

**IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICY & PROCEDURES:
VIOLENCE & AGGRESSION TO STAFF**

Leaflet Q/2
January 2007

Links:

GUIDELINES FOR STAFF

Children's Services

This document is to be read in conjunction with the Departmental Policy and Procedures relating to Violence & Aggression to Staff (September 1997) and the County Council's Guide to Managing Lone Working.

The policies identify the legal requirements on employers to assess and minimise risk, wherever possible, and on staff members to take reasonable care for their own health and safety and that of others. Safety is the responsibility of every single member of the Department. It is the responsibility of every Manager to ensure that each member of their staff has access to the above policies and is aware of the implications for their work practice. Information on the policy and procedures must be included in induction packages.

Staff across Children's Services have been involved in considering plans for effective implementation of the policy to ensure consistent standards across all Service Sectors.

The following outlines the action required of each Unit/Team Manager, reporting to their relevant Service Manager. This will ensure that issues of staff safety are regularly reviewed by Senior Managers, in conjunction with the regular briefing of the Departmental Management Team by the Safety Advisor.

Guidance notes are attached.

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REQUIREMENTS

There will be an annual safety audit and plan, commissioned by Service Managers for each Unit/Team for which they have responsibility.

Unit/Team Managers and staff will be responsible for jointly undertaking the audit and formulating their own annual plan within the identified framework.

Service Managers will collate plans to review procedures, ensure consistency and disseminate good practice.

These plans are in addition to statutory risk assessments, required wherever potential risk is identified.

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ANNUAL SAFETY PLANS

These plans will be prepared at the request of Service Managers. Guidance notes are attached identifying areas for consideration, recognising that each Unit/Team or Service Sector may have particular requirements.

Plans **must** address each of the following areas:

1. Review

- Detail the number and category of recorded incidents over the past year and learning arising from these to help prevent recurrence;
- Review of compliance with agreed plan/procedures.

2. Preventative Measures

2.1 Physical Environment

- Building security;
- Safe exit arrangements;
- Car parking;
- Lighting;
- Interview and reception facilities/public areas;
- Alarm provision and siting;
- Arrangements for response to alarm;
- Arrangements for lone-working in building;
- Arrangements for separate one-to-one working in building.

2.2 Personal Safety

- Access to personal alarms, mobile phones, criteria for use/arrangements for response;
- Staffing requirements in Unit/Team;
- Arrangements for joint/co-working;
- Out-of-hours working arrangements;
- Personal protection: risk analysis procedure;
- How and where the plan for managing the risk is recorded;
- Arrangements for maintaining log of staff details.

2.3 Communication of risk to other Service Sectors/Agencies

- Who to?
- Who does it?
- How?

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3. Incident Management

- Arrangements for response to alarm/phone call/request for back-up;
- Reporting arrangements, e.g., RIDDOR forms, Serious Incident Book, Incident Monitoring Form;
- Arrangements for completion of relevant forms;
- Arrangements for monitoring.

4. After Care

- Staff debriefing;
- Critical incident debriefing/Team learning;
- Support options available.

5. Training

- Audit of staff training;
- Identified training needs.

6. Future Needs

- Identified deficiencies/needs.

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GUIDANCE NOTES

The Safety Unit is willing to offer advice on any of the following:

1. Review

It is important to look back over the past year to quantify incidents but also to consider the types of incidents occurring and whether further risk assessment is required. Currently, staff comment that incident debriefing and support around an actual incident is helpful, but that not enough opportunity is given to wider learning for the whole Team. Analysis of incidents may identify more complex issues and training needs, e.g., inappropriate defusing techniques. Analysis may identify situations of particular vulnerability in your work situation or for particular staff. It is important that we do not just look at actual incidents, but at preventative measures that reduce risk without becoming oppressive to Service Users.

The audit should look at current arrangements and monitor whether these were actually carried out over the last year and if not, why not.

2. Preventative Measures

2.1 Physical Environment

Research shows that attention to welcoming and pleasant reception areas can help reduce tension. Decoration in calming colours is also said to help. There should also be no posters or pictures that may cause offence to visitors.

Equally, it is important to ensure the layout of reception areas enables staff to have good visibility and that reception screens are secure, but are not too small to create tension for Service Users. In reception or public areas, care must be taken not to leave objects available that could be used as weapons, e.g., glass ashtrays, pot plants etc. Security of work areas must be addressed, but also ensuring that staff actually close security or fire doors.

These issues are harder to address in residential establishments or family centres where a domestic living environment is sought. Nevertheless, staff teams should consider the environment and minimise potential hazards. Residents having to share equipment can increase tension.

Arrangements for lone-working in buildings should be recorded, e.g., ensuring that other staff know you are there, locking doors to prevent entry from others, having access to outside phone lines.

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Staff in family centres and residential units should consider arrangements for one-to-one working, even where there are other staff in the building, i.e., telling others where you are and if there is a perceived risk, planning for support/monitoring of situation. This also applies to office interviews where there is some known potential risk. Teams should consider whether lone-working is advisable in these circumstances.

Teams should consider their use of public or interview rooms, i.e., ensuring there is a quick means of exit and that they have access to any alarm system or consider how they may summon help. Support staff should be included in this planning. There should be visibility into interview rooms and an agreed written response plan to alarm use – which should be **rehearsed** and known to all staff. Rehearsal plans should be noted.

If engaging in an interview where staff are aware that reactions may be extreme, or where response may be unpredictable, as well as ensuring the interview is not carried out alone, arrangements could be made for another staff member to interrupt with a message to check that all is well. This could also be employed in one-to-one working in residential establishments or family centres or individual sessional work on premises. There are also alternative silent alarms that can be purchased that can be carried by an individual, which will activate a flashing light at a given location. In some situations, a loud audible signal is a help to allow a staff member to withdraw safely, but in other situations it may increase tension.

2.2 Personal Safety

It is recognised that not all risks can be predicted. However, where a Service User has a previous history of violence or serious threats of violence, a risk assessment should be undertaken with a clear plan recorded. This should be placed on the Service User's record so that any member of staff becoming involved can comply with the arrangements.

Agreed measures for dealing with these situations is as important in family centres and residential establishments. Research in residential settings shows that a large number of incidents can arise from one individual, so planning is an important preventative measure, along with consideration of staffing levels.

Joint working may be an appropriate response in certain situations and should always be considered if a home visit is required where there is identified potential risk to staff safety or the nature of the task is such that a strong reaction may be predicted, e.g., service notice of Care Proceedings. Staff

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should always be encouraged to identify their need for support. **Acknowledgement of fear, a request for assistance, or withdrawing from a situation may be a wise precaution and is not a sign of weakness. Fear is a natural response and is often the result of an accurate assessment of the situation.**

Staff should, however, be aware that aggressive language is not always a personal attack; it may be that person's normal pattern of speech. Service Users are also likely to need to express anger on occasions. Acknowledging anger can help to defuse the situation. However, if the anger or aggression is causing fear or distress, then this is likely to fall within these guidelines. Threat of violence can be particularly worrying.

It is recognised that sessional workers are potentially at risk by nature of their lone-working, often out of hours. Risk analysis by Line-Managers is a crucial element, which requires communication of any relevant information by staff who commission services. All staff are entitled to a personal alarm and Team/Unit Managers should consider their Team's need for a mobile phone and arrangements for its use.

Any members of staff undertaking lone-working may be made additionally vulnerable in some situations by virtue of their gender, ethnic background, sexuality or disability. Managers should be aware of this, even if the staff member does not draw it to their attention. This does not mean, for example, that black workers should necessarily avoid visiting someone who is known to hold racist views, as this would be to collude in that, but it may mean that extra support is required.

For **any** staff visiting away from their base, there should be a clear record of addresses to be visited (not just the area) and an estimated time of return. Teams/Units should have a protocol to deal with non-return by specified time and agreement as to who monitors these arrangements and who should be notified if there is a non-return. Most fieldwork Teams find their Team Clerks are most aware of visiting plans and they could be asked to notify Team Managers if problems arise.

Arrangements for the final visit of the day are very important if staff do not intend to return to the office. If there is any doubt at all that the last visit, or a visit out-of-hours, may prove problematic, then agreed arrangements **must** be put in place in advance of the visit. **No staff member should undertake a visit or interview if they consider themselves to be at risk without formally consulting about arrangements.** Arrangements may be to arrange a joint visit, or someone to wait in the car, or in extreme circumstances, Police back up may

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have to be requested. This will be a matter for considered professional judgement. In these circumstances, arrangements must be made for staff involved to “log in” at the end of the visit. Teams/Units may have differing approaches to this, which is acceptable as long as arrangements are clear. Contact is sometimes made with Team/Unit Managers, or with an agreed colleague (some Teams have adopted a “buddy” system). Some residential establishments have indicated that they would be willing to become involved in checking-in arrangements for fieldwork staff/sessional workers by prior arrangement. **The important thing is that your Unit/Team members know what they must do.**

Managers should maintain a log of staff details and information about their vehicles and update as required.

It is suggested that staff who work out-of-hours leave a contact number (Manager/colleagues/EDT) with family or friends so that they know who to contact if the staff member does not arrive home as expected.

Staff involved in transporting Service Users should receive relevant information if there is a perceived personal risk and a plan put in place for support and back up.

Units/Teams may wish to include other matters in their plans. Research in this department had identified that considerable stress can arise from threats of violence and persistent verbal abuse. Verbal abuse that is racial or sexual in content can have significant impact and Managers are advised to consider this with their Teams. Individuals may be tempted “not to make a fuss”, worrying that it may be perceived as weakness but the impact could be significant and such language should always be challenged by colleagues and not just left up to the individual. Teams should consider what “culture” exists in their Team/Unit. There is a real tension in protection of staff and not becoming so defensive in practice that it becomes oppressive. All Service Users should be treated in a respectful and sensitive manner. Language or attitudes on the part of the staff member that is perceived as patronising, sarcastic or oppressive may increase the likelihood of hostility.

2.3 Communication of Risk

If we are to avoid different levels of support to staff, then communication of risk is absolutely critical. This can be from one fieldwork team to a family centre, to sessional workers or to foster carers. It may well be that there is not the same level of risk to all staff, but there should be overt consideration of this where any personal protection issue is identified. There should

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also be consideration of such issues over time as circumstances can change and threat can recede. Measures put in place may not then be required.

Residential Units and family centres will need to consider how they pass on relevant information about risk to staff to other similar Units involved with the same Service Users. For example, there could be a wealth of information about a young person logged in the serious incident book, but if that young person transfers to another establishment, that information is important, along with information on effective strategies. It is recognised that staff do not wish to "label" users unnecessarily, but to avoid passing on relevant information may lead to the injury of another member of staff or carer.

It is also important to pass on any relevant concerns to other agencies who may be visiting, e.g., Health Visitors or Education Welfare Officers.

3. Incident Management

Each Unit/Team should have clear instructions for staff as to when it is required to complete appropriate forms following an incident and who these should be sent to. Completed RIDDOR forms should also be sent to the Safety Advisor and the relevant Service Manager, as it is important for the Department to ensure appropriate follow-up to incidents, but also to collate records so that there is current knowledge as to the extent of the problem.

The annual audit will be helpful for Teams/Units in collating their own information and ensuring that completion and procedures are complied with.

Residential Managers may wish to consider how to collate records pertaining to the same individual in the serious incident book. The monthly incident monitoring form is seen as a useful management information tool if completed by all Units and passed to the relevant Service Manager. It may also provide planning information for a particular Service User or highlight staff training needs.

4. After Care

Managers should ensure that there are arrangements in place to enable staff to have time to talk through an incident in as much detail as they want. Effects are not always immediate and staff and their Line Managers should be aware of this in supervision and the potential for reaction when the worker faces a similar incident. Managers must be alert to the fact that a Unit/Team member may underestimate their own needs. All staff must be made aware of the availability of independent,

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confidential counselling.

Team learning can also arise from dealing with particular incidents, although care must be taken not to attach “blame” to victims. Research suggests that there is a general tendency to assume mishandling of situations as a means of making ourselves feel less vulnerable to similar incidents.

The policy makes it clear that staff retain the right to seek prosecution following an incident even if the department decides not to pursue this course of action. Staff are also entitled to claim compensation for damage to personal property.

Managers also need support and debriefing. A number of research findings show that male Managers are statistically most at risk of assault, especially in the residential sector.

5. Training

Annual plans should identify training undertaken and outstanding training needs. Staff have commented on their need for refresher and follow-on training.

6. Future Needs

The annual safety plan should identify any other issue relevant to the Team/Unit and any resource deficits.

Personal Protection Information

This named individual may exhibit behaviour or have physical or medical needs which could place others at risk. Action required to minimise the risks is given below, along with details of who else needs to be informed.

This information will be held only as long as it is relevant and be reviewed and updated as often as required.

TO BE PLACED AT THE FRONT OF THE RELEVANT CASE FILE

Name:

Address:

- 1. Evidence of risk, condition or behaviour:** *examples include physical aggression, threats, severe verbal aggression. Transmissible infection. Specific medical or physical condition.*

- 2. Details of action needed to control risk:** *examples to include meeting on neutral ground, no home visits, no lone interviews. Ensure medication available. Develop restraint policy. Ensure adequate back up. Consult Police.*

- 3. Environmental Factors:** *examples include dangerous animals, likely contact with used hypodermic syringes. Dark, remote or dangerous areas/buildings.*

- 4. Other agencies/individuals to be informed and who will do this:**

Signed:..... **Dated:**.....
Key Worker

Signed:..... **Dated:**.....
Manager

Personal Safety – Staff Record

This form is intended to record basic information which will assist in locating individuals or provide appropriate contacts in the event of any difficulty. It should be amended as required. Forms will be retained by Unit/Team Managers and must be able to be located after hours.

Personal Details:

Name:

Address:

Telephone Number:

Mobile Number:

Details of Car:

Make:

Model:

Colour:

Registration Number:

Contact Person:

Name:

Work Telephone Number:

Home Telephone Number:

Additional Information:

INFORMATION FOR STAFF

The Department is aware that the incident you have experienced may be very emotionally distressing and will offer you support and assistance.

You may wish to contact, in confidence, an independent counsellor. You or your Manager can access this by contacting the Occupational Health Team at County Hall on 01905 766999. You may find that it is some time after the incident that you would welcome this support. Every effort will be made to link you with a counsellor suitable to your needs and wishes.

Your Line Manager will discuss what options are available to you following the incident. Support of your colleagues is likely to be helpful. Please let your Manager and colleagues know what would be helpful for you.

Claims for compensation to personal property can be made via the Principle Finance Officer at County Hall.