

Violence and aggression guidance for schools

This document is designed to provide Governing Bodies, Headteachers and all employees with guidance on the subject of violence and aggression to help them determine what arrangements they have in place and what needs to be done in relation to school employees and all other adults supporting learning (ASL's). The assistance of Trade Union representatives on the Schools Health and Safety Forum in compiling this guidance is gratefully acknowledged.

In this context, the term "ASL" includes student teachers, agency/temporary staff, and young people on work experience, visiting support staff, volunteers and members of the Governing Body whilst on official business.

Is violence and aggression a problem in schools?

Violence and aggression has been defined as:

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

(Health and Safety Executive)

The above definition from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is very broad but it is for the individual concerned to decide whether, in their opinion, they feel they have been a victim of violence and aggression in any form.

Whilst it is widely recognised that violence and aggression directed at employees and ASL's is a problem within schools and that it is **totally unacceptable**, it is important to note that there will be significant differences between individual schools. In some schools, violent and/or aggressive incidents may be regular occurrences whilst in others they will be rare events. It is equally likely that the severity of incidents will range from relatively minor to serious, possibly requiring medical attention, reporting to the HSE or even Police involvement.

Physical assaults must be reported to the County Council but verbal abuse or threats, including those made via social media, are generally under reported but can also damage an individuals' health through anxiety and stress, particularly where it is serious or persistent. Within schools, over half of all reported accidents / incidents that involve employees are linked to violence and aggression which is broadly classified as either "physical assaults" (non-consensual physical contact) or "verbal / non-physical aggression" in nature (figures taken from 2016/17 academic year - down 1% from 2015/16). This may be due to the amount of schools converting to academy status who no longer report incidents via the LA online reporting system.

Almost all received reports of violence and aggression involve school pupils as the perpetrator of which 20% (statistics from 2016/2017) of these come from special schools. It has been identified from the statistics of incident reported via the online incident reporting system that the Teaching Assistant role is where the majority of assaults are aimed at.

The majority of reported physical assaults occur when a pupil suddenly reacts to a particular situation in school (e.g. disciplinary measures used or a change of routine leading to anxiety) with very few being described as pre-meditated actions. The vast majority of injuries sustained are relatively minor and only require first aid but the psychological impact of physical or verbal aggression is not recorded. It should also be noted that whilst the level of **under-reporting cannot be quantified, it could be significant.**

Legal requirements

Employers have various legal obligations (Health & Safety at Work act, RIDDOR, INDG69) in relation to violence at work as it affects their employees and must;

- ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of their employees
- assess the risks to employees, including the need to protect them from exposure to reasonably foreseeable violence, and make arrangements for their health and safety
- notify the enforcing authority in the event of an accident at work to any employee resulting in death, specified injury or incapacity for normal work for seven or more consecutive days; this includes any act of non-consensual physical violence (within the County Council this role is performed by the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Team – see accident / incident reporting procedure)
- Inform and consult with employees in good time on matters relating to their health and safety. Employee representatives, either appointed by recognised trade unions or elected by colleagues, may make representations to their employer on matters affecting the health and safety of those they represent

Whilst the above only refers to the legal obligations towards employees, schools also have responsibility for the health, safety and welfare at work of ASL's and should therefore ensure that they are afforded the same provisions as described for employees.

What needs to be done about it?

An effective method of managing the risk of violence and aggression in all its forms needs to be established and the HSE recommends a four stage process. Governing Bodies and heads are responsible for the following;

- Stage 1 Find out if you have a problem
- Stage 2 Decide what action to take
- Stage 3 Take action
- Stage 4 Check what you have done

Stages 1 and 2 are completed by carrying out a risk assessment and guidance on this aspect and the process as a whole is provided in the HSE publication “Violence at work – a guide for employers” (see Further information section) but it is important to remember that these four stages are not a one-off set of actions. For risk assessment advice, guidance and training contact the [Health, Safety & Wellbeing Team](#). The checklist provided will aid schools to produce their V&A risk assessment. If stage 4 shows that there is still a problem then the process should be repeated again.

If the risk of violence and aggression is to be managed successfully. It is important to show that there is commitment at the top of the organisation. The Governing Body and Senior Management / Leadership Team (This should involve all staff and Trade Union Representatives) are advised to produce a clear policy statement, including a statement of their views and the actions proposed to be taken to tackle violence and aggression at work. This will show that they consider the risk of violence to be a serious matter.

The statement will need, in particular, to give clear commitments to supporting employees and ASL’s who have been subject to violence and aggression and to taking positive action to minimise identified risks. This will also demonstrate that efforts are being made to improve the organisational well-being of the school.

As a guide, the statement of intent may include;

- a commitment to introduce measures for reducing the risk of violence at work
- a commitment to ensure that the issue of violence at work and how it is locally managed is included within the induction process for all new staff
- a declaration of full support for people who have been assaulted or who have suffered verbal abuse
- School employees and ASL’s must use the online reporting system and reassurances that those who report incidents are acting responsibly and professionally
- confirmation that all reported incidents of violence will be investigated and all assaults will be reported, by a senior manager who will then determine whether further action is required e.g. reporting to the police
- Confirmation that legal guidance is available via the County Council’s [Employee Assistance Programme](#) (EAP) system.
- a commitment to send a letter, where appropriate, to people who make threats or verbally abuse employees in any way, warning them that legal action may be taken

- a commitment to periodically review with employees the arrangements put in place (at least annually)

Reporting incidents

If a physical assault, verbal abuse or threat (in any form) does occur to a school employee or ASL, it is essential to formally record the details using the [LGSS online incident reporting system](#) which is available on the Schools Health and Safety webpage (link provided under “Further sources of information, guidance and support”). Employees can report an incident via the online reporting system but must ensure that they put the headteacher details in the report so that they are aware of the incident.

Please note that the opening page of the online system gives an option to choose “Any incident involving a person (not verbal abuse)” or “Verbal abuse / Threat / Anti-social behaviour” and therefore physical assaults should be reported using the first option.

Hate Crime

Some incidents may be termed a “hate crime” or “hate incident” if they involve hostility or prejudice towards a person’s perceived:

- Race, colour, ethnic origin or nationality
- Religion or faith
- Sexual orientation
- Disability or Learning Disability
- Gender Identity and Transgender issues

If an individual considers that a hate crime has been committed, it is important that they report it to the Police and follow it up at a school level. The [LGSS online incident reporting system](#) can be used to record the details of what has happened but this should be in addition to the separate and official hate crime / incident report.

Key aspects checklist

To assist schools in determining their progress in managing the risk of violence and aggression, a generic checklist for key aspects has been produced and is separately available on the Schools Health and Safety webpage.

Further sources of information, guidance and support

A variety of information, guidance and support that relates to “violence and aggression” is available from the County Council and other external bodies. It is recommended that schools use these sources as appropriate to their local circumstances:

- The [Schools Health and Safety webpage](#) for generic health and safety guidance on many issues including managing violence and aggression (this and related documents), accident / incident reporting, lone working, risk assessment procedures, wellbeing and stress management
- HSE guidance on work-related violence including the leaflet “Violence at work – a guide for employers”: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/violence/index.htm>
- [Employee Assistance Programme](#) (EAP) for Cambridgeshire County Council employees: Tel: 0800 030 5182.
- Trade Unions / Professional Bodies usually provide information and support for their members on this issue.
- Government Equality and Diversity guidance
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education/about/equality-and-diversity>
- [Cambridgeshire Race Equality and Diversity Service](#) (CREDS) 01223 703882
- Reporting accidents to the Local Authority
www.reportincident.co.uk/cambridgeshire
- Citizens Advice <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/law-and-courts/legal-system/>