

Reporting violence and abuse in schools

A guide for all UNISON members

School staff experience violence and
abusive behaviour with alarming regularity
Here's what you can do in the aftermath

Introduction

Violence and abuse, both physical and verbal, is sadly a reality for school staff across the country.

UNISON research shows that more than half of classroom or teaching assistants (**53%**) across the UK experienced physical violence in the academic year 2015/16.

In addition to this statistic, three-quarters (**76%**) of the teaching assistants who took part in our survey said they had witnessed violence at their school in the previous 12 months.

UNISON are clear that an assault on staff is unacceptable behaviour, and employers have a duty to minimise, as far as reasonably practicable, the risk of assault.

The *Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974* requires employers “to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work” of their employees. Unfortunately, many of our members feel that in the aftermath of violent behaviour they are not supported by employers. Read on to make sure you are protected.

Policies

- Every school should have clear policies and procedures that set out how they will prevent, manage and respond to incidents. This is required by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).
- You have the right to read any policy your employer holds. Check that your school has a behaviour policy, and a formal process for reporting incidents both verbal and physical. This might be found attached to a health and safety policy.

Prevent

- It is the employer’s responsibility to ensure that you receive adequate training to do your job. In cases where you may face violence and abuse, you should be trained in how to prevent it and safely respond when necessary.
- All staff should be aware of policies and procedures in place. It is your responsibility to familiarise yourself with them, but your employer’s responsibility to put them in place. If this is not happening contact your UNISON branch.

- UNISON has run a training event on Managing Difficult Behaviour in the past. Contact your branch to enquire about availability.
- Violent behaviour should be treated as a health and safety risk, and individual pupil risk assessments should be in place when working with pupils known to act out.

Aftermath

- If you do not currently have an official process for reporting incidents you should immediately start recording these yourself, and contact your UNISON branch to notify them. The HSE has templates for reporting incidents that can be used, or you can contact them online at **hse.gov.uk/contact/concerns**.
- When recording incidents include who, what, where, when, how and witnesses.
- To avoid long-term distress for victims, the HSE suggests the following:
 - **Debriefing** with a manager or supervisor
 - **Time off work** if necessary for lasting mental or physical effects

- **Legal help** this can be accessed free for UNISON members)
- **Other employees** may need support moving forward

UNISON can help

If you feel your school is failing to provide any of the of the support outlined in this document, or that your employer is not meeting its legal responsibilities, contact your UNISON branch.

By working and negotiating with management we can make the changes needed to keep you safe.

A unionised workplace is a safe workplace – bad practices can be changed, and as a UNISON member you can be part of making that change.

UNISON members should contact their branch to access help and support. If you're not a UNISON member, don't wait until it's too late, join UNISON today at joinunison.org or call 0800 171 2193.

You may also find the following UNISON documents useful:

It's Not Part of the Job (Stock No. 1346)

Managing Difficult Behaviour in School: A Practical Guide
(Stock No. 3534).