

A Risk Management Approach to Preventing Occupational Violence

Step 1 – Identify Hazards. A hazard is anything with the potential to cause injury, illness or disease. Identify potential sources of harm to employees and members of the school community through acts of violence in the workplace. Identify how the violence is perpetrated. Which employees or members of the school community are exposed and most vulnerable to injury? There may be a risk of injury to staff, students and perpetrator.

Consider the context within which the violent act(s) may occur. A variety of human factors, individual and environmental create the context within which the violence occurs.

Individual Factors

- What is the purpose of the violence?
- Physical health needs
- Mental health needs
- Social skills
- Substance abuse

Environmental Factors

- When and in what surrounds does the violence occur?
- What triggers are likely to initiate or escalate the violence?

Step 2 – Assess the Risk. How likely is it that if left uncontrolled, the hazard(s) identified in Step 1 will result in injury, illness or disease to an employee or other member of the school community? How often and for how long are people exposed to the hazard? What is the likelihood of the violence occurring and what is the greatest possible severity of consequence following exposure to the violent act(s)?

Step 3 – Control the Risk. Use the Hierarchy of Controls to implement effective measures to eliminate or reduce the risk to health and safety caused by the violent act(s). First consideration should be given to eliminating the source of the risk. If this cannot be done then the risk must be reduced so far as is practicable. This reinforces the duty of the employer to make the work place safer rather than relying upon staff to work safely in a hazardous environment. Changes to the working environment, equipment used and system of work control the risk more effectively than personal protective measures.

Change the Working Environment

Design and engineering controls alter the physical characteristics of the workplace and equipment to reduce risk.

- Install barriers, screens or security doors.
- Classroom layout
- Availability of items which may be used as weapons or projectiles.

Change the System of Work

Substitution, isolation and administrative controls alter work practices and the way activities are conducted to reduce risk.

- Implementation of policy and procedures ie school welfare and discipline system
- Incident reporting systems
- Yard supervision rosters
- Strategies for safe exiting of classrooms
- Training for staff in aggression management

Adopt Personal Protective Measures

This is the least effective control and should not be used as the primary method.

- Personal duress alarms
- Mobile phones
- Whistles
- Long sleeves to prevent being scratched