

Violence in the workplace

Work-related violence is defined by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) as 'any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work'.

This includes verbal abuse and threats as well as physical attacks.

All work related violence has serious consequences for employees and the business. Violence can lead to poor morale and a poor company image, making it more difficult to recruit and keep staff. For employees violence can cause pain, distress, anxiety or stress and even disability and death.

Those employees most at risk are those engaged in the following type of activities:

Giving a service	Caring
Education	Cash transactions
Delivery/collection	Representing authority

Managing violence effectively

Step 1 Find out if you have a problem

Identify the potential danger areas. You may think violence is not a problem at your workplace or that incidents are rare. However, your employees' view may be very different. Some employees may be reluctant to report cases of aggressive behaviour for a number of reasons, but it could be that they feel threatened or worried. Encourage employees to report incidents straight away and fully, and let them know that this is what you expect.

Step 2 Decide who might be harmed, and how

Identify which employees are at risk - those who have face-to-face contact with the public are normally the most at risk.

Identify potentially violent customers in advance so that the risks can be minimised.

Step 3 Assess the risk

Check existing arrangements, are the precautions already in place adequate or does more need to be done.

Step 4 Take action

Your policy for dealing with violence may be written into your safety policy, so that all employees are aware of it. The violence policy should include a procedure for dealing with complaints of violence at work and detail who employees should report an incident to. This will help your employees to co-operate with you, follow procedures properly and report any incidents.

Items which could form the basis of your policy include the following:

Training and information

Train your employees so that they can spot the early signs of threatening behaviour and either avoid it or cope with it. Make sure they fully understand any system you have set up. Give employees any information they might need to identify clients with a history of violence or to prepare for factors that might make violence more likely.

Handling money

Where possible, limit the amount of cash available.

Bank money more often and vary the route you take to the bank to reduce the risk of being robbed.

Security measures

Consider using video cameras, alarm systems and coded security locks on doors to keep the public out of staff areas. (If necessary, you may want to consider using security staff.) Make sure items which could be used in a physical assault are bolted down or stored away from public areas.

The environment

Provide comfortable seating, decoration and lighting in any public waiting rooms.

Keep customers informed about any delays

Employees working alone

Manage numbers of staff at the workplace to prevent people from working on their own. Try to avoid situations where employees have to work on their own, and, if this is not possible (for example, with travelling sales representatives), use mobile phones and diary entries to make sure you know where staff are, who they are with and when they are due back or due to call in.

Locking up

The threat of violence does not stop when work has ended. It is good practice to make sure that employees can get home safely. For example, if employees have to work late, employers might help by arranging transport home or by making sure a safe parking area is available.

Step 5 Check what you have done

Check your records and with your staff regularly to see how well your arrangements are working.

Recording incidents

Keep detailed records - it is a good idea to record all incidents, including verbal abuse and threats. You may find it useful to record the following information.

An account of what happened

Details of the victims, the person or people responsible for the violence, and any witnesses

The outcome, including working time lost to the individuals affected and to the organisation as a whole

Details of the location of the incident

You can access work related violence case studies – Managing the risk in smaller businesses at
[/smallbusiness.htm](#)

Health & Safety Executive (HSE) Guidance publications

Preventing violence to retail staff (HS(G)133, HSE Books, 1995, ISBN 0-7176-0891-3, price £6.95)

Prevention of violence to staff in banks and building societies (HS(G)100, HSE Books, 1993, ISBN 0-7176-0683-X, price £6.50)

Violence in the education sector (Education Service Advisory Committee, HSE Books, 1997, ISBN 0-7176-1293-7, price £6.95)

Violence and aggression to staff in health services – Guidance on assessment and management . (Health Services Advisory Committee, HSE Books, 1997, ISBN 0-7176-1466-2, price £8.50)

Free leaflets

Violence at Work - a guide to employers INDG69

Working alone in safety - Controlling the risks of solitary work INDG73

www.suzylamplugh.org

The Suzy Lamplugh Trust is an organisation that focuses solely on personal safety issues, and lists various items for companies and organisations to use in a free catalogue, including videos, alarms and so on.
