

**Model**

**Violence at Work Policy**

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# 1 General principles

* 1. [Name of employer]and [UNISON Branch]recognise the appalling toll that violence in the workplace can take on staff and the services that they deliver.
  2. In line with the Health and Safety Executive definition, this policy defines violence at work in terms of incidents in which “an employee is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work” and is intended to cover incidents committed by any anyone external to the organisation (such as service users, visitors or contractors) against staff.
  3. The behaviour covered includes verbal and physical abuse, threatening behaviour, offensive language, discriminatory or prejudiced remarks / gestures, obscene gestures, physical attacks and stalking,
  4. This policy recognises that, in addition to physical injury, violence can cause anxiety, stress and depression among workers, with damaging consequences for morale, absence rates, productivity and staff retention.
  5. This policy is built on the foundation that violence in the workplace will not be tolerated and decisive action will be taken to protect staff. To achieve this, the following sections of the policy set out rigorous steps that will be maintained to reduce the likelihood / severity of violence in the workplace and the procedures that will be adopted to deal with incidents.
  6. Throughout the discharge of this policy, management will work jointly with the trade union(s) to ensure that the views of staff are incorporated in the shaping of policies to deal with workplace violence.
  7. This policy concerns violence against staff by anyone external to the organisation. Internal incidents between staff are dealt with separately under the Bullying and Harassment policy [the appropriate reference here may be a Dignity at Work policy and / or specific policies such as on sexual harassment].
  8. This policy builds on the broad principles set out in the Violence at Work Charter [for a copy, go to this UNISON website link <https://www.unison.org.uk/at-work/community/key-issues/end-violence-work/end-violence-work-charter/>. The charter can form a useful stepping stone to the more detailed policy set out in this document].
  9. This policy will be reviewed on at least an annual basis, to adapt to changes and incorporate improvements from lessons learned in the discharge of the policy.

# Measures to minimise violent incidents

* 1. A proactive approach will be taken to eliminating or minimising the factors that can contribute toward violence in the workplace, built around the five steps recommended by the Health and Safety Executive:
* Look for hazards;
* Decide who might be harmed and how;
* Evaluate the risks and decide on precautions;
* Record the findings and implement them;
* Review the assessment and update if necessary.

2.2 A full risk assessment will take place across the organisation on at least an annual basis, but where incidents occur, these will prompt a review of whether lessons can be learnt that should amend dimensions of the risk assessment. All incidents will be recorded to enable patterns to be assessed and acted upon.

2.3 In conducting risk assessments, particular attention will be paid to groups that are vulnerable to violence by virtue of the nature of their work, such as:

* Lone workers or staff working in isolated locations;
* Staff handling money or expensive equipment;
* Staff who deal with people who are frequently distressed, on medication or have a history of violence;
* Staff who frequently deal with conflict situations or operate in pressurised environments;
* Staff who work at hours when few other employees are around, such as night shifts.
  1. In conducting risk assessments, consideration will be given to the additional likelihood of violence directed at certain groups within the workforce eg avoiding placing an inexperienced worker in situations where skilful handling is needed to avoid the escalation of conflict.
  2. In conducting risk assessments, methods for mitigating vulnerability will consider the physical environment, use of equipment and working arrangements. By way of example, changes may include:
* Adjustments that reduce the opportunity for service users to mount a physical assault, such as barriers between staff and service users, reduction in office furniture that can be used as a weapon, escape routes for staff;
* Adjustments that reduce tension in the working environment, such as room design in terms colour and light, noise reduction, clear information screens, improved staffing levels to reduce waiting times or call-back options for telephone systems;
* Adjustments that help deter or respond to violence, such as providing staff with personal alarms, CCTV monitoring, notices reminding service users that staff must be treated with respect or visibility of security staff
  1. As appropriate to the role, staff will be able to access training in handling interaction with service users, handling conflict situations and recognising warning signs. Where appropriate, this may be supplemented by training in basic techniques for physical defence.
  2. In recognition that staff can need encouragement to report incidents, sometimes because they can view an incident as their failure or because they have come to view incidents as an unavoidable part of the job, a communication programme will be directed to staff that sets out:
* The importance that the organisation attaches to incidents of violence;
* The sympathy with which reports will be treated;
* The commitment of the organisation to taking appropriate action to deal with incidents;
* A commitment that, in the case of incidents of sufficient severity, the organisation will prosecute assailants if there are grounds to believe that prosecution will be successful and the case is not pursued by the Crown Prosecution Service.
  1. Clarity will be given to managers and staff over the procedure to be followed in the event of an incident, as set out in the following section.
  2. In drawing up this procedure, contact will be made with the local police to put in place clear arrangements and an understanding to facilitate prompt response when incidents occur.

# Procedure for handling of violent incidents

3.1 This section of the policy sets out the procedures to be followed by managers and staff in the event of a violent incident. The appropriate response clearly depends on the nature and severity of the incident, however, the guidelines below offer immediate and longer term steps for the different forms of incident.

* 1. During and immediately after an incident
     1. In the event of physical violence or the immediate danger of physical violence, immediately call for assistance from internal security and / or police [detail method and contacts for achieving this here] and seek to withdraw to an agreed place of safety [detail of agreed locations].
     2. In the event of verbal violence, call for assistance from line manager [detail method and contacts for achieving this]. The manager will issue a warning to the service user that if they persist in any form of verbal abuse, sanction will be implemented [list agreed set of sanctions].
     3. Where any form of physical violence has occurred, the manager will call for on-site first aid or medical assistance where any incident extends beyond minor injury [detail first aid locations and contacts, alongside contacts for gaining rapid medical assistance].
     4. Where feasible, the line manager will hold a private discussion as soon as possible after the incident with the member of staff to assess the appropriate immediate response –options will include allowing the member of staff to take a break, allocating alternative duties over the rest of the day, sending the member of staff home to recover.
     5. Consideration will be given to whether to notify a partner or relative depending on the nature of the incident and wishes of the member of staff.
     6. If the member of staff is judged to be in an appropriate condition, the incident reporting form will be completed (as per the appendix to this policy) to establish the following key information:
* An account of what happened;
* The circumstances in which the incident took place, including details of the victim, the assailant and any witnesses, alongside details of the location;
* The outcome of the incident in terms of impact on the worker.
  1. Subsequent to the incident
     1. A private debrief will take place between the line manager and member of staff on the day after the incident whenever possible or on the nearest subsequent day if that cannot be achieved.
     2. If it was not possible to complete the incident reporting form in the immediate aftermath of the incident, this will now be completed.
     3. The private debrief will focus on reaching agreement between the manager and member of staff on the following issues:
* Seeking any further medical assistance that may be necessary, [including assistance through the Employee Assistance Programme] in dealing with physical injuries or counselling over the psychological impact on a member of staff;
* Making adjustments to help the member of staff cope with the impact of the incident, such as short or long-term changes to the employee’s place of work or the nature of their duties;
* The possibility of setting a series of follow-up meetings to discuss progress;
* Drawing lessons from the incident that can feed into risk assessment in terms of training, the physical environment, equipment and work organisation to deter future incidents.
  + 1. The member of staff will be entitled to be accompanied by a trade union representative at these meetings.
    2. Any time off as a result of the incident will be classified as special leave and therefore will not be counted against the employee as sickness absence.

# Follow-up action against violent service users

4.1 Where a physical assault has taken place, the default position will be as follows:

* With the exception of circumstances where it is clear that prosecution would not be in the public interest, [Name of organisation] will co-operate fully with the police to provide evidence to facilitate prosecution by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS); [The wording of this section may require amendment where the prosecution of an assailant is less likely, for example where the nature of an organisation’s work means that it regularly deals with service users with challenging and violent behaviour, and the bolstering of section 2.6 on staff trained to deal with violent incidents is more appropriate. However, there should usually be a default assumption in favour of prosecution to counter the tendency of some employers to put pressure on staff not to pursue the issue.]
* Where the CPS decides not to prosecute and [name of organisation] receives legal advice that there would be reasonable grounds to believe that prosecution would be successful, [name of organisation] will take legal action against the assailant;
* The member of staff will be permitted reasonable paid time off to participate in legal proceedings;
  1. In response to any form of violence, the following options will be available to managers depending on the nature and severity of the incident:
* Ban the assailant from entering [name of organisation]’s premises for a prescribed period and take security measures to ensure that this is enforced;
* Withdraw provision of services to the assailant;
* Prescribe terms on which services are provided, such as insisting that all contact is made through a specified manager;
* Issue a warning that any repeat of the incident will result in an escalation of sanction against them to one of the options above.

# Recording of violent incidents

* 1. In accordance with the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR), all incidents involving physical violence against employees that cause major injury (as set out in regulation four) or absence from work for more than seven days will be recorded and reported to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), while any absence from work for more than three days and less than eight days will be recorded without the need for reporting to the HSE.
  2. In accordance with the Social Security (Claims and Payments) Regulations 1979, all physical injuries (including those classified as minor) that result from a violent incident will be recorded in the accident book.
  3. Beyond these legal requirements, [name of organisation] will maintain a record of all incidents regardless of whether the consequences are limited to physical injury.

# Appendix - Reporting Form

**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:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| □ Physical Assault –  Hitting, fighting, pushing, spitting or shoving | □ Armed Assault –  Use of weapon such as gun, knife, etc. |
| □ Armed Assault –  Use of object as weapon | □ Verbal Abuse |
| □ Stalking | □ Sexual Harassment |
| □ Destruction of Property | □ Other (specify below) |

**Please describe any injuries suffered:**

**Please describe the incident** (*Include what happened, where, who was involved, what you heard, saw, etc)****:***

**Contact details of any witnesses:**

***Name: Contact Details:***

***Name: Contact Details:***

**Was first-aid required? YES/NO Was an ambulance called for? YES/NO**

**Were the police called for? YES/NO**

**-----------------------------------Follow-up: For Internal Use Only-----------------------------------------**

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

*Date investigation commenced:*

**Has the relevant safety representative been notified? YES/NO**

*Name of safety representative and date of referral:*

**Has a referral to an Employee Assistance Programme been made? YES/NO**

*Name of responsible person and date of referral:*

**Has a referral for counselling been made? YES/NO**

*Name of responsible person and date of referral:*

**Have the outcomes of follow-up action been communicated to the victim? YES/NO**

*Name of responsible person and date of communication:*