Education and Training

Human Resources

# Occupational Violence and Aggression in Schools Procedure

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# Occupational Violence and Aggression in Schools Procedure

## 1. Purpose

The Department's duty to maintain a safe working environment in schools is owed to all employees, including principals. The Victorian Government is committed to preventing and responding to occupational violence and aggression (OVA) across the public sector.

In schools, there are a wide range of potential scenarios involving behaviours that are violent, aggressive or otherwise pose a safety risk. These behaviours can have serious consequences for the health, safety and wellbeing of employees, students and other members of the school community.

The purpose of this procedure is to outline the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) requirements in Department of Education and Training (the Department) schools, for the identification, management, reporting and monitoring of occupational violence and aggression related risks, hazards and incidents.

## 2. Scope

This procedure applies to all Department schools.

## 3. Procedure

### 3.1 Identify hazards

The principal and / or their delegate, in consultation with Health and Safety Representatives (HSR) and employees must enter "occupational violence and aggression" in the 'Hazard Description' column of the school OHS Risk Register.

The principal and / or their delegate, in consultation with Health and Safety Representatives (HSR) and employees must complete a risk assessment if the risk level in the OHS Risk Register is rated 'High' or 'Extreme', and document the risk assessment using the Risk Assessment Template or equivalent

Schools can seek assistance from the OHS Advisory service, including Regional OHS Officers, in identifying OVA hazards. The Employee Health, Safety and Wellbeing Division can provide additional support in identifying hazards where there are complex, significant and ongoing risks to employee safety from violent or aggressive behaviour.

Potential scenarios presenting an OVA risk in schools include:

- Two or more students are physically fighting, and a member of school staff is injured when attempting to intervene.
- A student displays behaviours of concern that may, in certain situations, escalate to hitting or punching staff. Students may also pinch or hit because they have not yet learnt how to communicate their needs in a prosocial way. This behaviour may not be intended to harm but can still result in physical and/or psychological injury.
- A parent or carer is upset about an incident involving their child and make abusive or threatening calls and emails to school staff and education support staff.

- Parents, carers and other family members use abusive or threatening language on social media and in other online forums, such as e-petitions.
- Members of staff or of the school community physically assault, threaten or verbally abuse a staff member on school grounds.

### 3.2 Identify the contributing workplace factors

The principal and / or their delegate, in consultation with the HSR and employees, are to identify and record the contributing workplace factor(s) that alone, or in combination, may contribute to the OVA risk in the workplace. Contributing factors may occur at the level of the school, the Department, or the broader community.

Consider the following questions / statements to assist with identifying workplace hazards and contributing factors:

1. Effective systems
    - Workplace design: Consider how physical environments can be designed or adapted to reduce the risk of OVA. Are there appropriate entry and exit points for buildings/rooms? Is there appropriate security infrastructure in place? Are teaching spaces and playground areas assessed and fit for purpose? Are there objects or parts of infrastructure that could be used as a weapon and need to be removed?
    - Resourcing and workflow management: Are there appropriate staffing ratios/supervision arrangements in place?
    - Student behaviours of concern – management plans and supports: Are there any individuals with known behaviours of concern that are likely to pose a safety risk to staff or other students? Have they had specialist support such as a Board-Certified Behaviour Analyst? Has a functional behaviour assessment been completed by a trained specialist? Do they have Behaviour Support and other individual management plans in place and have Department supports been engaged?
    - Incident management systems and planning: Does the school have an emergency and critical incident management plan? Does it include planning for when the school will access regional supports, or for when an OVA incident impacts on the ability of school staff to perform their duties?
2. Capability and culture
    - Organisational culture and school climate: Is there a strong culture of inclusion, respect and safety for staff, students and the broader school community?
    - Education and training: Do staff have the right training to understand, prevent and manage OVA related risks?
    - Consultation and information sharing: Are staff proactively engaged in risk management planning, through Health and Safety Representatives or through other consultative forums such as Health and Safety committees? Have OVA risks been communicated to staff?
3. Supporting our people
    - Incident response: Are appropriate procedures in place to respond to and report incidents? Do staff have sufficient time to complete eduSafe reporting and access supports?

- Department support: Can staff readily access support and advice from their manager and the Department? Are there targeted supports in place for staff who are affected by OVA?

## 4.0 Risk controls

### 4.1 Development and selection of risk controls

Appropriate risk controls are critical to ensure staff are provided with the highest level of prevention of and protection from occupational violence and aggression. To discharge their responsibilities as site manager, the principal and / or their delegate, in consultation with the HSR and employees, must eliminate or (if this is not possible) reduce the level of OVA risk so far as is reasonably practicable, by considering the workplace factors in Section 3.2 of this Procedure.

General principles for the development and selection of risk controls include:

- Activities to control the risk should be school and work-group specific. Where Department resources or programs are drawn upon, they should be adapted to specific context of the school.
- Activities to control the risk should be targeted to at both school environment (physical and online) and community (teachers, students, parents/carers and others) factors identified via risk assessment.
- Risk-control plans should focus on prevention of incidents, but also cover prevention or reduction of health, safety and wellbeing impacts where incidents do occur.
- Risk-control plans should focus on organisational-level interventions but also include individual-level interventions.
- Employee induction, instruction and training should form part of a holistic approach to addressing occupational violence and aggression.

### 4.2 Record current risk controls

The principal and / or their delegate in consultation with the HSR and employees must record the current risk controls in the OHS Risk Register.

Where a risk assessment is to be completed, current risk controls should also be recorded in the Risk Assessment Template or equivalent.

### 4.3 Information, instruction and training

The principal and / or their delegate must ensure all employees are informed about the risk controls in place to manage occupational violence and aggression in the workplace. This can be achieved by:

- ensuring all employees complete an OHS induction prior to commencing work
- promoting and encouraging employees to report hazards (e.g. psychosocial hazards), near misses and incidents on eduSafe.

and by providing employees with:

- a copy of the school OHS Risk Register and completed risk assessments and the opportunity to raise questions and participate in consultative processes

- information about likely OVA hazards they may encounter in their work
- information from the Department about existing resources and strategies to reduce the risk of OVA related injuries
- information about the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and how to access it.

For further information on OVA controls, resources and supports please refer to the Occupational Violence and Aggression Risk Controls, Resources and Supports Guidance Advice document.

### 4.4 Monitor, review and revise controls

Due to the complexity of workplace factors that can cause OVA related injury, it is important that OVA risks are managed on an ongoing basis, regularly reviewed, and revised when necessary. The principal and /or their delegate are required to monitor and review the effectiveness of implemented risk controls on a regular basis (e.g. quarterly) in consultation with HSR and relevant employees.

Review of controls must be ongoing. However, additional reviews and revisions are required when:

- an incident or near miss is reported that indicates the risks and controls need updating
- a new potential risk is identified (e.g. through a report on eduSafe).

## 5.0 Risk controls – student behaviours of concern

### 5.1 Development and selection of risk controls

Because of the wide range of potential scenarios where student behaviour can become violent, aggressive or otherwise pose a safety risk, actions to prevent and respond to these behaviours must be tailored depending on a number of factors including:

- the level of risk of the behaviour to the safety of staff and students
- the context of the behaviour
- the individual needs of the student
- the capability and experience of school staff
- the circumstances of the school (i.e. location, size, student population).

For all students, building a positive, safe and inclusive school environment is critical in assisting to prevent and manage the occurrence of behaviours that are violent, aggressive or otherwise pose a safety risk.

Where students present with known behaviours of concern, equipping school staff with the skills to work safely with students, and the capability to support students to be engaged in learning according to their skill and functional level, can help prevent situations where there is a significant risk to safety.

Where student behaviours of concern pose a safety risk that is rated ‘High’ or ‘Extreme’, a functional behaviour assessment is recommended, and a Behaviour Support Plan may be required. Where there is a significant, ongoing risk to staff safety, a Risk Management Plan for students with behaviours of concern must also be in place. Contact the Employee Wellbeing

Response Team to get advice on whether an OVA Risk Management Plan would be appropriate for your school to manage safety risks.

If there is / will be a Behaviour Support Plan or OVA Risk Management Plan for students with behaviours of concern for a particular student, this / these plan(s) document the risk assessment undertaken for the risk posed by the student's behaviours of concern and must be recorded on the Risk Register.

For further supports, including advice on what individualised plans may be required where a student presents with behaviours of concern, schools should contact:

- For support on developing, implementing, reviewing and troubleshooting Behaviour Support Plans – Student Support Services.
- For support on significant risks to staff safety (including where a Behaviour Support Plan is in place but additional support is required) – Employee Wellbeing Response Team.

Student Support Services and the Employee Wellbeing Response Team work closely together to ensure that Behaviour Support Plans and Risk Management Plans for students with behaviours of concern are implemented appropriately and effectively.

Refer to OVA Risk Controls, Resources and Supports Guidance Advice document for further guidance on risk controls for student behaviours of concern.

### 5.2 Record current risk controls

Where a school has individualised plans in place for students with behaviours of concern, the principal and / or their delegate should record the existence of these plans in the school OHS Risk Register. The principal and / or their delegate do not need to indicate the names or number of students for whom plans are in place.

### 5.3 Information, instruction and training

The principal and / or their delegate must ensure that in addition to induction and general staff training, staff likely to be affected by student behaviours of concern must be briefed on / trained in the individual plans for students with behaviours of concern. A copy of any plan(s) must be readily available to staff.

### 5.4 Monitor, review and revise controls

The principal and / or their delegate must ensure that in addition to regular reviews of controls, any incident involving a student with behaviours of concern requires a review and, if necessary, revision of the Behaviour Support Plan and any other individual plans in place.

If student behaviour continues to pose a significant safety risk, the principal and / or their delegate must escalate the case to the Regional Behaviour Coach via the SSS Branch Manager and the Employee Wellbeing Response Team contact.

## 6 Legislation, Compliance Codes, Standards and Guidance

*Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004*

*Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2017*

## 7 Related documentation

*Occupational Violence and Aggression Risk Controls, Resources and Supports Guidance Advice*

*OHS Risk Management Procedure*

*OHS Risk Register*

*Risk Assessment Template*

## 8 Further assistance

Further information, advice or assistance on identifying OVA hazards is available by contacting the:

- OHS Advisory Service on ph.: 1300 074 715 or email safety@edumail.vic.gov.au
- North Eastern Regional OHS Support Officer on ph.: 1300 333 231 or email nevr@edumail.vic.gov.au
- North Western Regional OHS Support Officer on ph.: 1300 338 691 or email nwr@edumail.vic.gov.au
- South Eastern Regional OHS Support Officer on ph. 1300 338 738 or email sevr@edumail.vic.gov.au
- South Western Regional OHS Support Officer on ph. 1300 333 232 or email swr@edumail.vic.gov.au