

Preventing assaults and violence in schools

In order to minimize the risk of assaults and violence, schools should adopt a constructive approach which acknowledges that assaults/violence are an issue for the whole school community, not a personal issue.

Approaches to prevention include:

- Ensuring adequate supports are in place for pupils.
- Use of strategies to reduce challenging behavior.
- Ensuring that staff have access to training and professional development in managing challenging behaviour.
- Where necessary, training should include the use of safe and effective physical interventions (e.g. Management of Actual or Potential Aggression [MAPA] or Team Teach).
- Assessing access and security issues in the school building.

Schools should develop a policy which clearly provides for:

- Risk assessment.
- A cooperative approach to prevention.
- Dealing with assaults and violence.
- Reporting.
- Training and professional development of staff.

Risk assessment

An essential part of managing health and safety at work is risk assessment. There is a legal requirement on employers to do this, and to put in place measures to manage the risk of assaults and violence. This should be carried out as part of the school's health and safety policy/ statement.

The steps to risk assessment are:

1. Identify the hazard – including the risk of violence and assault and who might be at risk and how.
2. Evaluate the risk of violence and assault (severity, likelihood, frequency).
3. Put in place appropriate control measures to eliminate or minimize the risk. (How can risks be controlled so that injury is less likely and specify who actions this.)
4. Record findings and implement them. (Must be agreed and written down.)
5. Review the assessment and update if necessary, and in particular after an assault has occurred.
6. Monitor on an ongoing basis to evaluate implementation.

Advice on dealing with assaults and violence at school



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What is work related violence?

The European Health and Safety Authority (OSHA) defines work related violence as “physical violence, verbal aggression or the threat of physical violence” in the context of the workplace.

In the school context teachers have been the subject of assaults and violence carried out by pupils and others in the school community

Examples of assaults and violence in schools which have been reported to INTO include:

Physical violence

- Assault causing actual physical injury
- Use of missiles / damage to property
- Sexual assault
- Spitting
- Scratching
- Biting
- Kicking
- Punching
- Use of weapons

Non-physical violence

- Verbal abuse/shouting
- Physical posturing by a person
- Abusive phone calls, texts, emails or comments on social media
- Threatening behaviour or gestures
- Sexual or racial abuse
- Name calling
- Swearing

In the event of an assault

1. If possible, use de-escalation techniques to minimise the threat.
2. Remain as calm as possible.
3. If it is safe to do so, try to remove yourself and others from the immediate danger.
4. Summon help but if this is not possible, try to place a barrier between you and your assailant.
5. Where the assault is carried out by a young person/child, any measures that you use to protect yourself or those in your charge must be proportionate and reasonable to the situation, and in the best interests of the child/young person.

Responding to an assault

The response of school management and colleagues to an assault or incident of violence is an important factor in how the assault impacts on a teacher.

1. In the immediate aftermath, a teacher should be afforded appropriate time in a private quiet place to recover. Someone should stay with the teacher during this time.
2. Where necessary the teacher should be accompanied home or to receive medical treatment.
3. Details of the assault/incident should be recorded.
4. The assault /incident should be formally reported to the principal and employer as soon as possible.
5. Teachers should be reminded of the services of the Employee Assistance Service.

Inspire Workplace Services

Freephone: 1800 411 057 (ROI)

0800 389 5362 (NI)

Website: <https://inspirewellbeing.org/workplaces>

Email: support@inspirewellbeing.org

After an assault

If you have been subjected to a work-related assault, report the matter immediately to your principal.

- All incidents must be entered into the school's accident/incident book.
- An Incident Report Form should be filled in and given to the employer.
- Where an assault/violence is carried out by an adult, consideration should be given to reporting the matter to the Gardaí/ PSNI as appropriate.
- Where the assault/violence is carried out by a pupil, the school's Code of Behaviour should be utilised.
- A risk assessment/revised risk assessment should be carried out and appropriate action taken to prevent recurrence.
- Where a teacher is off work for more than three days because of injuries sustained due to a workplace assault/violence there is a legal requirement to report this to the Health and Safety Executive (HSENI) in NI or the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) in ROI.
- Where a teacher incurs medical expenses or other costs as a result of assault/violence in school, an application may be made to the employer for recovery of the costs.

In all cases of serious assault advice should be sought from the INTO to ensure the protection of teachers' rights.