

# work smart, work safe

combating violence against care staff



I could see  
her starting  
to get  
angry

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## violence in the workplace is everyone's problem

Violence, threats and abuse of staff and volunteers in the workplace are unacceptable. Although incidents are still far too common, they are not a part of the job and must be prevented and prepared for, to minimise impact on you and your colleagues.

### working together for a safer workplace

Making sure this happens is both your responsibility and that of the organisation you work for yourself. Employers, managers, employees, volunteers and people who use services can work together to provide safer practice and safe places to work.

#### The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines work-related violence as:

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

This includes sexual and racial harassment, and threats to family and property.



# your employer has the primary responsibility

To protect you, your employer must provide:

- clear assessments of the risk to you from the individuals, families and groups you work with
- a statement of the organisation's policy that sets out clear risk reduction procedures that fit your job and where you work
- clear procedures about what to do when you think there is a risk; what to do if an encounter is escalating into a possible violent incident; what to do after an incident; and what follow-up and support there will be
- training that is appropriate for your role, including your responsibilities for colleagues and people who use services
- a working environment that ensures your health, safety and well-being (and that of all employees and volunteers)
- support in dealing with your concerns about threats, abuse and violence
- procedures for making sure that precautions work and can be reviewed
- support after an incident for everyone involved, to help people recover from the experience
- a commitment to action to be taken by the employer against the perpetrator including considering removal of service.

Skills for Care has published an updated employer's guide checklist, providing detailed guidance and examples of all above.

You'll find more information at  
[www.skillsforcare.org.uk/combatingviolence](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/combatingviolence)

# you have responsibilities too

To fully protect yourself in the workplace, you should familiarise yourself with your organisation's procedures, and implement them.

Where applicable this includes the procedures that cover working away from your base or with colleagues from other organisations.

Whatever your job, you need to be clear about how you should raise any concerns with colleagues and managers. They will be able to provide relevant advice.

You should also be aware of what triggers violence and abuse. These dangers are not considered part of your job, but even when measures are put in place to reduce the risk it cannot be eradicated completely.

## be prepared

- When you think there is a risk, discuss your concerns with colleagues and managers
- Report all cases of violence and abuse
- Use local systems to check whether other professionals have flagged concerns
- Gather as much information as possible about people who use services where violence is threatened
- Share information about potentially violent users of services with colleagues, your manager, other departments and other organisations
- Attend training organised for you.

If you're at risk of violence,  
speak to your colleagues

## questions you should ask

Use your employer's risk assessment procedures and ask yourself the following questions:

- Is there a history of violence?
- Do you need to visit the person using services in their house or is there an alternative?
- Should you be visiting in pairs?
- Do you need to consider whether a man or a woman works with a particular person?
- Do you need additional support when visiting the home, such as a line manager or a police officer?
- How might the person using the service interpret what you are doing?
- Are they frightened or under the influence of drugs or alcohol?
- Are you limiting the choice of the person using the service or removing or restricting their freedom?
- Are you withdrawing a service?
- Are you saying 'no' to something they want to do or something they think will make a big difference to them?
- Are you sharing information with colleagues to help keep them safe?
- Are you recording thoroughly what the assessment is and the plan for managing the risks?
- Is the risk of violence affecting your ability to assess or monitor risks to children or other adult members of the family?
- Are you regularly re-assessing the risks to yourself and others with your manager and revising the assessment when required?

## the importance of planning

Plan what you and others will do in the event of a violent or abusive incident. The plan should:

- result from discussions with your managers and colleagues, including people outside your organisation if they are, or may become, involved
- whenever possible, be made with people who use services and carers
- have a strategy for coping with an incident where there is a known risk. You could cover:
  - your organisation's contact arrangements
  - your movements and expected return time
  - a safe place to meet
  - who to involve
  - ways of responding to violence, particularly the response to physical contact and what you think is a safe distance
  - any equipment you may need, such as a mobile phone, attack alarm or sim card alert – but do not rely exclusively on these as they are only additional preventive and protective measures to be applied within the risk assessment process
  - an exit strategy for you and others who may be at risk.



**expect the unexpected:**

Your employer should have procedures that staff and volunteers must follow in the event of an unpredictable or unexpected incident. Your employer should tell you about these procedures and you should familiarise yourself with them and remind yourself of them from time to time.

Preparation is never wasted



# reducing risk

The first step in reducing risk is to ensure managers, staff and volunteers fully understand the policy and what is required of them. Make sure clear procedures are in place and followed if an alarm is raised, whether in an office or care setting, or from a lone worker.

## Managers should:

- ensure workers have access to adequate technology (such as alarms and panic buttons) but that these are not solely relied upon to keep people safe
- understand the importance of their role and ensure the organisation's policies and procedures are complied with, even when resources are stretched
- provide clear, jargon-free information.

## Staff should:

- have a confident, calm, professional approach that demonstrates understanding, empathy and respect
- have received adequate training in recognising mental health issues which may result in violent or aggressive behaviours
- understand how their own behaviour can escalate or diffuse a situation, using methods that can reduce anxiety, distress or anger among others
- dress appropriately for the client group, to prevent intimidation
- know the procedures and how to use them when a situation gets out of control
- be respected for their experience, expertise, history and culture
- get involved in planning safe practice, environments and training.

## review and revise

Don't forget to review incidents, learn from them and re-plan for the future. With systems in place to check learning from incidents is used and you and your colleagues can easily get support, you can minimise the chances of a similar incident occurring again.

# after an incident

## what your organisation should do

**If a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work, your organisation should follow these steps:**

### Immediately:

- implement your post-incident procedures eg. to gather information about the incident, ensure all staff are safe and inform the police
- provide immediate appropriate support to everyone involved – this may include medical treatment.

### As soon as possible:

- discuss with you:
  - the sort of support you need – everyone reacts differently to incidents, so support should be tailored accordingly
  - who else, if anyone, needs to be informed to keep them safe
  - the lessons for the worker, their colleagues, the organisation and any other organisations involved
  - what will be done and how progress will be checked.

### They should also:

- review the risk assessment and make any necessary changes to the procedures and support to reduce the risk of further violence or abuse
- liaise with the police regarding possible criminal proceedings being brought against the perpetrator.

### Later down the line:

- where criminal proceedings are brought against the perpetrator you should be fully supported throughout the court process
- consider the long term impact of the incident on the worker – this may require possible re-training or redeployment if you are unable to continue in your current post.
- consider any wider changes required to your organisation's policy and procedures.

**remember, safe practice is part of best practice**



## what you should do

- Be familiar with and use the organisation's procedures.
- Know where you can get immediate support for yourself. It is your employer's responsibility to get support for others involved.
- Don't be surprised if your reactions or other people's are different from what you expected, and be tolerant of your own and others' immediate reactions.
- Take care of yourself and contact people who will offer the support you need.
- As soon as possible, record details of the perpetrator/s and the events and expect debriefing sessions for everyone involved.
- Record and report the incident to your employer.
- Attend all further training sessions provided by your employer.
- Remember nothing will change for the better unless incidents are reported.

## the right support for you

The government expects adult social care employers to take the issue of violence against workers seriously and introduce effective measures to reduce risks and deal positively with any incidents that occur.

This guide and the other resources available from Skills for Care are designed to help employers meet these responsibilities in a very practical way.

There are also examples of policies, procedures, training and approaches to dealing with incidents available on our website [www.skillsforcare.org.uk/combatingviolence](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/combatingviolence)



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[www.skillsforcare.org.uk/combatingviolence](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/combatingviolence)

To request additional materials including posters please email [marketing@skillsforcare.org.uk](mailto:marketing@skillsforcare.org.uk)

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