

## Violence at Work - 2009

### 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 (LINK) initially to your Headteacher. A copy of the form must be forwarded to the Children and Younger Adults Health and Safety Section.

Targeted attacks against property, both the council's, 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 and Younger Adults 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 and Younger Adults Department's 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:

- Ensuring there are measures in place to allow managers to undertake risk assessments of work places and work activities that may expose employees to incidents of assault.
- Provide adequate information, instruction and training to reduce the risk in situations where it is identified that staff may be exposed to violence.
- Provide support as appropriate to establishments and employees who have been exposed to violence.
- Provide appropriate legal support to settings who have identified a risk of violence to prevent such violence occurring.
- 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. 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 need to take to manage the risk of violence in their area of control. These are as follows:

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

### **Assess the Risk**

In order to do this it is necessary to identify any situation arising from work which might result in the exposure of employees or others to violence. This will then identify if current measures are sufficient to prevent harm. It is important to consider any specific hazards arising directly from work, how to actually carry out the work and the physical aspects of the premises where this work occurs including security.

The logical steps in this process are therefore:

- Decide if there is a problem
- Identify any situations where staff or others could be harmed through exposure to violence. Some of these may be obvious through knowledge of the premises or work carried out. The Headteacher should talk to staff and trade union representatives as they may have noticed things or have knowledge of situations that are not immediately obvious. 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 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 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 1998, Education (School Records) Regulations 1989, and Human Rights Act 1998 is not infringed. Nevertheless relevant factual information can and should be recorded and shared).

### Decide who may be at risk of being harmed and how

Think carefully about who may be exposed to the risk. This will include not just regular staff but visitors, contractors, temporary and part time staff. 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

### Evaluate the risks and decide whether existing precautions are adequate or if more needs to be done

From the information gathered from (a) and (b) above it should be possible to decide which risks identified, if any, are significant. For these risks decide whether appropriate precautions are in place 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 precautions taken are not adequate refer to stage 2 (Decide what action to take).

### 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.

### 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 actually necessary. If not then not doing the work will eliminate the risk. If a parent/carer 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, 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. 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 or other premises. Other measures to 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/college 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.

### **Security**

If there is a history of violence caused by intruders, or 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 all settings. Ensure that the measures will deal with the risks 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. 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 Children and Younger Adults Health and Safety 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 School buildings may well be called 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 Children and Younger Adults Health and Safety Section and Behaviour Management and physical intervention training is available from the Behaviour Support Team.

### **Implement the Measures**

Once the risk of violence has been assessed and measures decided, implementation is needed 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.

### **Monitor the Effectiveness of the Measures**

Simply implementing measures and then forgetting about them is insufficient. It is important to monitor the effectiveness of any measures put in place. This monitoring identifies which measures have worked and are working and identifies any measures which have not reduced the risk, or which have in fact created a new risk not previously considered. There are two types of monitoring and both have a place in ensuring the measures in place are effective.

- **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.
- **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.
- 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.

### **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. Headteachers will need to create an ethos where staff feel comfortable reporting such incidents and staff 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 the County Assault Reporting form a copy should be kept on file at school and a copy sent to the Children and Younger Adults Department, Health and Safety Section. 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.

### **Review the Measures**

Schools 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. Headteachers should also contact their personnel section to access additional support e.g. welfare visits, counselling etc and to discuss what measures may be appropriate.

### **Update 2014**

Lone working minimized.

Lone worker safety dvd for staff to watch, cpd on dealing with potentially violent situations-dvd?

Personal alarms available.

Staff let others know when they are accessing outbuildings.

Staff ensure doors are properly shut, so building is secure.

## APPENDIX 1 – From H&S Policy

### Violence at Work

1. The legal duties of D.C.C. under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 include the protection of employees, as far, as is reasonably practicable, from incidents of assault. This will include verbal abuse and physical violence.
2. The County Council's policy statement is detailed in the Health and Safety Handbook.
3. The policy identifies 5 particular categories in which employees may be potentially exposed to violence:
  - whilst handling money or valuables
  - whilst providing advice, care or training
  - whilst carrying out inspections or enforcement
  - whilst working with drunk, drugged or disturbed people
  - whilst working alone or away from the workplace.
4. General advice provided in the D.C.C. guidance includes:
  - Think safety – assess potential risk situations and take appropriate precautions. This will include the devising of working routines, patterns and practices intended to avoid potential problem situations.
  - Act on warning signs immediately
  - Walk away from situations which it is felt may get out of hand
  - Do not resort to aggressive actions which are likely to challenge or confront anyone.
  - Discuss fears with colleagues/Headteacher.
5. The procedure to be followed if an incident occurs is detailed in the guidance. In particular:
  - Immediate action must include calming of situations/separating persons as necessary, paralleled by relevant medical attention.
  - The Head Teacher should be informed immediately and the Police will be contacted as deemed necessary. The Head Teacher will collate all relevant details, including receiving accounts from those involved and witnesses as appropriate.
  - The County's Assault Report Form must be completed, and copies sent to relevant persons and agencies as detailed in the form guidance

Schools must ensure that a policy is in place, which clearly sets out the responsibilities, duties of staff, and procedures for preventing and dealing with violence within their areas of responsibility. School managers need to be aware that staff fears of violence can create a situation where their own uncertainty may make violence more likely and can result in unacceptable levels of stress.