

# work smart, work safe

combating violence against care staff



I could see  
her starting  
to get  
angry

## contents

- 03 introduction
- 05 legal obligations
- 06 your responsibilities
- 07 safeguarding and protection
- 08 reducing risk
- 09 steps after an incident
- 10 protecting lone workers
- 12 training
- 13 be prepared – a checklist
- 14 getting support

## violence in the workplace is everyone's problem

Violence against social care staff remains a major concern and it's a difficult area for employers and individuals to address. It's crucial that the issue is not ignored, as the potential consequences can go far beyond injury or stress for individuals and can affect morale and staff turnover. It can also lead to inadequate protection of vulnerable children and adults, as well as a risk of prosecution for employers if they fail to meet their responsibilities.

### 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.



## clear, practical advice from skills for care

This guide is one of a series of products developed by Skills for Care to update the materials produced by the National Taskforce on Violence against Social Care staff, originally published by the Department of Health in 2001. The initial work was supported by the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services, Local Government Employers and the Health and Safety Executive.

Designed to provide advice on key areas for employers, this guide will enable you to assess and reduce risks and to respond positively to any incidents of violence.

It's essential reading for employers of all types and sizes, from people who employ their own assistants directly, through small and medium sized independent and voluntary sector organisations, to local authorities and large national organisations.

A guide has also been produced for individual workers (staff and volunteers). It is recommended that employers use that guide in conjunction with this one and distribute it widely to raise awareness of the subject and provide specific guidance on individual responsibilities.

**To order additional copies of the work smart, work safe guide please email [marketing@skillsforcare.org.uk](mailto:marketing@skillsforcare.org.uk)**

### additional resources

There are 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)



# legal obligations

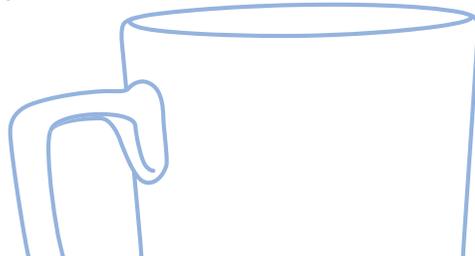
Health and safety law applies to risks from violence, just as it does to other risks from work. The main pieces of relevant legislation to be aware of are:

- **The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 (HSW Act)**  
Employers have a legal duty under this Act to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of their employees and others who may be affected by their undertaking.
- **The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999**  
Employers must consider the risks to employees and others (including the risk of reasonably foreseeable violence); identify hazards; assess risks posed; decide how to prevent or control the risks; and develop a clear management plan.
- **The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 (RIDDOR)**  
Employers must notify their enforcing authority in the event of an accident at work to any employee resulting in death, major injury or incapacity for normal work for three or more days. This includes any act of non-consensual physical violence done to a person at work.
- **Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 (a) and The Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations 1996 (b)**  
Employers must inform, and consult with, employees in good time on matters relating to their health and safety. Employee representatives, either appointed by recognised trade unions under (a) or elected under (b) may make representations to their employer on matters affecting the health and safety of those they represent.

# your key responsibilities

**As an employer, you're responsible for setting out the organisation's policy and arrangements for managing the risks arising from violence and aggression. To carry out this role effectively it's important to:**

- have clear procedures setting out the risk assessment process including initial assessment of the individual and family, and guidance on when a review is required. Workers should be fully involved in this process
- know what to do
  - when people think there is a risk
  - if an encounter is escalating into a possible violent incident
  - after an incident, including what follow-up and support there will be
- implement competent effective management and management systems
- identify how technology can be used, and the most relevant types and methods
- identify staff training needs
- identify the responsibilities individuals have towards colleagues and to service users
- create a working environment that contributes to the health, safety and well-being of employees
- provide support in dealing with concerns about threats, abuse and violence
- implement procedures for reviewing the effectiveness of risk reduction procedures and, where appropriate, revising procedures and assessments
- provide appropriate and timely support after an incident (including out of hours if required) to help the victim recover from the experience
- take action against the perpetrator.



# safeguarding and protection of vulnerable adults

This work focuses on combating violence against the adult social care workforce. These situations may challenge the ability of the social care professional to effectively carry out their safeguarding role. Where workers feel intimidated or threatened, they may be less able to assess and monitor risks to children or vulnerable adults in families they are working with.

Supervisors and managers have a particular responsibility to identify such situations and to put effective support and protection for their staff in place to enable them to meet their safeguarding responsibilities.

*Offer support  
and protection if you identify  
a violent situation*



# 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 de-escalate the situation and be familiar with 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 workers can easily get support, you can minimise the chances of a similar incident occurring again.

# what to do after an incident

**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 support to the victim and others involved – this may include medical treatment.

## As soon as possible:

- discuss with the staff member involved:
  - the sort of support they need. Everyone reacts differently to incidents, so this 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 in 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:

- if criminal proceedings take place, the worker should be supported through the court process
- consider the long term impact of the incident on the worker – this may require re-training or redeployment if they are unable to continue in their current post
- consider any wider changes required to your organisation's policy and procedures.

*remember, safe practice is part of best practice*

# lone working

Exposure to violence at work not only depends on a person's occupation but also upon the worker's circumstances and situation. Working alone often increases the worker's vulnerability – staff can face increased risks because they don't have the immediate support of colleagues in the event of an incident. This level of risk can be increased by factors such as being in someone's home, working at night or in an isolated location.

## HSE defines a lone worker as:

- someone who works by themselves without close or direct supervision.

## Lone workers include those who:

- work from a fixed base, such as one person working alone on a premises
- work separately from others on the same premises or work outside normal hours
- work away from a fixed base
- work at home
- are mobile workers.



Social care workers may belong to several of the above categories, most commonly when working away from a fixed base and as mobile workers. A large number of social care staff visit the homes of people who use services – this includes social workers, care managers and their assistants, occupational therapists and domiciliary care staff.

Employers must put specific lone worker procedures in place and ensure these are complied with, even in urgent or high pressure situations when resources may be stretched.

## Ways to protect these workers include:

- identifying key risks
- risk assessments
- providing examples of incidents
- training and information
- audits and reviews
- policy and guidance notes
- incident reporting
- charters explaining standards
- a mobile phone lone worker system (logging visits and cancelling alerts when completed)
- a personal alarm loan system
- flagging system
- police accompanying employees
- using alternative staff
- doubling-up at night
- 24 hour reception of emergency calls.

## additional resources

Domiciliary care is an area of work where a large proportion of staff work alone. Skills for Care have produced a lone worker safety guide for domiciliary care staff in partnership with UKHCA and the Care Providers Alliance. It is available at [www.skillsforcare.org.uk](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk) in the developing skills section.

**Working alone often increases  
the worker's vulnerability**

# training

Training plays a very important role in raising awareness and it has a key role in helping workers recognise potentially violent situations and developing their skills to react effectively.

It's also a good way to get staff on board with procedures, including practising what to do if they are involved in a violent incident and understanding what support is available.

By refreshing and reviewing training course content and delivery in the light of any incidents, you can ensure your staff members are ready to handle most incidents.

## is self defence the best defence?

Self defence or restraint is not recommended as the primary focus of training. This type of training should be given where job requirements and risk assessment deem it appropriate, but it should only be provided once the basic training (outlined above) has been undertaken.

## further advice from the suzy lamplugh trust

The Suzy Lamplugh Trust is the UK's national charity for personal safety and works for the benefit of everyone in society. They offer personal safety training, consultancy and a variety of products including a guide for employers and managers and a lone working directory.

**training helps staff recognise  
potentially violent situations**

# checklist for employers

**Can you answer all these questions with a clear 'yes'?**  
**If not, identify the actions required so that you can.**

### Legal:

Are you aware of your legal responsibilities in relation to violence and abuse to your workers?

### Policy:

Does your organisation have a written policy statement in relation to violence and abuse against your workers? Are managers and workers (staff and volunteers) familiar with the policy?

### Risk Assessment:

Has your organisation undertaken an assessment of the risks of violence and abuse facing your staff and volunteers? Remember you need a specific risk assessment for each situation where a concern has been raised or risk identified. Have the relevant workers been fully involved in the risk assessment process?

### Action to take:

Have you prepared an action plan to deal with any gaps identified in the risk assessment? This should cover:

- the working environment
- the person or people who use services
- other people who live with the person who uses the service or who may be present when service is provided, whether in the home or in other settings
- social care workers (staff and volunteers)
- training
- regular review.





## checklist for employers

### Post-incident responses:

Does your policy and procedure inform workers, victims, colleagues and managers about what they should do after a violent or abusive incident:

- in terms of an immediate response
- in terms of follow-up.

### Organisational culture:

Is there a positive culture across the organisation that takes staff safety seriously? Is there visible and active leadership on health and safety issues from the top of the organisation?

### Checking and reviewing agreed actions:

Are you monitoring and reviewing implementation of your action plan, and taking corrective steps where necessary? Do your procedures expect and enable managers to regularly check that your arrangements are effective and working?

## the right support for your organisation

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 available on our website [www.skillsforcare.org.uk/combatingviolence](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/combatingviolence)



## work smart, work safe

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

To request additional materials including posters and the work smart, work safe guide for staff and volunteers please email [marketing@skillsforcare.org.uk](mailto:marketing@skillsforcare.org.uk)

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