

017 - Violence and Aggression in Schools Guidance

Guidance: Violence and Aggression	Issue Date and Version Number:	Page: 1 of 5
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Name	Position	Contact Number
	Head Teacher	

INTRODUCTION

All schools should view acts of violence and aggression towards its employees or any other persons under its care as unacceptable and should therefore; so far as is reasonably practicable, ensure that staff are protected from risks to their health, safety and wellbeing posed by violence and aggression.

This guidance covers all full-time and part-time teaching and support staff, irrespective of whether they hold permanent or temporary posts; it also covers casual employees, such as daily supply teachers.

DEFINITION OF VIOLENCE AND AGGRESSION

The Health and Safety Executive's definition of work-related violence is:

"any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work".

This may be by a pupil, parent or member of the public.

Violence can range from a life-threatening physical attack to verbal abuse. Verbal abuse and threats are the most common forms of violence.

Violence and aggression is behaviour directed by a pupil, their relatives or carers, members of the public, other employees, visitors or other person which produces damaging or hurtful effects, physically or emotionally in other people.

This includes:

- Assault/abuse causing actual physical injury or distress.
- Verbal or written aggression (letter, emails) which offends the individual.
- Assault to others including members of an individual's family.
- Stalking.
- Animal attacks.

- Offensive language, verbal abuse, swearing, unwanted or abusive remarks which makes staff feel unsafe.
- Invasion of personal space.
- Brandishing of objects or weapons.
- Offensive gestures.
- Threats or risk of serious injury to a member of staff, customers or visitors.
- Near misses i.e. unsuccessful physical assaults.
- Spitting.
- Alcohol or drug fuelled abuse.
- Unreasonable and/or abusive behaviour.
- Any of the above linked to destruction of or damage to property.
- Threat or fear of any of the above.

Where the alleged offender is a member of staff these incidents will be covered by the school's HR disciplinary policy.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF HEAD TEACHERS AND EMPLOYEES

The Head Teacher, together with the employees within the school, should be alert to the safety needs of their colleagues and should work together to develop strategies to reduce or eliminate risks.

Head Teachers have an important role to play in anticipating situations which can lead to incidents of assault, threats and verbal abuse. It is most important that the potential risk of violence within schools is assessed, so that measures can be taken to prevent or minimise the risk.

Under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR), acts of violence to employees which lead to physical injury resulting in major injury classification (e.g. broken bones) or loss of more than 7 days from work must be reported to the Health & Safety Executive (which can be done via the Assessnet online reporting system).

The responsibilities of the Head Teacher are to:

- ensure that all staff appreciate the importance of security and understand the school's policy and their own responsibilities;
- identify any situations/activities where any staff could be faced with violence or aggression, e.g. teachers dealing with an aggressive pupil or issues associated with site agents and other key holders;
- assess the risks of such situations/work activities;
- determine appropriate control / preventative measures;
- assess and provide for any staff training needs (through induction/appraisal/staff development processes or other established systems within the school);
- where a violent incident has occurred (a) discuss with the staff member involved his/her needs in relation to support and (b) assess the risk of repetition;
- ensure all incidents are recorded, reported and suitably investigated;
- ensure all assaults are reported to the police.

It is also important that Head Teachers and their management teams strive to create and maintain a culture in the workplace which affirms that:

- incidents of violence are a 'whole school' matter not just an individual matter;
- aggressive behaviour towards employees is not acceptable;
- exposure to an aggressive incident is not evidence of professional failure;
- it is unreasonable to expect any employee to predict accurately when aggressive incidents will arise;

Head Teachers should identify the need for counselling after any violent incident and advise on the options available.

The responsibilities of individual staff members are to:

- follow the school policy and the procedures laid down by the Head Teacher;
- use the 'preventive strategies' where available;
- not place themselves at risk in potentially threatening situations, e.g. caretakers and other key holders called to break-ins, etc;
- discuss any potentially dangerous situations with their Head Teacher, requesting support if they feel vulnerable;
- represent the school in a manner that is not likely to provoke violence;
- share information with colleagues about potentially dangerous situations;
- be supportive to colleagues who have been subject to violence;
- raise any training needs with the Head Teacher or other responsible member of staff (through any appraisal/staff development process or other established system within the school);
- report any violence to the Head Teacher;
- report to the police any serious incidents, including those where there has been physical violence.

RISK ASSESSMENT

The school should adopt a risk based approach to the prevention of workplace violence and aggression, involving risk assessment, control measures, monitoring and review. The following steps should be carried out when completing a risk assessment:

- Identifying the hazards (where is there potential for violence?)
- Assessing the risk (i.e. the likelihood of violence in the circumstances, the likely severity and who is likely to be at risk)
- Considering what control measures need to be implemented
- Monitoring the effectiveness of the control measures
- Reviewing the situation

Risk assessment is an integral management tool that should be completed to ensure that employees are safe in their work. Workplace risk assessments should be completed in accordance with the Risk Assessment Guidance.

TRAINING

Training can prevent conflict situations from arising or escalating into violence. Such training should enable staff to recognise and leave situations that they consider unsafe. Assertiveness training is invaluable to staff who work with individuals who use aggression to the decisions of others. Management of violence training needs to be directly relevant to the staff group. 'Break away' and 'Team Teach' training are examples of training where a member of staff may need to actually break away from an assailant.

Schools have responsibility to provide information, instruction and such training as appropriate to ensure that staff required to work on their own are competent. CBC no longer provide health and safety training; all schools must source their own training.

Training in the prevention and management of violence (not only for those staff identified as working in high risk areas) should be made available for all staff that come into contact with clients, public and visitors. This training should cover such topics as:

- Causes of violence.
- Recognition of warning signs.
- Handling threats and abuse.
- How to diffuse potentially violent, threatening and abusive situations.
- Body language.
- Personal behaviour.
- Interpersonal skills.
- Security procedures e.g. location of panic buttons and operation of safety devices such as personal alarms.
- Encouragement to report incidents and the procedures to follow.

INCIDENT REPORTING AND INVESTIGATION

Incident reporting is an essential element for preventing violence and aggression. Incident reporting provides documentary evidence for:

- Monitoring the effectiveness of control measures.
- Identifying and modifying those control measures in need of improvement or replacement.
- Supporting the provision of appropriate resources and training.
- Supporting further action such as court orders.
- Reporting to the HSE under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR).
- The evaluation of trends.

A member of staff who has been the subject of violent/abusive behaviour or damage to personal property must report the incident to the Head Teacher as soon as is practicable. Staff must report all incidents of violence, even if they are of a minor nature.

The Head Teacher should ensure the incident is recorded in the accident/incident near miss book and that the form is passed to the AssessNET administrator for the school, for inputting on the online system.

All incidents must be investigated thoroughly by the Head Teacher. Incident investigations should be carried out as soon as possible after the event.

Information from the investigation should be used when carrying out a post incident review of risk assessment.

STEPS TO TAKE AFTER AN INCIDENT

Supporting Employees after an Incident

Employees harmed physically or psychologically by violence may need support. Experience has shown that the immediate care and concern of managers and colleagues is much appreciated and may limit or prevent any serious long-term effects.

Post incident procedures

- First and foremost the affected person/s must be supported.
- Later, but as soon as possible, staff should be encouraged to begin the post – incident procedures.

These procedures include:

- Completion of the accident/incident report and investigation forms.
- Sensitive debriefing of the incident. Staff can sometimes be brought together soon after a violent incident to discuss what happened. The process of debriefing may have two functions to; establish the details of what happened and to provide emotional help.
- Reminding staffs they can seek the support and advice of their professional association/trade union.

Post incident practices: Types of support

The following identifies the type of support/action which may be required following violent incidents (this list is not exhaustive and not all items will be appropriate in all cases):

- Encourage the employee to seek medical attention or attend hospital.
- Look after the employee's belongings including their vehicle if they leave them behind.
- Contact the relatives or friends of the staff member.
- Acknowledge that the staff member has experienced an extreme event and establish appropriate arrangements to allow them to talk about it in school including during a private meeting where they are encouraged to recount the events from a personal perspective.
- Acknowledge and respect the employee's feelings whether this is anger, fear, resentment or guilt.
- Demonstrate a team/shared concern for the staff members welfare.
- Be aware of any need for 'time out', either away from the scene of the incident or perpetrator involved.

Employee Support

The affects of violence and aggression can be severe, some people cope more easily than others and some people may experience emotional ill-health, such as post traumatic stress.

Where management support is unable to address the individual's emotional concerns there is a need to seek expert advice employee support should be contacted.