

VIOLENCE IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

Introduction:

The Union's policy on violence comprises five key elements:

- (i) Violent behaviour is unacceptable.
- (ii) Members are entitled to work in a safe environment.
- (iii) It is the responsibility of the employer to provide a safe working environment.
- (iv) Members are entitled to access appropriate support services and procedures following a violent incident in the workplace.
- (v) Students with specific violent behaviours should be recognised and catered for by targeted specialised programs.

Violence in educational settings is an important health and safety issue. The ACT Branch believes that its members should not accept violence and intimidation in the workplace. However, the Branch emphasises that whilst violence is a problem for those involved in particular instances, and sometimes in particular educational settings, it is not implying that violence is the overriding feature of the ACT educational system.

SECTION 1:

Definition

Violence in educational settings is present in any situation where a member of the educational community (teacher, student, other education worker, parent or visitor) is intimidated, harassed, abused, threatened or assaulted, or their property deliberately damaged by another member of that community or the public in circumstances arising out of their activities in an educational setting.

Forms of Violence:

- 1.1 Violence which involves unequal power relationships, can take many forms. It can be:
 - (i) system violence, where punitive and authoritarian language, policies and practices dominate the educational setting culture.
 - (ii) verbal - yelling, answering back, name calling (eg racial/homophobic taunts), put downs, swearing, using abusive or obscene language.
 - (iii) emotional - disturbing (eg taking/hiding belongings), teasing, excluding spreading rumours and gossip, vilifying, humiliating threats, extortion (eg lunch, money, property) blackmail.
 - (iv) physical - pushing, shoving, poking, pinching, hitting, slapping, punching, tripping, kicking, graffiti, vandalism, damage to property, plant or equipment.
 - (v) sexual - leering, gesturing, showing offensive material, writing suggestive notes, touching, feeling, groping, fondling, assault, rape.

SECTION 2:

Definition of a Safe Workplace

A safe workplace will have:

- (i) a whole workplace commitment to respectful behaviours and social justice.
- (ii) an accessible working policy on effective school behaviour management where students' and teachers' rights and responsibilities are clearly stated.
- (iii) an active critical incident policy and guidelines.

SECTION 3:

Employers' responsibility

To develop an increased focus on Departmental support for resourcing strategies to reduce violent incidents in educational settings through:

- (i) designing and building physical locations in such a way as to increase the safety for staff.
- (ii) arranging consultation with Union elected Occupational Health and Safety Representatives on health and safety matters.
- (iii) applying guidelines in Occupational Health and Safety policy with particular reference to violence in educational settings.
- (iv) providing sufficient additional human resources as well as adequate alternative educational settings in support of students.

- (v) providing ongoing and appropriate professional development in identifying violence in its variety of forms, management strategies, mediation skills, conflict resolution and other relevant issues.
- (vi) providing staff with access to prompt advice from an expert task force whenever a critical incident occurs.
- (vii) providing educative programs for managers focusing on the gender, power and cultural implications of violence in educational settings.
- (viii) providing the necessary infrastructure to enable educational settings to work effectively in partnership with other agencies in terms of both proactive and critical incident support.
- (ix) developing accountability mechanisms to ensure all educational settings uphold legislative responsibilities in relation to sexual and racial harassment.

SECTION 4:

These are provided as a check list for Union members. Use only those items appropriate to manage the violent incident.

Preventative Action

4.1 Members should take certain precautions:

- (i) Know and check the behavioural management policy of the workplace, and its place in Departmental policy.
- (ii) Discuss at staff meetings desirable action in the case of hypothetical incidents.
- (iii) Be aware that a Critical Incident Response book exists in every educational setting, and know where it may be found.
- (iv) Develop proactive educative strategies for both staff and students which focus on respectful practice and an analysis of the dynamics of violence, power, culture and gender.

Immediate Action

4.2 When an incident occurs:

- (i) Defuse the situation by removing the source of disruption from the group, or the group from the source of disruption.
- (ii) Seek support and intervention from principal or acting executive officer.
- (iii) Seek support and assistance from colleagues.
- (iv) Determine other immediate action in consultation with principal, such as need for ambulance, medical assistance, appropriate community groups, or the critical incident debrief team.

Subsequent Action

4.3 When the immediate needs have been attended to:

- (i) Check the emotional needs of yourself and others involved.
- (ii) Complete Critical Incident Form(s); obtain names of witnesses; prepare personal statement; have witnesses write statement independently one of the other.
- (iii) Undertake the follow up and communication which is internal to the school: advise or send report to Occupational Health and Safety Officer; Counsellor; Student Welfare Officer; Staff Welfare Officer; Union representative; Sexual Harassment Contact Officer for students, Anti Racism Contact Officer for students.
- (iv) Executive Officer will undertake action which is external to educational setting: submit reports, advise parents, community organisations and the like.

Action for Closure

4.4 Finally:

- (i) Officer should see medical practitioner, if necessary, advise that visit may be a claim under Comcare so that appropriate forms are completed; seek statement of nature of injuries and the injuries are consistent with reported causes. Medical practitioners keep Comcare claim forms in their surgeries.
- (ii) In the case of sexual or homophobic harassment, the officer should seek the advice of a Sexual Harassment Contact Officer for staff in order to establish a resolution process; or in the case of racial harassment, the advice of an Anti Racism Contact Officer for staff.
- (iii) Officer should seek counselling or talk with others to unload the emotional distress caused by such events.
- (iv) Officer should consult with school executive to make a plan for action for returning to normal routines after an event. Unresolved emotional stresses may cause

resistance, withdrawal, anger, non compliance on the part of any person involved in crisis incidents. Plans need to be put in place to deal with the resulting behaviours.