fencing.
- ensuring there is good external lighting round the site paying special attention to walkways and car parks.
- issuing personal alarms to staff.
- use of CCTV cameras.
- installing panic buttons in remote buildings, reception areas and meeting rooms

- putting systems in place which allow staff working late at night to park close to the exit they will use.
- ensuring staff have received appropriate personal safety training.
- doors should lock easily so staff do not have to spend significant time facing the door to lock it.
- ensuring exits/entrances not required for and designated as emergency exits are appropriately secured.

Whilst some of these measures are relatively inexpensive and easy to put in place, others are not, and may not be appropriate for your setting. You will also need to ensure that the measures will deal with the risks you have identified before implementing them. For example, if CCTV is to be used to protect people (rather than just record evidence) then it will require monitoring by someone who is trained in what to do should something occur.

Staff should be trained in how to use any equipment provided for their safety e.g. panic buttons and personal alarms, and when to use them. Staff should also be trained in how to react should they hear an alarm being activated. This training will need to involve all relevant staff, including temporary and supply staff as necessary.

### **Working Practices and Patterns**

Certain tasks or jobs, by their very nature, are more likely to expose staff to the risk of violence. Equally, the way certain tasks or jobs are carried out can expose the person doing them to a greater degree of risk.

As previously mentioned, the first stage in the process to reducing the risk is to ask, “do we need to actually do the work?” If the work is not necessary, then do not do it. An example may be staff stopping late at work to “just finish off a task” thereby becoming a lone worker when there is no need.

If the work is necessary and therefore cannot be eliminated, consideration should be given to whether the work can be redesigned to reduce the potential risk of violence. An example of this may be cleaners or caretakers who work alone in remote buildings and are therefore vulnerable to attacks from intruders. Working in pairs, providing a means of summoning help quickly and ensuring they can and do secure all external doors/entry points will reduce this risk.

Where the risk cannot be reduced by eliminating the task or job, or by redesigning how the work is done, then specific control measures can be applied to help inform your risk assessment as follows:-

## **All Situations Where Staff Could Be Exposed To Violence:-**

- Exposure to violence is something that all employees potentially face and therefore all members of staff should receive a basic minimum awareness training as part of their induction training programme. Line managers should use this policy as part of induction training for new employees to meet this need, and the policy should be brought to their attention.
- Ensure that members of staff who deal with visitors have received training in dealing with aggressive visitors using the “keep calm keep safe” training package which was supplied to all schools. For other staff this training package is available to loan from the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Section.
- Carry out refresher training as necessary to ensure skills remain sharp and staff feel confident in their ability to deal with a situation should it occur.

## **Dealing With Angry Visitors to Your Establishment**

- Act in accordance with any training received and any site-specific control measures you have been made aware of.
- Avoid confronting angry visitors in front of large groups and especially pupils or other parents. With fewer people involved it may be easier to allow the visitor to back down without losing face. It will also ensure the angry visitor is not “spurred on” by others.
- Consider your body language and how this could be perceived, do not make the situation worse, and avoid such things as wagging fingers and placing hands on hips.
- Stay calm, speak slowly and clearly. Do not be drawn into a heated argument.
- Consider the words you use. Do not try to prove how clever you are as this could make the aggressor angrier, equally do not patronise the person. Use clear direct and easily understood language.
- Where necessary involve a more senior member of staff, particularly if the means to sort out the aggressors’ complaint is beyond your authority to resolve.
- Do not invade the person’s personal space and do not allow yourself to be cornered or trapped.

## **Visits Away from Base**

- Be aware of the area you are visiting and any history of incidents of assault and violence in the area.
- Avoid home visits wherever possible; try to arrange visits at a neutral location such as an Area Office.
- Try to avoid evening visits whenever possible. If these cannot be avoided ensure there is a system where you can regularly report your movements and that you can ensure that someone from your management knows you have returned home safely.
- Plan the visit, ensure you have considered the route you will take, how you will make contact as above, where you will park (is it visible and well lit).
- Ensure that a responsible contact has an itinerary of your movements with agreed check in times and there is a plan in place in case you don't check in within a certain time of that agreed. This could be an initial call to you to establish you are still OK but could involve calling police if necessary.
- Try to ensure all home visits, especially initial contact visits, are carried out in pairs.
- Ensure you are fully briefed about the person/persons/household you are visiting (are there any histories of violence, racist or sexist behaviour).
- Agree any rules regarding home visits as soon as possible e.g. whether animals need to be locked in a separate room etc. Ensure you are always aware of an escape route in case of emergency.
- Ensure you are provided with any necessary safety equipment e.g., personal alarm, mobile phone etc., and that you always carry it when on visits. You should also ensure that your phone is charged and there is a signal.

## **Call Outs**

Staff who are designated as key holders for County Council buildings may well be called out to those buildings out of hours if the alarm goes off or for any number of other reasons. This could potentially expose the key holder to the risk of violence from intruders on the premises. Precautions to include:

- Consider alternative options to staff acting as key holders such as employing a reputable security firm to carry out this role.

- No key holder should approach or enter the building on their own. Key holders should either wait at the main entrance for the police to attend, or a system should be established where 2 key holders attend and meet at a pre-arranged place before entering the site.
- Key holders should also have a system for alerting a responsible contact when they have returned home safely.
- Key holders should be provided with appropriate safety equipment, torch, mobile phone, personal alarm etc.

### **Violence from Pupils**

Certain pupils present with behaviour which is challenging and could lead to violence towards staff. For these pupils it is vital that there is a behaviour management plan, agreed by all the relevant parties, which will include risk assessment and, where necessary, restrictive physical intervention. To protect staff and the pupils it is vital that all the relevant professionals, the parents / carers and where appropriate the pupils themselves are involved in agreeing strategies for such pupils, and that the detailed guidance in the County's Restrictive Physical Interventions Policy and Guidelines is followed.

There is also a risk of violence to staff when, for example, they try to separate pupils during a playground fight. This risk is less predictable than from a pupil with known behavioural problems. Nevertheless, the risk will need to be assessed. Factors that should be considered when assessing such a risk include the age of the pupils involved, supervision ratios, ease of summoning help, any history of similar incidents and the lessons learned from these. This risk assessment, and in particular the control measures identified to reduce risk, should inform an action plan on whether and how interventions in these circumstances should be attempted. Again, schools are directed to the Restrictive Physical Interventions Policy and Guidelines.

All staff should be made aware of the findings of any such behaviour management plans and risk assessments and should be made fully aware of what they can and cannot do and what action they should take in specific circumstances.

### **Staff Training**

Where it is thought that staff could be at risk of exposure to violence, the staff should be aware of these risks and receive the necessary information, instruction and training relating to them. Any training needs to be relevant to the particular situations identified and include all staff who could be affected. For example, in schools this could include, as well as teaching staff, administrative staff, teaching assistants, caretakers and cleaners etc. Personal

safety training is available from the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Section and Behaviour Management and physical intervention training is available from the Behaviour Support Team. Schools also have the “keep calm keep safe” and “what if” training packages supplied by the Local Authority which they can use for staff training.

### **3. Implement the Measures**

Once you have assessed the risk of violence and decided what measures you need to implement to deal with the risk, Stage 3 of the process is to put them into place.

Some of the measures may be relatively straightforward to implement as they only involve minor changes (e.g. changes to working practices). These should be put into place immediately. Other measures may be much more involved in terms of time and resources (e.g. building work to create a safe reception) and consequently take much longer to implement.

In order to ensure all the necessary measures are implemented it is advisable to draw up an action plan stating what measures are to be implemented, who is responsible for ensuring they are implemented; when they are to be implemented by, and what resources will be needed.

The action plan should be communicated to all staff affected so that they know what is happening; how they are involved; and the timescales for action.

### **4. Monitor the Effectiveness of the Measures**

Simply implementing measures and then forgetting about them is insufficient. It is important that you monitor the effectiveness of any measures you have put in place.

This monitoring will allow you not only to identify which measures have worked and are working but also to identify any measures which have not reduced the risk, or which have in fact created a new risk not previously considered. For such situations you will then be able to put in place new or additional measures to tackle the problem.

There are two types of monitoring, and both have a place in ensuring the measures in place are effective.

- a) Active Monitoring: - This involves checking that the systems put in place are working effectively before things go wrong. Techniques such as audits, staff questionnaires, specific staff meetings, representation to safety committees and observation of working practices are tools which can be used to actively monitor issues. The findings of any such monitoring should be recorded.

- b) Reactive Monitoring: - This takes place after incidents have occurred, to ensure any lessons that can be learned from the incident are taken on board. This could take the form of an incident investigation, where the investigation is carried out not to apportion blame but to ensure similar incidents do not happen again. A report of the investigation with its findings will need to be produced.

Secondly, assault report forms and records should be periodically looked at to determine if there are any trends in the types of assaults recorded and this can then inform any necessary action to prevent recurrences.

## **5. Assault Reporting**

In order for reactive monitoring to be effective staff will need to be encouraged to report all incidents of violence / assault whether or not they result in an injury. Managers will need to create an ethos where staff feel comfortable reporting such incidents and staff and managers don't see such incidents as a failure. Staff need to be encouraged to report any incident which falls within the definition of work-related violence on page 1 of this guidance.

All incidents of assault / violence to staff should be recorded on **Incident Form** which is on S4S and Our Derbyshire websites under Health and Safety. ([Incident reporting form](#))

Establishments will however need to set up a system for recording violent incidents / assaults that works for their specific circumstances, it is better to have incidents recorded in some form than not at all otherwise monitoring of incidents for trends cannot take place. If for example a school has a pupil with special needs which present in repeated violent behaviour of the same type possibly several times a day. It will not necessarily be practical to fill in a form for every incident, in this situation if indeed the incidents are similar, it would be sensible to fill in one form per member of staff per week and have a separate simpler recording system for detailing the numbers, locations and times of incidents. It is from these that potential trends and thus actions to prevent re-occurrences can be identified. A copy of this should be sent in with the main assault report form.

Where any incident of violence or assault results in a physical injury then a record of this should also be made and if the injury is to a member of staff (or is a RIDDOR reportable accident to a pupil) then an accident form must be completed and departmental guidance on accident reporting must be followed. (See Services for Schools - S4S / EDRM for Assault report form and / or Accident form)

## **6. Review the Measures**

Establishments should periodically review what they are doing. This will include looking at the action plan to ensure it is on target, looking at the findings of the active and re-active monitoring and whether the numbers of incidents have actually decreased. Part of the review process will also be to ensure that the measures put in place are still relevant. As work practices evolve it is important that any control measures evolve with them, and part of the review process should be to ensure this happens.

### **Victims of Violence**

It is important that the victims of violence are taken seriously and supported appropriately. It is often easy to dismiss a victim's concerns, particularly where they have not been physically harmed. Managers should ensure that victims are treated with sympathy and understanding and are fully supported should a violent incident of any kind occur. Managers should also contact their personnel section to access additional support e.g. welfare visits, counselling etc and to discuss what measures may be appropriate.