



AEUNT Guide to Occupational Violence



What is Occupational Violence?

Occupational violence is any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work. This definition covers a broad range of behaviours that can create a risk to the health and safety of workers.

Challenging or extreme behaviour of students can include biting, spitting, hitting kicking, pushing, shoving, tripping, grabbing, throwing objects, verbal threats, threatening someone with a weapon, or sexual assault.

Threats or assaults may also arise from parents, guardians or intruders. Occupational violence can seriously affect physical and psychological health and the safety of staff and those they care for.

Whether it is intended or not, occupational violence is a workplace hazard. OHS laws require employers to ensure risks to health and safety are eliminated or reduced so far as is reasonably practicable.

What are my rights in regards to Occupational Violence?

All AEU members have a right to a safe and healthy workplace. Where violence or potentially unsafe work practices exist, support and systems to counter these practices must be readily provided. Failure of the employer to provide adequate support, resources and systems is an OHS, industrial and educational issue.

You may cease, or refuse to carry out, work if you have a reasonable concern that to carry out the work would expose you to a serious risk to your health or safety, emanating from an immediate or imminent exposure to a hazard.

Notwithstanding the above rights, teachers must be mindful that every teacher has a 'duty of care' towards every student under his or her supervision by virtue of the conditions of the teacher's employment and the common law principles of negligence. Generally speaking a teacher owes a student a duty to take reasonable care to protect him or her from foreseeable risk of injury.

What must my workplace do to ensure my safety at work?

Prevention and management of occupational violence is a requirement of your workplace under NT OHS laws. Some or all of the following safety measures should be used to prevent and manage occupational violence in your school.

Consultation

Consultation is essential to prevent occupational violence. Employers must consult with health and safety representatives (HSRs) and workers, so far as is reasonably practicable.

Consultation involves taking the views of staff and HSRs into account before making a decision.

If your school doesn't have a HSR you can [click this link](#) to visit NT Worksafe's HSR page. It provides a step-by-step guide to electing a HSR (or do a Google search for "NT Worksafe Health and Safety Representative")

Risk management

Employers should assess the risk to health and safety in their workplace by:

- identify any hazards in the workplace
- assess the hazards risk to health and safety
- eliminating or controlling the risk, and
- monitor and review the control measures to ensure on-going safety.

Practically this means your school or workplace must carry out a risk assessment on the risk of occupational violence in your school and if there is a risk, the risk must be eliminated or controlled.

Reporting procedure

Setting up a procedure for staff to report incident of occupational violence, these procedures should:

- identify potential issues early
- understand why incidents have happened
- decide how to prevent incidents



- measure how well safe work procedures are working
- meet the workplace requirements for reporting workplace injuries and incidents.

It's important that all occurrences of occupational violence are reported, no matter how minor the incident is.

Training

Training should form part of an overall approach to control the risk of occupational violence. Training could be provided in the following:

- Violence prevention measures
- Workplace policy and procedures, including emergency response.
- De-escalating aggression—identifying signs of aggression, verbal and non-verbal, communication strategies, encouraging reasoning, listening carefully and acknowledging concerns.
- Positive behaviour strategies and managing behaviours of concern.

What to do during a violent incident?

Despite preventative measures, incidents of workplace violence can and do occur. An essential part of your plan is to be prepared. All workers who are likely to be exposed to violence and aggression must be aware of and trained in the violence prevention controls in place, and the types of situations that may happen in their workplace. It's important that these procedures are practiced regularly. If your school doesn't have prevention control or offer training contact your sub-branch rep or the AEU office. Follow these practical steps if faced with a violent incident:

- Try to remain calm.
- Act in accordance with your school's occupational violence procedures.
- Inform your supervisor immediately.
- Complete any reporting forms or write down the details.
- Your supervisor should ensure that you are not left alone at work or placed in situations at work where you could be at risk of repeated aggression.



- The incident should be reported to the Police, where appropriate. The right to report an incident to the Police rests with you as the victim of an incident, not your manager.

If your school doesn't have a policy and procedure or training on handling a violent incident of Occupational Violence contact your sub-branch rep or the AEU office.

What to do after a violent incident?

This will depend on the nature and severity of the incident. Be aware that even seemingly minor incidents can cause emotional and psychological trauma, which may not be immediately evident. Here are some practical things you can do to help recover from a violent incident:

- Seek medical treatment if you are injured or suffering psychological trauma.
- Report the incident to your supervisor.
- Report details of the incident by completing any required report forms.
- Debrief with other colleagues involved.
- Seek professional counselling if needed.
- Report the incident to your sub-branch rep or the AEU office.

References and further information

AEUNT website: www.aeunt.org.au

NT Worksafe : www.worksafe.nt.gov