



**GMB** **UNION** **GUIDE**  
Violence in schools



GMB has many thousands of members working in schools, providing a range of essential services. While this type of work can be extremely rewarding, any job which requires contact with the general public brings risks. School support Staff can often face aggressive or violent behaviour. They may be sworn at, threatened or even attacked, and the aggression can come from both adults and children.

## **WHAT IS VIOLENCE AND WHO IS AFFECTED?**

The government agency responsible for workplace health and safety is the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). They define work-related violence as:

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

This includes insults, threats, or physical or psychological aggression exerted by people from outside the organisation against worker. There can be racial, sexual or other discriminatory elements to the violence.

Workers in the education sector can be targeted because they are seen as representing the institution or system. There are a number of different groups who may instigate violence:

- Pupils;
- Former Pupils;
- Parents;
- Visitors;
- Intruders

It is not just teachers who experience violence at work. Teaching assistants, premises staff, cleaners, cooks, secretaries, and other support personnel all face abuse, threats and aggression.

HSE statistics show that verbal abuse and threats are the most common types of incidents and that physical assaults are comparatively rare. However, no-one should have to face such behaviour as they go about their work.

*Violence to workers is never the individual problem of the person involved. It is an occupational safety and health issue and should be dealt with at the organisational level.* All employers have a legal responsibility to tackle workplace violence and aggression and a duty of care towards their staff, and it is absolutely a hazard which can and must be managed.

## THE CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLENCE

Violence has particularly severe consequences in the education sector, as it affects not just victim(s), but also those in the same environment – other staff, children and young adults. The consequences of violence are not just physical, and can be severe. They include:

- Physical harm;
- Stress;
- Emotional trauma;
- Feelings of powerlessness;
- Demotivation and feeling unvalued

If violent incidents are tolerated, and are not investigated; or those performing the violence are not subject to some kind of penalty, the consequences for the employer organisation can include:

- Poor morale and culture;
- Poor working environment for both staff and pupils;

- Higher staff turnover;
- Increased absenteeism and sickness absence;
- Higher insurance costs

Violence against any member of staff should be dealt with consistently, regardless of whether they are a head teacher, teacher or any member of support staff. Whoever the victim of violence is the penalty should be the same

## WHAT DOES THE LAW SAY?

Health and safety law states that all employers should have a clearly defined statement of any potential risks including those that their employees might face from violence. The statement should spell out what action the employer proposes to take to reduce this risk.

In addition to this there are a number of laws which relate to violence at work. These include:

### The Health & Safety at Work Act 1974

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 places a legal duty on employers to ensure, as far as they possibly can, that their employees work in a healthy and safe environment and that their welfare is considered in any work activity.

Under the act an employer has an obligation to ensure any potential risk of violence is eliminated or controlled.

### The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999

These Regulations state that employers must carry out a risk assessment to protect employees from exposure to reasonably foreseeable violence. A risk assessment is an examination to determine what hazards exist in your workplace. A hazard is anything that could cause harm to people, including verbal or physical abuse.

Employers must then decide whether there are enough measures to protect people or whether they need to take action to eliminate or reduce the risk of the hazards that they have identified.

## **A RISK ASSESSMENT ON VIOLENCE AT WORK WILL:**

### **1. Identify hazards**

This means that an employer should look for situations arising from work where violence and aggression might occur. Examples would include dealing with parents known to be unhappy or aggressive, or dealing with children with known temperament or behavioural issues. Your employer should consult you about this and should check the accident book and any near-miss or incident reporting. A GMB incident reporting form is included at the end of this booklet.

### **2. Find out which workers could be harmed, and how this might happen**

Any employee who may have a vulnerable job or be placed in a potentially dangerous situation should be identified. This applies as much to teaching assistants, premises staff, cleaners, office staff and kitchen staff as it does to teachers. Everyone who works at the school should be considered, with no exceptions.

### **3. Evaluate the risks arising from the hazards and decide whether existing precautions are adequate or what more needs to be done**

The employer must look at the potential for a verbal or physical assault, and then put in place measures to eliminate or reduce the risk so that harm is unlikely.

Measures that employers should consider could include:

- Ensuring that staff numbers are sufficient during breaks and meal times. Ratios for the numbers of midday supervisors can only be decided by risk assessment;
- Providing security if staff have to work until late at night;
- Changing shift patterns so that no-one works alone;
- Providing a way of quickly raising the alarm if a serious incident occurs or seems likely;

- Better lighting, to eliminate potential dark areas where poor behaviour can occur;
- Adapting the environment, if possible, to reduce the risk to employees, such as providing CCTV in known hotspots;
- Giving training and information for staff in organising work so that the risk of violence is reduced;
- Providing training and information in how to deal with violent situations

#### **4. Record the measures that are being taking to prevent violence in their work place**

This plan must be written down in organisations of five or more people. It should be communicated to all staff who may be at risk, so everyone should be aware of the policy and plan.

#### **5. Review the findings of the risk assessment**

This should be done periodically, and should take into account any new information or circumstances that employers might need to change or improve their policy if necessary. This will primarily be after an incident or near miss occurs; after any investigation takes place; or after a serious incident in another school which provokes a national policy change.

### **Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977**

Employers must consult with GMB Safety Representatives on all of the above steps. GMB Safety Reps may take up any issues of concern under these Regulations on any aspect of violence that concerns the health and safety of employees, including stress from the fear of violence.

GMB Safety Representatives have the legal power to take up issues relating to violence at work – and can help YOU.

## The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) 2013

Under RIDDOR, any violent incident which requires the victim to take more than 7 days off work must be reported to the relevant enforcing authority – usually the HSE. These can then be investigated by HSE Inspectors if they are particularly serious or if there is a pattern of reports from a single school. In practice though, it is rare for Inspectors to intervene unless the incident has been extremely serious.

### WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE THREATENED OR HARASSED



- Try to stay as calm as you can.** You are not alone in dealing with the issue, and the GMB is there to help and support you.
- Don't try to handle the situation alone.** If you possibly can, get help from your supervisor or manager, or another colleague. There is strength in numbers and a second presence can help to give any witness statements needed if the incident needs to be investigated.
- If a supervisor or manager is present, they must **explain that threatening or aggressive behaviour is not tolerated,** whether it is from a child or an adult. Disciplinary action should be mentioned, and in the case of adults and non-pupils, they should be asked to leave the school, and the Police should be called if the aggressive or threatening behaviour continues or escalates.
- Tell GMB about what has happened.** If you have a GMB safety rep on site, speak to them. Otherwise contact your branch of local office.





- ❑ Report the incident. Every school should have a recording and reporting system. Always record (in the accident book) and report to your line manager.
- ❑ Always immediately report any school related threats or issues that occur beyond the school boundaries.
- ❑ Always immediately report if you see any suspicious person, non-authorised person or anyone who has previously behaved aggressively or threatening on school premises.

## **WHAT MANAGEMENT SHOULD DO IF AN INCIDENT OCCURS:**

It is vital to have well-understood procedures to follow if a violent incident occurs. The crucial thing is to prevent further harm to the victim, and ensure that support is provided as quickly as possible.

The key elements of any procedure are that:

- The victim of violence, or anyone who has witnessed violence, is not left alone in the hours after the events - nor expected to carry on with their duties;
- Senior management must become involved, be sympathetic, and support the victim;
- Psychological support and counselling should be provided to the victim both immediately and later on in the event of post-traumatic stress;
- The victim must be given the time and support needed to ensure that the incident is properly and fully reported;
- GMB Health and Safety Representatives, Workplace Organisers or branch officials; any health & safety committee, and other workers must be informed;
- Risk assessments must be reviewed to identify any additional measures that are needed.
- Absence for a work-related incident should not be considered towards sickness reviews.

## **GETTING ACTION**

There are a number of simple steps that your employer can take to eliminate or reduce the risk arising from violence. The GMB 'Violence at Work' Checklist is provided later in this booklet, and can be used to check the standards in your workplace and identify areas for improvement.

## Policies and Procedures

Employers should set out clear procedures to prevent violence. These might include:



- Having a clear violence prevention policy, which is prominently displayed and which all staff, parents, pupils and visitors are aware of;
- Ensure staff levels are appropriate to the task and the time of day;
- Inform staff of the procedures;
- Measures to tackle violence should be part of every health and safety course that is run and should be treated as a standing item on the Safety Committee agenda or LA committees;
- Establish emergency procedures i.e. on what staff should do, where they should go; emergency telephone numbers etc.;
- Rotate high risk jobs where practicable;
- Ensure that no-one works alone in potential high-risk situations;
- Provide personal alarms/mobile phones or 2-way radios for high risk staff;
- Provide solutions training in recognising and dealing with violence.

## Environmental Measures

Workplace design can help prevent or reduce violence. Employers should consider the following suggestions (where relevant):



- Clear visibility and lighting for staff;
- In canteens and areas with vending machines, introduce cashless systems if possible;
- Site cash tills away from children;
- Widening or raising counter heights;
- Staff should have access to a secure location;
- The layout of public areas should be bright, well decorated, and have seating;



- Bright lighting around the building and removal of any potential cover for assailants;
- Install screens where staff are most at risk, such as reception desks or cash offices; and
- Monitor high risk entrances, exits and delivery points

### Security Systems

Some schools employ security staff if the risk assessment identifies they may be needed. CCTV should be considered if there is a high risk of violence to staff. The use of CCTV however should be carefully planned and consulted upon, **and should not be used to monitor staff behaviour. Staff should be made aware that CCTV is in use and for what purpose.**



## Training

Training should be used so that all workers know what procedures and policies exist to prevent violence at the workplace. The emphasis must be on preventing violence, rather than tackling it.



The employer should use training to gain knowledge of their employees' experiences and thoughts of how to prevent violence. This should apply across the whole of the workforce on site, not just teaching staff and should be accredited, up to date and conducted by specialist training providers.

Trainers should provide certificates that trainees are competent to restrain should that prove necessary as a last resort.

## SPECIFIC CAUSES OF CONCERN

### Lone Working

There may be occasions when staff in schools or college have to work alone on site. This will usually be out of hours – either before or after the school day – or out of term time.

People who work alone can be particularly vulnerable to violence. The law states that employers must assess the risk of lone working, and where it cannot safely be carried out, put in place arrangements for help or back up.

Employers will also need to give some thought to lone workers as to how they will be supervised and what procedures they have in place should the member of staff become ill, have an accident or if there is an emergency. This is especially important for those working alone on a regular basis, such as premises staff.

Keeping in touch with lone workers is essential. It is crucial that employers provide a mechanism whereby they can continually remain in communication with lone workers.

The GMB believes that employers should consider providing all lone workers with a mobile phone or a panic alarm so that they can call for help at any time. Employers should also consider introducing systems so that the staff's whereabouts are known at all times and staff are required to contact a base or office at regular intervals.

Taking no action is not an option for employers, and ensuring that two-way communication can take place is essential for ensuring that lone workers have some protection from the risk of violence.

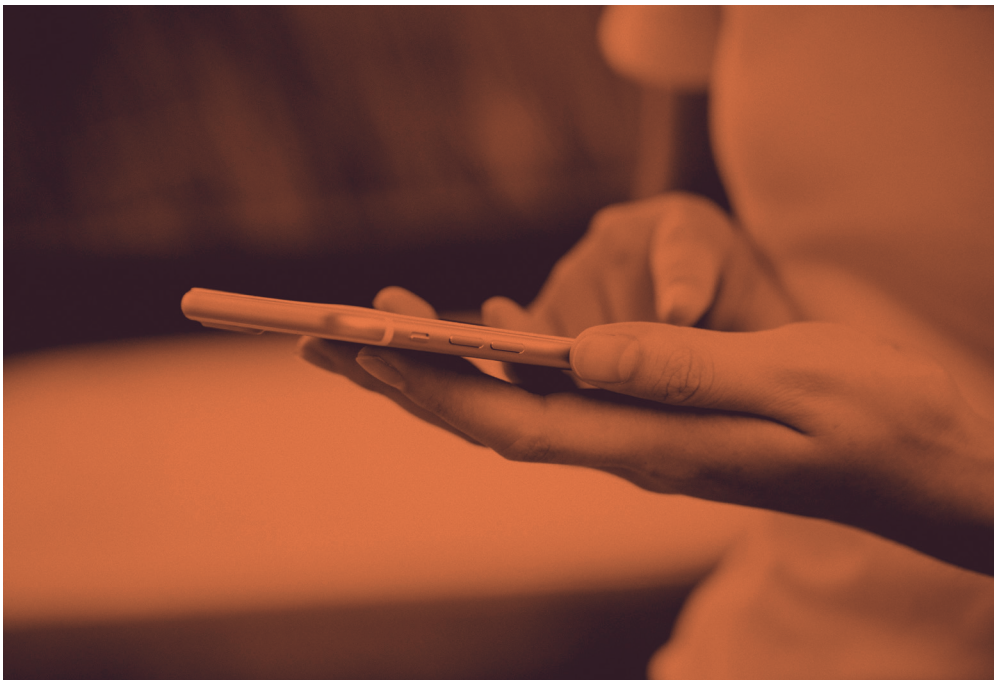
### Home visits

Making home visits is a particular area of concern and GMB recommends working in twos. Any role which involves visiting homes should be assessed for the risk of violence, particularly if this is an unusual or infrequent activity.

The assessment should include as much information on the person or area as possible, including any past history of violence from the child, their parents or their relatives. Information from other agencies, such as the police, should also be used where it is possible to obtain it.

If home visits cannot be avoided employers should consider the following:

- Initial contact should be in a public area, such as an office, before any home visit is made;
- Staff should be fully briefed on the person or area that they are going to visit;
- Staff should be trained in strategies to prevent violence;
- The provision of personal alarms or mobile phones;
- A system of communication with colleagues, reporting back to base, or the monitoring of staff whereabouts;
- A system of accompanied visits, with a security escort if necessary in the most potentially serious or difficult cases





## 1. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- Has a policy on violence with trade union input, usually called behaviour management, been negotiated?
  - Is the policy prominently displayed and available to all staff?
- Are students and parents made aware of policies on violence, discriminatory language and behaviour, and bullying and harassment - and the consequences of them?
  - Are staff, parents, and pupils made aware of their rights and responsibilities?
- Does the risk assessment fully reflect the risk of violence in the workplace?
- Are the risk assessments made available to relevant members of staff?
- Are staff made aware of how to report incidents and escalate issues?
- Are unusual risks such as lone working and home visits considered?
- Is there a health and safety committee or other consultative body that has oversight of violence risks and management?
- Are procedures in place for when an incident occurs?
  - Are they regularly reviewed?
- Is record-keeping well managed and kept up to date?
- Are records reviewed to identify patterns or risks?
- Are staffing levels in relation to the number of pupils sufficient to ensure the safety of staff?



- Have safe work practices been adopted, such as:
    - escorting co-workers;
    - late-night working;
    - supervision of pupils by two members of staff wherever possible?
  - Are support structures such as counselling services in place if incidents occur?
    - Is there provision of educational psychological services for advice and counselling?
  - Are visitors accompanied and supervised whilst on the school premises?
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## **2. WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN**

- Can lighting levels be increased in dark areas where there may be a risk of violence?
  - Can workplace access be monitored and controlled to allow for screening of visitors?
  - Can any tools equipment and/or furniture that could be used as weapons be replaced?
    - Has the risk of assault from such items been assessed, and the risk reduced to the lowest level achievable?
  - Can alarms and CCTV systems be introduced?
    - If these are already in place, are they positioned correctly?
    - Can they be upgraded or improved?
  - Can a positive physical environment be provided, through colour scheme, temperature control, and music?
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### 3. TRAINING

- Are staff trained on how to respond to threats and violent behaviour?
  - Is training provided on recognising warning signs for potentially violent behaviour?
  - Has the training been provided by an accredited external provider?
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# VIOLENCE AND ABUSE REPORTING FORM



This form should be used to report all instances of violence and abuse, whether physical or verbal, that are directed to anyone working on our behalf. This includes abuse and threats made over the telephone. Reports must be made as soon as possible after the incident.

**The victim must be given time away from their duties for this report form to be completed.**

**Copies to 1) the victim 2) held on file**

**Victim's Name:**

**Victim's Address:**

**Victim's Contact Telephone Number:**

**Victim's Email Address:**

**Date of incident:**

**Time of Incident:**

**Precise address and location of incident:**

Name(s) of the person(s) being violent or abusive (if known):

Description of the person(s) being violent or abusive:

**Is CCTV footage available?**

YES     NO

**If telephone abuse or threat, is a recording available?**

YES     NO

**Nature of Incident:**

- Verbal Abuse
- Stalking
- Destruction of Property
- Physical Assault: Hitting, fighting, pushing, or shoving
- Armed Assault - Use of object as weapon
- Armed Assault - Use of weapon such as gun, knife, etc.
- Sexual Harassment
- Other (specify) e.g spitting, abuse on social media

**Verbal Abuse?**

YES     NO

Please give details:

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**Physical Violence?**

YES     NO

Please give details, including any weapons used:

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Please describe any injuries suffered – give as much detail as you can:

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**Contact details of any witnesses:**

Name:

Contact details:


**Was first-aid required?**

YES     NO

**Was an ambulance called?**

YES     NO

**Were the Police called?**

YES     NO

Completed by: \_\_\_\_\_ on date: \_\_\_\_\_

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**FOLLOW-UP: FOR INTERNAL USE ONLY**

Name and contact details of person investigating incident:  
(Report must be attached on completion)

Name:

Contact details:

Date investigation commenced:

Date:

Has a referral to an Employee Assistance Programme been made?

YES     NO

Name of responsible person and date of referral:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Has a referral for counselling been made?

YES     NO

Name of responsible person and date of referral:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Have the outcomes of follow-up action been communicated to the victim?

YES     NO

Name of responsible person and date of communication:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Follow up action taken to reduce risk of repeat occurrence:

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Completed by: \_\_\_\_\_ on date: \_\_\_\_\_

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