



Managing Aggressive Behaviour from Parents and Visitors to our School	
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All members of the school community have a right to expect that their school is a safe place in which to work and learn. Abuse, threatening behaviour or violence against school staff, or other members of the school community is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Any incident will be treated seriously and a disruptive visitor may be banned from entering the school or even prosecuted.

Abuse, threatening behaviour or violence are not considered to be an acceptable part of any job, nor is it part of the duties of any employee to accept such behaviour. Throughout this document where the term 'visitor' is used it covers any abusive parent or visitor to the school and is not confined to adults.

Gusford Primary School is committed to reducing the risks of its school staff from acts of violence and aggression by:

- Demonstrating to staff that the potential for violence at work is recognised
- Issuing clear procedures/guidelines, which include preventative and protective measures
- Providing adequate training to staff who may be subject to violence or abuse to develop their ability to anticipate violent incidents and deal with them
- Providing appropriate equipment where applicable
- Clarifying violent incident reporting and monitoring procedures
- Encouraging proper reporting of incidents and near misses and ensuring that school staff do not avoid reporting violent incidents in the belief that an assault may suggest a failure on the part of the member of staff concerned
- Supporting staff who have been subject to violent, threatening or abusive behaviour and offering counselling where appropriate
- Allocating adequate resources to support this Policy
- Reviewing this Policy statement and procedures and guidelines regularly.

Types of violence

In identifying types of violence, the governing body recognises that staff can be intimidated or threatened by a variety of circumstances, not simply physical assault, which includes:

- Kicking
- Biting
- Punching
- Poking or pushing
- Spitting
- Scratching
- Head butting
- Tripping
- Actions that restrict movement
- Unwanted physical contact which results in no injury
- Use of weapons
- Use of missiles
- Swearing
- Other verbal or written abuse which causes personal offence or distress
- Sexual, racial or other harassment

- Bullying
- Intimidation
- Damage to personal property
- Abusive telephone calls, letters, faxes, emails, website entries
- Other aggressive behaviour
- Shouting
- Posturing
- Gestures
- Insults
- Innuendo
- Unreasonable demands or blackmail
- Deliberate silence

Procedures for Staff in dealing with Incidents involving Violent, Threatening or Abusive Visitors Avoiding an Incident

Parents, or members of the public, may arrive in a tense, agitated state and how they are initially dealt with might well make the difference between a minor exchange of words and a violent confrontation.

Members of staff are entitled to support from their phase leader in handling a potentially difficult parent interview, so, if you have any concerns you should discuss them with your phase leader. Sensitivity towards parental difficulties is an asset. Many adults are still influenced by their own schooling and other childhood experiences, as well as their consequent expectations for their own children. Over anxious, or even ambitious, parents can feel very vulnerable.

Preparation is an essential ingredient in ensuring that interviews/meetings prove constructive rather than confrontational.

The school advises all staff not to engage in work related conversations with parents/carers etc outside of the school boundary. Staff that do risk breaching confidentiality guidelines and may also be putting themselves at unnecessary risk of abuse.

Always try to:

Prepare in advance by:

- Ensuring there is enough space in the room, whilst also making it appear intimate and relaxing (this can be achieved through lighting and warm colouring). People can need greater personal space than normal when upset or angry and the proximity of others can be more threatening
- Having an alarm readily available (a member of staff nearby/door open/mobile phone next to you switched on)
- Considering having a colleague present, or pre-arranging with a colleague to check that all is well, if you have reason to believe that the visitor has a previous history of aggression or violence or appears to be aggressive or violent.
- Gathering information that might help

- Ensuring the layout of the room is not intimidating for visitors and allows you to escape quickly; if possible, position your chair/desk with the door behind you
- Positioning seating at equal height so that the parent does not feel patronised, and, if possible, at a 45-degree angle as this is less threatening. Avoid barriers if it is safe to do so.
- Considering items in the room that could be used as potential weapons
- Remove an angry or upset person from an audience, or, if easier, remove the audience and don't leave them waiting unnecessarily. The fewer people that are involved in an incident, the easier it is for an aggressor to back down without losing face.
- Keep the discussion as calm and friendly as possible, paraphrasing what has been said and using sympathy and empathy where appropriate.
- Summarise what has been said and follow through. This will help to build trust and respect.

Minimise a parent/visitor's frustration by:

- Being yourself. Do not hide behind authority, status or a job title. By using your name instead of a description of your status, you are presenting yourself as another human being. Later on, it may be important to explain what authority or status you have in order to reassure the visitor that you are in a position to act on their behalf.
- Keeping the visitor talking and explaining the problem, their perception of what has happened, why they feel aggrieved. Use verbal and non-verbal prompts (saying 'mmm' or 'yes' or nodding) to keep them talking. Use open questions to encourage them to talk and explain. Use positive body language, smile.
- Listening and allowing the visitor to express any complaint, without preventing them from finishing what they have to say. Listen empathetically without pre-judging or patronising. Listen also for the feelings, concerns and possible intentions behind their words
- Responding promptly, paying attention and showing that you do care about their problem. Don't keep leaving the room as this gives the message that you have other more important matters to deal with.
- Being polite, pleasant and reassuring and do not show anger. Resist arguing. It is very tempting to respond and become engaged in an argument, especially if you are the butt of aggression or accused in some way, but it is far more likely to result in conflict or confrontation than contribute to defusing the situation.
- Paying attention to your body language so it is as non-threatening as possible.
- Avoid aggressive or defensive stances, such as arms folded, hands on hips or waving fingers or arms. Try to relax your facial muscles and convey openness and empathy with the speaker. Make eye contact, but avoid constant eye contact that may be threatening or trigger aggression because it is perceived as staring
- Trying to explain clearly in jargon free language precisely what your difficulty is in giving the aggressive person what they want. Repeat it until you are sure you are understood because upset people do not always hear the first time
- Not making any promises which you know you cannot keep as this may make things worse for you or your colleagues at a later date.

Make sure that you are aware of the school's emergency action plan/'lockdown' procedures and when these should be implemented.

Handling an Incident – General Principles

If someone becomes abusive or threatening, consider whether or not you can cope with the situation. You should not feel you have to cope with it alone: you should seek help from other people, or leave altogether. If a situation appears to be getting out of control, make an excuse and leave and immediately report the incident to the headteacher.

It is important that you:

- Know whether you are in a position to offer the parent a realistic and reasonable answer to their expectations
- Know whether you are competent to handle the situation
- Be confident you have back up
- Be assured you can summon help
- Have a plan of how to approach the problem.

First keep calm, relax, allow yourself time to think and decide the best course of action. Ask yourself if what has occurred so far in the exchange means that someone else, specially briefed by you, would be better placed to handle the situation.

Colleagues may have particular skills or experience that you do not have. The situation may be such that it requires specialist help, such as the police to eject a person; if so, you should get help quickly, before the situation deteriorates.

Warning Signs

Someone who is potentially, or about to become, violent can give out signs and signals that constitute a recognisable warning:

- Agitation
- Tapping the table
- Loud speech/shouting
- Muscle tension in face, hands, limbs; fidgeting, hand-wringing; clenching fists
- Drawing breath in sharply
- Colour of face: pale is dangerous – the body is ready for action; a red face is likely to indicate a bark worse than the bite, but this could change
- Finger- wagging or jabbing
- Inability to be still, even pacing about
- Swearing
- Staring eyes
- Sweating
- Oversensitivity to ideas, suggestions • Rapid mood swings.

Over the Telephone

If a parent, carer or member of the public begins to exhibit aggressive or abusive behaviour, e.g. use of foul language or verbal threats) towards any member of staff during a telephone call, the member of staff should:

- Calmly state that the language used is unacceptable and that they will end the call if it continues.

- Try to establish the name and contact details of the complainant (and the nature of the complaint if possible) and state that a member of the Leadership Team will return their call as soon as possible.
- End the call. Make notes of what was said immediately on termination of the call and then report the incident to a member of the Leadership Team.

A member of the Leadership Team will contact the complainant to establish the nature of the complaint and try to resolve the issue.

Written Abuse

If a member of staff receives written correspondence, e.g. letter, e-mail or text of a threatening or abusive nature from a parent, carer or member of the public, this shall be reported immediately to a member of the Leadership Team and a copy retained as evidence. The receiving member of staff will not reply to the correspondence without first agreeing the response with the Leadership Team member or, in preference, the LT member will respond on their behalf.

Whilst the School will make every effort to resolve any issue raised by the complainant, consideration may also be given to involving the police, especially where threats of violence have been made.

Every effort must be made to minimise the likelihood of written abuse through not communicating using personal email or social media direct mail. Only use the secure school email for communicating with parents and other staff (on school related matters).

It should always be remembered that:

- The physical safety of employees is more important than the security of buildings or property.
- When violence is threatened it is important that reasonable effort is made to control the situation.
- If a situation is out of control it is better to retreat and get away if possible.
- In controlling an incident, involvement of members of the public should be avoided
- If an implement has been involved in an attack, this should be retained, provided this can be done without any risk.
- Physical intervention or restraint should always be regarded as an absolute last resort.

Action to be taken following an incident:

- Seek medical attention, if required.
- Report verbally to your headteacher/manager as soon as possible. Other staff may be at risk from the same person.
- Complete an Incident Report Form and pass to your headteacher/manager for investigation, having sought Union advice, if appropriate (Appendix E).
- Take time with your headteacher/manager to discuss the incident and your feelings.
- Ask for assistance if you need it.
- Consider Police involvement, if they are not already involved.
- Seek advice on your entitlement to claim financial compensation, if appropriate.

In all cases of assault causing actual injury the employee sustaining the injury is advised to make a formal complaint to the Police against the assailant, unless this is considered inappropriate. This decision, although personal, should be discussed with the Headteacher.

Employees have joint responsibility with their employer to review any incidents and identify the need for appropriate training and counselling, and specific strategies to reduce the level of risk.

Support

Occupational Health advice and telephone-based professional counselling is available through the Local Authority's Employee Assistance Programme.

Guidance for Headteachers/Managers

People with responsibility for staff management need to be committed to the objective of reducing violence and risks of violence to employees and ensuring that all staff receive appropriate training.

It is important to ensure that new members of staff are aware of this policy and procedures as part of their induction to the school and that they have access to appropriate training.

Staff should be aware that they can expect support from their Headteacher in managing parent interviews well.

A formal notice should be displayed at the entrance(s) to the school informing visitors of the school's expectations about behaviour and/or that they may face prosecution for violent, threatening and abusive behaviour.

Action following an incident

Where there has been any kind of affray, where an assault* has resulted in actual injury, or where an employee has been seriously threatened, the police should be called.

**An assault occurs when a person suffers, or is put in immediate fear of, personal injury by the deliberate or reckless act of another.*

Any incidents of a less serious or ambiguous nature should still be discussed with the police.

In all cases of assault causing actual injury the employee sustaining the injury is advised to make a formal complaint to the police against the assailant, unless this is considered inappropriate. This decision, although personal, should be discussed with the Headteacher. Assault is a criminal offence which may result in prosecution at court.

Action to be taken following an incident

- Provide access to a private area for as long as necessary where the member of staff can sit with a friend or colleague.
- Provide assistance, if necessary, for the member of staff to go home/visit their GP/attend hospital etc. A medical assessment of any injury should be made as soon as practicable and, in case of visible injuries, it is helpful to obtain photographs.
- Make time for the employee to talk to you.
- Explain the employee's right to involve the police if they so wish.
- Contact the Police as above under 'Role of Thames Valley Police'.
- Provide the opportunity for the member of staff to consult his/her trade union representative before submitting their completed Incident Report Form/Statement (Appendix E).
- Report the incident.
- Carry out a thorough investigation into the incident.
- Obtain written statements from witnesses as soon as possible after the incident (the sooner the better).
- All evidence obtained should be retained to support any action taken.
- Maintain regular contact with the person if they are off work because of the incident.
- Make the member of staff aware of the availability of occupational health advice and telephone-based professional counselling through the Employee Assistance Programme (0800 243 458).
- Review risk assessments and procedures following an incident and amend if necessary without delay.
- Ensure other relevant staff are informed of the incident and of any changes to working practices.

Reporting Procedures

A great deal of crime and other incidents often go unreported, sometimes because they are considered too trivial to report or, there is a view that no action will be taken when incidents do occur. Consequently, failure to report incidents and near misses gives a false picture of the real situation. As the employer, the Governing Body has a duty to ensure a safe and secure workplace, but cannot help if it is unaware of problems.

The Headteacher and staff must ensure that all incidents are properly reported and acted upon so that recurrence can be prevented. It is important to record the circumstances that led to violence as this may help identify what events may have triggered the incident and what systems or procedures may need revision.

As soon as practicable after the incident, a written statement/Incident report Form (Appendix E) should be prepared by the member of staff concerned which includes the circumstances leading up to the incident. It needs to contain sufficient detail to help identify appropriate preventive measures, and to help assess whether those measures were successful. Suggested details include information on:

- Where the incident occurred, including physical environment; the time of day;
- Activity at the time of the incident

- Details of the perpetrator
- The relationship between the victim and the perpetrator
- An account of what happened • The outcome
- If preventive measures have been introduced, did they help?

The Headteacher should inform the Chair of Governors in confidence of each incident. Where required the LA should also be informed.

The school will need to retain proper evidence so that it can be used to support any action taken. Recording details of incidents will also help in reviewing the school's policy and should inform future risk assessments.

Follow up

The Headteacher will need to make a judgement as to whether the visitor is likely to become involved in such an incident again, or whether there were unique circumstances in this specific case. If it is likely that the behaviour will be repeated a warning letter should be sent, explaining that the behaviour is unacceptable and will not be tolerated on the school premises. Depending on the circumstances, it may be helpful to discuss the warning letter with the LA Legal Team.

For future visits to the school, advance notice of an intention to visit could be required and an independent witness could be present.

In all cases of assault causing actual injury the employee sustaining the injury should be advised to make a formal complaint to the police against the assailant, unless this is considered inappropriate.

The Headteacher/Governing Body/LA have the power to ban anyone from coming onto school premises for a specified period of time. This decision will be communicated to the person concerned. When the period elapses, the Headteacher/Governing Body/LA will review whether the visitor's ban from the school premises should continue or whether it should be lifted.

If abusive behaviour is repeated, the visitor should be declared unwelcome and they can be ordered off the premises as they then become a trespasser under Section 547 of the Education Act 1996. *This power is usually delegated by the Local Authority (community, voluntary controlled and community special schools) to the Headteacher and caretaker.*

Banning a parent/visitor from the school

The school reserves the right to impose a temporary or permanent ban from the school premises on any parent/carer or member of the public who has demonstrated aggressive or abusive behaviour towards any member of staff, student, visitor or volunteer at the school.

This decision shall be made by the Headteacher in consultation with the Chair of Governors and the length of any ban shall be proportionate to the nature and circumstances of the incident. In the case of a parent/carer, prior to a ban being imposed (except in urgent situations), the Headteacher/Chair of Governors shall write to the individual indicating that a ban from the premises is being considered, stating the reasons for this and the date by which any written

representations by the individual should be received by the school before the decision is made. In urgent situations, the Headteacher may impose an immediate **temporary** ban in writing and provide the parent/carer the opportunity to make written representations prior to formalising any extension to the ban.

Where the decision to impose a ban is made, notification of the ban shall be in writing and shall clearly state:

- The reason for the ban being imposed
- The date of commencement of the ban
- A date by which any written representations by the individual should be received by the School
- A date for review of the ban and how this will be arranged (including any reparation that may be required by the School, e.g. a written apology)
- Provision to be made (if a parent or carer) for access to their child during the school day, e.g. should an emergency occur and the process to be followed should the parent/carer wish to contact the school or need to attend meetings at the School
- What action will be taken to remove the individual from the premises should the ban be breached*

The banned individual will be invited to make written representations and to attend a review meeting (accompanied by a friend or relative if required) with the Headteacher and/or a panel of Governors/police representative (this may take place away from the school site if appropriate). The Panel will review the ban and consider whether to lift it, make it permanent or continue it for a specified period.

The Headteacher may remove the ban at any time prior to the review date if appropriate resolution has been achieved.

Any ban imposed will not prevent or affect the outcome of the school's investigation into any complaints raised by the individual concerned. These will be handled as per the school's Complaints Policy/Procedure.

Equal Opportunities Statement

This policy applies to all and does not unlawfully discriminate because of the protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race (including colour, nationality, and ethnic or national origin), religion or belief, sex (gender) and sexual orientation.