

Personal Safety at Work



A guide for everyone

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Violence and aggression at work: are you at risk?

Personal safety at work is an issue which everyone should take seriously. The effects of violence and aggression can be damaging both physically and psychologically, in the long and short term. Many of us do our jobs without really thinking about whether we are putting ourselves at risk. Some consider violence at work as 'just part of the job'. It isn't – or at least, it shouldn't be.

According to the British Crime Survey (BCS), the risk of becoming a victim of actual or threatened violence at work is relatively low, with an estimated 1.2% of working adults the victims of one or more violent incidents at work in 2014/15.

The level of risk you personally face may, however, be very different. It is affected by a number of factors: the environment in which you work; the people you work with; the job you do. The more contact you have with the general public the greater the risk to your personal safety. Vulnerability can also be increased by working alone or outside normal hours.

There are lots of things which you and your employer can do to reduce the impact of violence and aggression. This booklet is designed to help. You should find that it raises a lot of questions. Thinking about these questions will help you and your organisation plan ways to keep you safe.

What do we mean by 'personal safety at work'?

Some organisations may need to interpret and apply the following definitions slightly differently. Whatever is accepted by your organisation, the chosen definition and reasons for it should be made clear in your personal safety policy. This will help you plan for and respond to incidents as confidently and safely as possible. It will also mean you know what sorts of incidents to report (more on reporting later). If you are not aware of your organisation's definition, find out and write it in the space overleaf.

Personal Safety

'An individual's ability to go about their everyday life free from the threat or fear of psychological, emotional or physical harm from others'.

Defined following research undertaken by Suzy Lamplugh Trust Research Institute

This means that personal safety relates specifically to harm caused by other people's *behaviour*. This is where personal safety is clearly different to 'health and safety', as it excludes harm caused by *things* such as chemical substances, electricity and fire.

Violence and Aggression at work

'Any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work.'

Defined by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE)

This means that violence and aggression at work is more than just physical attack. It also includes verbal aggression, threats, intimidation and harassment.

Our definition of violence and aggression is:

Who is responsible for personal safety at work?

The simple answer to that question is everybody! Personal safety at work is covered by several laws. The responsibility for it is shared between employer and employee.

The following examples of legislation should give you an idea of how employers are expected to manage work related violence and aggression.

The ***Health & Safety at Work Act 1974*** states that employers have a duty to ensure the safety and welfare of their employees. Every organisation with five or more employees is required to have a written Health and Safety Policy.

The Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1992 (updated 1999) requires every organisation in the UK to *proactively* control risk. Organisations must assess risk, create safe systems of work, communicate to their employees and review their systems on a regular basis.

The Chief Executive of your organisation is ultimately responsible for dealing with violence and aggression at work. In practice, however, it may be a different member of staff who is responsible for creating policies and procedures. Find out who is responsible for personal safety in your organisation. Write their name and contact details below for reference.



How does this relate to me?

The law requires your employer to conduct a risk assessment. From this it is best practice to develop a policy specifically related to personal safety. Such a policy may not be implemented in your workplace yet, but there are ways in which you can help your employer to understand its importance.

Highlight the cost to your employer

The costs of ignoring risk can be immense. Increased sickness absence and decreased performance are just the start. These can easily escalate and result in civil claims, damage to reputation, the loss of key personnel and, potentially, the company's collapse. The BCS suggests that this costs industry approximately £62million per year. The HSE estimates between £17k and £19k is spent per serious incident.

Keep reporting incidents

The more you report incidents of violence and aggression, the easier it is to identify risks. Don't give up on reporting even if your employer appears not to be taking any action. If fewer incidents are reported than occurred your employer may not take the situation seriously. In effect, if there are no reports there were no incidents.

Your legal responsibilities

As personal safety is the responsibility of both the employer and the employee, the law states that there are also things which **you** must do. If you don't you could be held accountable should an incident occur.

You must:

- *take reasonable care of your own safety, and that of others*
- *follow your organisation's policies and procedures*
- *attend training and become familiar with the information provided by your employer*
- *report any incidents of violence and aggression to your employer, including 'near misses' (see 'Reporting incidents' pg 9)*
- *inform your employer if any safety procedures are not working or are impractical to follow*

But it's not just about following procedures simply because they are law. You need to actually *want* a safe working environment – and surely everyone wants that? It often isn't difficult to achieve. More often than not, all that is needed are a few small changes to working practices and environments. Small changes can make a big impact.

Work *with* your employer and your team to control the risks to your personal safety. Get involved in developing and applying safety plans. Keep your employer informed of your concerns to ensure that risk reducing measures are up-to-date, effective and consistently followed.

With this in mind, find out if you have a personal safety policy and read it if you do. Fill in the following as you progress:

Our safety policy is kept:

- I have read it
- I have understood it
- If necessary I have challenged any procedures which no longer work or are impractical to follow
- I feel the policy is valid and I have no problem following it (if you can't tick this, you must speak to management about your concerns or you could be liable should an incident occur)
- I know how to report incidents to management (see next section for advice)

Reporting incidents

Reporting incidents is vital for identifying and preventing risks at work. This includes both actual incidents of violence or aggression and those occasions which could have been ('near misses'). Often low level aggression is a precursor to high level aggression. 'Near miss' reporting can highlight trends and triggers so that changes can be made to avoid future escalation.

All incidents should be reported in accordance with your organisation's established procedures. Make sure you know:

- the procedures for reporting incidents
- how to obtain an incident report form
- how to complete the form, or where to get help if you cannot complete it
- who to ask for advice, help and support including the name, address and telephone number of the relevant person at work

Make a note of those details here:

I need to report all incidents of violence and aggression to:

Incident forms are available from:

I can ask this person for help and support:

Prevention and avoidance

The best way to ensure that the workplace is safe is to avoid violence and aggression before it ever happens! It may sound obvious but it isn't always the first thing many people consider. Many of us do our jobs the way we always have, simply assuming that other people will behave predictably. When a situation becomes violent we are often shocked and surprised. With hindsight, however, many victims of violence and aggression can identify the signs which led to the incident. Knowing how to recognise these signs and act accordingly, before an incident escalates, is essential for keeping safe.

Find ways of working and behaving which help you recognise and avoid danger. Strike a balance, however, between sensible caution and exaggerated suspicion. Some groups of people are overly fearful, others are complacent and don't give a second thought to their

personal safety. The ideal is to be somewhere between these two points; to be aware of the risks but also aware of how to minimise their effect and control threatening situations.



Paranoid

Aware

Complacent

PLAN for your personal safety!

As avoidance is the key, it makes sense to PLAN ahead. Here are the key strategies for staying safe at work:



Everyone needs to be involved in the **preparation** to avoid potential incidents. Simply considering the significant risks and ways to reduce them can really make a difference. Think in advance about the 'what ifs' ("What if I was approached by an angry customer? What would I do?"). The more prepared you are, the more positive your reaction to threat will be.

Preparation will give you the **confidence** to avoid or deal with aggression. Being confident does not mean

being confrontational. Even if you don't feel confident, make yourself look as though you are so that you appear less vulnerable. Walk tall. Be alert and aware of your surroundings.

Waiting for an aggressive situation to improve often has the opposite effect. Your actions will affect whether a situation escalates or not. The moment you identify risk, **act** to reduce it to acceptable levels, or avoid it altogether. Even if there are no significant risks present, keep assessing the situation to ensure that you are prepared.

Once you have put personal safety plans into place, don't become complacent. **Never assume** that it could never happen to you, or that your fears are unfounded. Trust your instincts; they are there to warn you of possible danger. Never assume that people are what they seem: appearances can be deceptive.

Assessing the risks: recognising the signs of danger

Be aware of your surroundings at all times. Continually assessing the situations you are in is essential for keeping safe. If you are aware of what's around you, you can spot possible threats earlier and act to avoid risk. Assessing the risks isn't just a one-off exercise. You need to do it all day, everyday. Your personal assessments should complement the formal risk assessment conducted by your employer.

To examine the risks involved in your work, you should look at the **people** involved, the **environment** in which you are working and the **tasks** you are required to do.

PEOPLE

Who are you likely to meet/work with? Are they...

- people who are well known to you?
- people with a history of violence or aggression?
- people about whom you know very little?
- total strangers/members of the public?
- likely to welcome your presence, or are you dealing with a difficult subject?

Do any of the people you meet pose any significant threat to your personal safety?

Consider who may pose a threat to you at work and note down any concerns:

ENVIRONMENT

Where are you working? Are you...

- in an area where there is open access to the public?
- in a busy area with little or no information available to waiting customers/clients?
- able to communicate easily and confidentially with your customers/clients, or are there barriers preventing this?
- going into someone else's home or territory?
- out on the street amongst members of the public?
- visiting a rural or isolated area?
- able to communicate with colleagues or call for back up if you feel threatened?

Does your working environment pose a significant threat to your personal safety?

When are you working? Is it...

- during office hours when there are many people around?
- late at night or early in the morning when you are more isolated?

Do the hours you work pose a significant threat to your personal safety?

Consider the environments which may pose a threat to you at work and note down any concerns:

TASK

What are you doing? Are you...

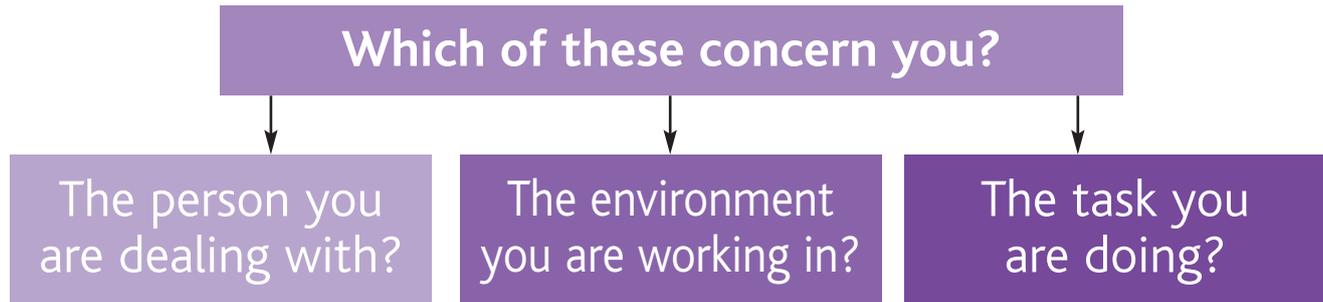
- dealing with cash?
- enforcing a rule?
- denying a service?
- discussing sensitive issues?
- carrying valuables or medical supplies?
- acting as a security service?
- supervising groups of young or vulnerable people?

Does the task you are carrying out pose a significant threat to your personal safety?

Consider the tasks which may pose a threat to you at work and note down any concerns:

Discuss any concerns you have with management.

The previous exercise should help you to conduct your own personal risk assessments. These will enable you to assess any situation and decide what action to take.



Case study: ignoring the risks at work

Thinking about personal safety means thinking about what could happen and then about how to avoid it. Read through the following imaginary case study where our character Mike, has not done that. See if you can identify where planning would have helped to keep him safe.

On his way to his job as a social worker, Mike was delayed by heavy traffic and found himself getting increasingly agitated. Arriving at work he saw the car of his most challenging client, whom he was half an hour late to meet. As he walked hastily into reception the client rushed towards him, demanding to be seen immediately.

Mike took him into an empty office, where the client's aggression rapidly increased. "How dare you keep me waiting so long?" he shouted. Mike tried to calm him down without much affect. His confidence was low because he felt guilty and his adrenalin was high due to his rush to the office.

His client started threatening him verbally and Mike realised he needed help, but his way to the door was blocked. There was no way to summon his colleagues. Suddenly the client stepped closer to Mike aggressively and shouted "This will be your last day at work!" Luckily, at this moment someone opened the door.

If this were a true scenario, Mike and his employer should use it to help them avoid anything similar happening again. You can use it to discuss with colleagues. Consider what steps Mike, his employer and the team could have taken to prevent the situation escalating beyond his control.

What were their options...

Before the day of the meeting?

- Mike's employer should have ensured a formal risk assessment of this task was done. This would have highlighted that aggression from clients was possible. Training could then have been provided to enable Mike to defuse difficult situations.
- Everyone in the office could have considered how best to set up the interview space. The incident would have been less damaging if Mike were positioned near the door. He may then have found it easier to get away or call for help.
- They could have considered other ways for summoning help. Having a telephone or panic button in the room may have been helpful.
- Mike could have devised some exit strategies: ways of removing himself from difficult situations. This would have helped him to summon help or de-stress before returning. A good strategy would be 'I'll go and get the paperwork which relates to that'.

- Everyone in the office could have pre-arranged a code word to indicate to others when they are experiencing problems. If Mike had known and practiced what to do he would have been able to respond appropriately. If a code word isn't obvious, help can be summoned without a client knowing or increasing their aggression.

On the day of the meeting?

- Mike could have called the office to tell them he would be late. Keeping his client informed may have stopped him from getting so angry.
- Mike could have told his colleagues about the meeting and asked them to interrupt after a few minutes. They could have checked that it was progressing safely and helped Mike to defuse the situation if it wasn't.

- Mike should have conducted his own Dynamic Risk Assessment on meeting the client. This may have alerted him earlier to the signs of aggression in his client. He could then have avoided being alone with him and/or done something to placate him immediately.
- Mike should have taken a few minutes to de-stress alone before taking his client into the room with him. Even though this would have delayed the meeting further, it would have allowed Mike a chance to calm down. If he had been calmer at the start of the meeting, he could have been more in control and acted positively.

During the meeting?

- Mike could have ensured that he was sitting nearest the door. This would at least have made it easier for him to leave or call for help.
- He could have used one of his pre-planned exit strategies or code words.
- He could have used defusion techniques to calm his client down (see 'Defusing aggression' on page 22).

At the time of the attack?

- By the time the client approached Mike he had very few options left. Usually when threatened we have three options: fight, flight or compromise. As Mike hadn't prepared fully for the situation, he wasn't able to choose 'flight' as his exit was blocked. He wasn't able to offer a compromise because he had lost control of his own emotions. He could have chosen to fight, physically or by shouting the man down, but neither of those options would have been safe.

This case study highlights the importance of taking steps to reduce or avoid risk as early as possible. During the time before the incident, there were lots of opportunities for Mike, his team and the organisation to make safe choices. As time went on, Mike's choices became more and more limited.

Many choices



Before Mike got to work

Some choices



During the meeting

Very few choices



Incident

Communication

Effective communication is one of the most successful ways to prevent aggressive situations developing. The case study highlights that Mike wasn't able to communicate properly with his client. This led to an increase in the client's aggression levels and an attack on Mike.

Remember:

- If you do not defuse aggression, it could escalate beyond your control and may put your personal safety at risk.
- If you are faced with aggression, it may impact on your own behaviour. Stress and tension may cause you to respond unpredictably (to help avoid this, tension control is covered on page 24).
- Think about not only what you say but *how* you say it. Speak calmly and clearly. Avoid patronising or using sarcasm.
- Avoid aggressive body language. Crossed arms, hands on hips, a wagging finger or a raised arm will challenge and confront.
- Try to avoid looking down on an aggressor. Stand at a 45 degree angle instead of squaring up to someone confrontationally.
- Often aggression arises simply due to a lack of information. Make sure that you always communicate any delays or cancellation of services.

Why do people become angry? They might want several things. Here we use an example of delayed trains to illustrate:

- they want a problem solved:
“How am I going to get to work now?”
- they want some help or information:
“When is the next train?”
- they want to be given more options:
“What other route can I take?”
- they want understanding:
“Please tell me you can help.”

The most common causes of aggression are frustration and fear (that a problem cannot be resolved or will worsen). When answers are not provided, some people will resort to aggressive behaviour.

Think about what makes you angry.

Try to recognise why other people may become aggressive towards you. If you can understand the causes of aggression then you will have a better chance to avoid or defuse it. Remember, however, that just because it's understandable doesn't mean it's acceptable. Aggression is best dealt with as soon as possible to prevent it from becoming harmful.

Defusing aggression

Many factors could affect the way you behave if threatened, from your own confidence and experience to how you are feeling on the day. There are no right or wrong answers. Thinking through the options ahead of time, however, will help you to take positive action.

Threatening behaviour can take many forms. It may take place face to face, by e-mail, on the phone or in writing. Always aim to defuse aggression early on, and never respond to violence with violence. Placate rather than provoke.

The earlier you spot a potential problem arising, the more choices you have to avoid it.

We've already spoken about how to **P.L.A.N.**, but what if you still can't avoid aggression? Here are some things you could do to defuse an aggressive situation:

- Be aware of changes in behaviour. This will help you to act before a situation gets out of control. It is very rare for aggression or violence to come from nowhere.
- If the person you are with is getting angry, try to remain calm. Do not be drawn into their anger.
- Think back to the exercise on the previous page. Simply being aware of what angers you may help you to avoid responding aggressively and thus escalating the situation.
- Use tension control techniques. These need to be practised to be really useful!
- Be aware of personal space and keep a safe distance.
- Try to distance yourself both physically and emotionally.
- Never put a hand on someone who is angry.
- Be aware that enforcing your authority or status and using jargon may actually increase their aggression.

- Avoid high-risk strategies such as using humour or shouting the other person down.
- If you have used a particular phrase or word effectively to defuse aggression, keep it handy for future use. Aggression can sometimes limit your ability to think clearly and such information can help you to stay focused.
- Keep your eye on potential escape routes. Move away from dangerous locations such as staircases, restricted spaces or places where equipment could be used as a weapon.
- Keep yourself between the aggressor and the door and, if possible, behind a barrier such as a desk (but don't block your exit doing this).
- Never walk deliberately into trouble to test your abilities. Responding to violence with violence may commit you to a fight you could lose (or make you liable for assault).

Telephone aggression - employees are not required to tolerate verbal abuse or threats on the telephone. If possible, a caller should be warned that a call will be terminated before ending an abusive phone call. For the protection of staff and Ofsted, a report should be generated whenever a call has to be terminated.

Stopping rules' – These refer to a set of conditions where an employee can reasonably terminate an interaction when it is deemed that there is an unacceptable level of risk to personal safety. Employee safety is paramount and an interaction should be terminated if:

- aggression is aimed at the employee personally
- the employee has been unable to defuse aggression
- aggression involves threats of violence against the employee
- Use tension control techniques. These need to be the employee feels his/her own safety is at risk

Tension control

Many people 'freeze' when confronted or threatened. Our senses receive an alarm signal which triggers a series of changes to the body, e.g. racing of the heart and nausea. These changes are useful. They tell us that something is wrong and that we should get away from a situation or try to defuse it.

Allow tension to alert you to danger but do not allow it to control you. Practice tension control techniques to help you learn how to regain control of your reactions. They can help you to think more clearly in a stressful situation and make safer choices.

Sitting in a chair:

- clench your hands into tight fists
- release completely including your arms, shoulders, jaw and neck. Breathe out a sigh as you release
- stretch your fingers out as far as you can.
Release as above
- push your shoulders down. Release
- push your back down into the chair. Release
- push your heels into the floor. Release

- expel all breath as a sigh so that your lungs fill with air
- slowly breathe in one long breath, filling your lungs
- expel again as a sigh
- repeat as often as you can

It will take practice to perfect these techniques.

Personal safety strategies

Along with learning how to recognise risk and defuse aggression, there are some general strategies you can put in place:

Reception/initial contact

- Start on a positive note as first impressions count. Use a friendly, helpful and confident approach to dealing with the public/clients. This will set the tone for a mutually respectful exchange.
- Acknowledge the person as soon as possible – even if you have to attend to another matter before you can help them.
- If you have an access control system, be strict with how this is used. Unlocked entrances, delivery areas and fire doors can all provide easy access for an intruder.
- Ensure that waiting areas provide appropriate seating, ventilation, lighting and updates on waiting times, if possible. Poor environments and misinformation are key triggers to aggression.

Meetings on-site

- If you know little or nothing about the person you are meeting, try not to meet with them alone. Find out as much as you can from colleagues or other agencies who have worked with them.
- Consider the effects of the meeting environment. Is there adequate space, access to exits, ventilation and the ability to communicate with colleagues?
- Ensure that there is a way of raising the alarm. Make sure that colleagues know what to do and that the system is tested to ensure that your plans work.

General

- If you see someone at work that you do not recognise, find out why they are there. Be aware of your personal safety when you approach them and avoid demanding aggressively that they tell you who they are.
- When entering or exiting the building, remain alert and aware of your surroundings to avoid being followed in or out.
- If you plan to work outside normal hours check that it is supported by your organisation's risk assessments and policies. Ensure that a colleague is aware of your plans; let them know if your plans change.

Out and about

- Remain alert and aware of your surroundings at all times.
- Consider carrying a personal alarm and know how to use it to shock and disorientate an attacker.
- A confident appearance can reduce your chances of becoming a victim (walk tall at a normal tempo with arms relaxed, not looking up or down).

- Your safety is more important than possessions; give them up if threatened. Carry some money and travel tickets/car keys hidden in a separate pocket. Do not attempt to recover any stolen goods yourself.
- Only carry what you need while working and do not draw attention to yourself by overtly displaying valuables.
- Be aware of the impact of your appearance in relation to your environment. Do not draw unnecessary attention to yourself and remain professional at all times.
- If your organisation receives negative attention from the public, try to hide anything that makes you identifiable as an employee.
- Try to avoid danger rather than confront it.
- Ensure that you have a fully charged mobile phone on you a BT Chargecard or some change as back up.
- Plan your journey in advance and avoid giving the impression that you do not know where you are going.

- Whenever possible visits and appointments should be arranged during daylight hours or when it is likely that people will be around.
- Ensure that you understand the organizations tracking and communication procedures and that they are followed. If they are deficient then inform your manager immediately.
- To carry things, use a small bag. If this is slung across your body, wear it under a jacket or coat. A shoulder bag should be worn with the straps over your shoulder and kept close to your body under your arm with the fastenings innermost.
- Don't switch off to the world by wearing a personal stereo.
- Try to avoid using your mobile phone in public, if you do, stay alert.
- You are most likely to escape danger wearing clothes you can move in easily and shoes that are comfortable. Walking quickly is usually safer than trying to run.
- Avoid poorly lit or little used areas.
- Do not take short cuts, unless you know they are as safe as the longer route.

- If you have to wait around, choose a well-lit, busy area and look confident and positive.
- If you think you are being followed, cross the road and keep walking. If you are still being followed, make for the nearest busy area, an open shop or well-lit house and, if necessary ask for help.
- Avoid areas where you know groups of people loiter, such as pubs and clubs.

Going out with colleagues

- Think in advance about how you will get home – especially if you are likely to be drinking.
- Keep an eye on each other; if possible have one person who will remain sober to look after the others.
- Watch your drinks being poured and keep an eye on them at all times.
- Consider that your colleagues' behaviour may be different outside of the workplace.
- If you receive unwanted sexual attention, a firm 'no' will often be enough. Be confident in your right to say this. Find out what your employer's policy on sexual harassment is if you are concerned.
- Trust your instincts.

Public Transport

- Take a map of public transport routes and a timetable with you in case you encounter any diversions or delays. If available, check web sites for notification of cancellations, delays, engineering works etc. Also carry taxi number for unforeseen emergencies.
- When waiting for public transport after dark, try to wait in well-lit areas and near emergency alarms and CCTV cameras.
- If something or someone makes you feel uncomfortable, act upon your instinct. It would be better to move seats before a problem arises.
- Never disclose details of your onwards journey. Never disclose the home address or home telephone number of yourself or employees. Direct all enquiries or follow up via the office.
- Check emergency exits and procedures when on public transport.
- If possible plan the time of your departure to avoid rush hours, poor lighting conditions, empty or unmanned stations etc.
- If possible, sit near the driver.

Taxis and Cabs

- Ask your employer to make a list of reputable firms and/or contact your council for details of local licensed minicabs. You could also look on the internet.
- Try to make bookings for outbound and return journeys before you leave.
- Make sure you keep the details of several taxi or minicab firms with you. You will then have a back-up if the first firm is busy or your booking doesn't arrive.
- When making a booking, ask for driver and/or car details and confirm them (without offering up the information) when the cab arrives.
- If you are concerned for your safety, instruct the driver to stop or drive to a busy area if possible. If the situation really worries you, attempt to attract the attention of other people.
- Only flag down a licensed taxi, as it is against the law for any other vehicle to ply for hire on the street.
- In any conversation with the driver, do not give personal information.
- Have your door keys in your pocket so you can enter your home quickly.

Driving

- Put together an emergency kit for your car. This could include an extra coat, a torch, bottled water, spare change and a mobile telephone charger (if you have a mobile).
- Join a vehicle recovery service and check the representative's ID when they respond to your call.
- Keep your car in good working order and have it serviced regularly 'in accordance with the manufacturer's guidance'
- When travelling by car ensure that you have enough petrol for your journey and any possible diversions.
- You must carry out daily/pre-shift visual checks of vehicles prior to your journey
- Plan your route before setting off. When you have the choice, use main roads.
- Have a map and directions with you so you don't have to stop to ask for directions
- If you see an incident or accident, or somebody tries to flag you down, ask yourself is it safe to stop? Can you help? Might it be safer and more useful if you went for help or rung the police?
- If your car breaks down pull as far off the road as you can and switch on your hazard lights. Remain aware of your surroundings at all times. Only get out of your car if and when you feel it is safe to do so.
- If your car breaks down use your mobile phone or walk to the nearest phone and call your breakdown service or the police.
- If you need to use an emergency phone, a marker post every 100 metres will point you to the nearest phone. Phones are situated every 1000 metres. Be ready to tell the person who answers the number on the marker nearest your car, car registration and the name of your motoring organization. If you are alone tell the control room.
- The call is free from these phones. Stand behind the phone and watch out for passing traffic, or anyone approaching you. Never cross the carriageway to reach a closer phone.
- If someone stops, use the phone to let the police know and give them the registration number of the car that is stopping. Tell the driver you have given all the details to the police and that they are likely to arrive shortly.

- Leave your vehicle via the passenger door and move as far away from the traffic as you can, standing on the verge behind the crash barrier. If this is not possible, or you don't feel safe outside the car then you should sit in the front passenger seat, put your seat belt on and lock the doors.
- If you decide to stand on the verge, take your keys with you and lock all the doors except the passenger door, which you should leave wide open, so you can get in quickly if you need to.
- When help arrives, check that the breakdown person knows your name and has been sent to help you specifically.
- Do not keep valuables on the front seat where they could be grabbed through a window.
- Keep your doors locked in built-up areas or in stop-start traffic.
- Road rage incidents are rare and can often be avoided simply by not responding to aggression from other drivers.
- If the driver of another car forces you to stop and gets out of his/her car, stay in your car. Keep the engine running and, if you need to, reverse to get away.
- When driving to meetings, try to plan where you will park before you go. If safer to do so, park as close to your destination as possible. If you will be returning after dark, consider what the area will be like then and try to park near street lights.
- When parking in a car park consider where the entrances and exits are. Try to avoid having to walk across an isolated car park to get to your car. Park away from pillars/barriers.
- If you can, reverse into parking spaces so you can get away quickly.
- When approaching your car, be aware of your surroundings and have your keys ready. Before entering, quickly check that no one is inside.

Staying in Hotels

- When approaching your car, be aware of your surroundings and have your keys ready. Before entering, quickly check that no one is inside.
- Park nearby, in a well lit area where you and your vehicle can be seen.
- At reception, try to avoid other people overhearing your name and room number.

- Try to avoid rooms that are accessible from the outside, such as ground floor rooms.
- If you feel unsafe in the room you have been given, do not be embarrassed to ask for another room.
- If you hear a disturbance, stay in your room and telephone for help.
- If you would rather not be seen dining alone, order a meal in your room.

Use this page to add any personal safety strategies you think might work for you.

In the event of an incident

It is impossible to guarantee that you will never encounter violence or aggression. If you have done all you can and attack is imminent, your aim is to get away. Not retaliating can sometimes be enough to avoid a violent incident. Your safety is paramount and it is better to get away than to stay.

- be prepared to move quickly
- never remain alone with a violent person
- don't turn your back on an aggressor
- to leave, move backwards gradually
- if you manage to calm the situation, re-establish contact cautiously

Be wary of choosing self defence as a means of protection

People tend to practice self-defence in a safe environment where they can expect an 'attack'. This can sometimes lead to a feeling of false confidence which could be dangerous.

Physical force should always be used as a very last resort. You could commit yourself to a fight you may lose or be liable for assault*

You could also try diversion techniques, in order to create surprise and an opportunity to get away. You might consider using:

- your voice. Shout a loud instruction like "Call the police!" or "Back!" You could also pretend to call out to someone nearby
- a personal safety alarm. The main purpose is to shock and disorientate an attacker so you can get away. Never rely on an alarm to bring you assistance. Make sure you read the alarm's instructions and that you test it from time to time

**Your organisation may wish to teach control and restraint techniques – for this your instructor will need to be Home Office approved and their appropriate use must be outlined clearly in policy.*

Exit strategy – Clear local exit strategies should be considered for exiting from the premises of an aggressive person. For example:

- you may set a reminder on their mobile telephone (if available) to be set off a few minutes after arriving at a service user. When the alarm goes off, it can be pretended that it is a 'phone call that requires attendance at another situation immediately. This could provide an opportunity to leave the potential aggressor without aggravating the situation
- you could also have 'stock answers' ready to use as excuses to leave in case of risk to your safety.

After an incident

Having a process to deal with the consequences of an incident is just as important as preparing to avoid it altogether. After any incident the needs of the individual, the team and the organisation must be addressed. Everyone needs to work together to achieve them.

If an incident happens to you:

- ensure that the immediate danger has passed
- make a note of any details you can remember as soon as possible
- report the incident to your employer, however trivial you may feel it was or if it was a 'near miss'

Verbal abuse or physical attack is extremely stressful and can have long-term psychological effects. Even if you handle the situation calmly at the time, you may experience a range of disturbing feelings afterwards including:

- guilt: what did I do to provoke them?
- fear: are they still out to get me?
- anger: how dare they treat me like this?

Your employer's policy on violence and aggression should include aftercare measures to minimise the traumatic effect of an incident. Contact your Line Manager in the first instance.

What are you entitled to from your employer?

- You should be provided with reasonable support. That may include debriefing, counselling, protected earnings, redeployment, time off work and legal support. This should be outlined in your organisation's personal safety policy.
- If it was a relatively serious incident, your risk assessment should be reviewed and any necessary changes made. This may also require changes to general working practices.
- Your employer should consider and address the impact on other employees.

Practical help

Anyone who has experienced violence might need help with:

- reporting the incident to the police
- time off work
- transport home or to hospital
- replacement of belongings lost in the attack
- contact your Line Manager and the Departmental Security Officer

Emotional support

Someone should always be available to support a victim immediately after an incident with sympathy, empathy and a quiet listening ear. This emotional support precedes any professional counselling that may be offered later.

If you are providing someone else with support:

- Allow the person to talk as much as they wish. Take things gently, however, as many victims of violence need time before they can speak about their experiences.
- Avoid criticising the victim's actions or speculating on what may have provoked their attacker. You can discuss later what can be learnt for the future.
- Remember that people will respond differently, in the long and short term. Some will want time off work; others will want to go back to work.
- Remember that verbal abuse can be just as upsetting as a physical attack.
- Ask *them* what help they need.

Long term support

Some people may need professional counselling to come to terms with their feelings about what happened and enable them to return to work as an effective member of the team. If you wish to talk to someone in confidence about counselling after an incident, contact your Line Manager or Health and Safety Manager.

Ask your employer or union. Assistance may also be obtained from your local police station. The Home Office has a useful leaflet called *Victim of Crime*, which gives information on how to apply for compensation if employees suffer an injury, loss or damage from a crime. Contact the Departmental Security Officer for more details.

Victim Support, a national charity, offers help and support to victims of crime. Their telephone number is 0808 1689 111.

Some basic guidelines for aftercare include:

	Individual	Team	Organisation
Up to 24 Hours after an incident	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical assistance • Police attendance • Contact family/ Next of Kin • Debrief and reporting with line manager • Sent home if appropriate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be informed of incident (even if not in detail) • To cover workload of the individual • Support – incident may affect team confidence/morale • Consider whether the aggressor will return. Take appropriate action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oversee completion of incident form • Oversee communication between teams and employees • Consider adverse publicity and strategy related to this • Review safety of the work area
1-7 days after	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further reporting of incident if necessary • Counselling if appropriate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debrief on incident and any updates • Support colleague as necessary • Cover workload of individual • Review local guidelines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive feedback from employee involved • Inform union where necessary • Consider adverse publicity • Inform Health and Safety Executive if necessary • Inform RIDDOR* if necessary
7+ days after	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow-up by employer/Police • Counselling if appropriate • Legal advice for individual 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and amend policies and procedures in conjunction with management • Conduct/partake in training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and amend policies and procedures in conjunction with staff • Provide training for staff and receive training for management • Legal advice for the organisation

*RIDDOR: Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations

Quiz

Here's a short quiz to see what you've learned. Tick the correct answer (unless otherwise stated, there is only one correct answer per question)

1. Personal safety should be considered by...

- only those who have high risk jobs
- everyone – men, women, children and the elderly – regardless of where they work or live
- only those who are scared

2. According to the 2004/2005 British Crime Survey, what is the risk of encountering violence and aggression at work?

- 1.5%
- 85.3%
- 0.7%

3. Violence at work refers to...

- threats, verbal and/or physical abuse
- physical attack only
- threats only

4. The level of risk is affected by what things? (tick three boxes)

- the workplace environment
- how many people work in your office
- whether you work in IT
- whether you deal with the public
- whether you work with numbers
- who the Prime Minister is
- the job you do
- whether your office is opposite a main road

5. Who is responsible for personal safety at work?

- your employer
- the government
- it is a joint responsibility between employer and employee

6. An incident of violence or aggression at work should be reported...

- always, no matter how trivial – how it is reported is dictated by the employer
- only if physical injury occurs
- only when the police are involved

7. It is important to report 'near miss' incidents so that...

- managers can really understand what it's like to do your job
- your Health and Safety Officer has something to do at work
- trends and triggers can be highlighted and changes made to reduce risk

8. What does P.L.A.N. stand for?

- Prepare, Look cocky, And Never run away from trouble
- Prepare, Look confident, Act to avoid risk, Never assume it won't happen to you
- People, Learn, About, being Nice

9. You should continually assess the situations you are in to ensure that you...

- are aware of any problems and can avoid them sooner
- know what kind of danger you're getting into
- can give a better description of what happened to your employer

10. Mike (from the case study) can learn from his incident that...

- if he gets stuck in traffic again he shouldn't go into work
- there are lots of things that he and his employer can do to prevent future incidents
- he shouldn't worry about his personal safety

11. How much do we communicate through words alone?

- 80%
- 50%
- 7%

12. If you haven't managed to avoid aggression, why is important to try to defuse it?

- because our employers tell us to
- so that we can put an end the situation or limit the damaging effects of aggression
- it's good to give it a try!

13. Why is it important to control tension? So that we...

- don't find our jobs too stressful
- don't cause muscle strain
- can react positively to threat or fear

14. Diversion techniques help us to...

- summon help
- make the other person laugh
- get away from threatening situations

15. It is important to think about personal safety strategies in advance because...(tick as many as you think are appropriate)

- we are less likely to freeze when threatened
- we are better prepared to avoid risk
- we are more likely to take positive action

Answers

How did you get on? Here are the answers;

1. Everyone – men, women, children and the elderly – regardless of where they work or live (see pages 3 and 39)
2. 1.5% (see page 3)
3. Threats, verbal and/or physical abuse (see page 4)
4. The workplace environment, whether you deal with the public and the job you do (see pages 3 and 12)
5. It is a joint responsibility between employer and employee (see page 6)
6. Always, no matter how trivial – how it is reported is dictated by the employer (see pages 7 and 9)
7. Trends and triggers can be highlighted and changes made to reduce risk (see pages 7 and 9)
8. Prepare, Look confident, Act to avoid risk, Never assume it won't happen to you (see page 11)
9. You are aware of any problems and can avoid them sooner (see page 12). It's no good simply knowing what the danger is that you are facing – you need to act to avoid risk
10. There are lots of things that he and his employer can do to prevent future incidents (pages 16 to 18)
11. 7% (see page 20)
12. So that we can put an end to the situation or limit the damaging effects of aggression (see page 22)
13. So that we can react positively to threat or fear (see page 24)
14. Get away from threatening situations (see page 30). Never rely solely on someone coming to your aid – do everything that you can to get yourself away from threatening situations
15. All three statements are true!

Where to find more help and advice

The Health and Safety Executive is responsible for the regulation of almost all the risks to health and safety arising from work activity in Britain.

www.hse.gov.uk

The Home Office has lots of useful information on crime reduction and advice for victims of crime on their website. www.homeoffice.gov.uk

Victim Support is an independent charity which helps people cope with the effects of crime.

UK Victim Support line: 0808 169 111

E-mail: supportline@victimsupport.org.uk

www.victimsupport.org.uk

The Samaritans are available 24 hours a day to provide confidential emotional support for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair.

Tel: 116 123 (UK) E-mail jo@samaritans.org

www.samaritans.org.uk

Crimestoppers, if you need to report a crime you can do so anonymously. Tel: 0800 555 111

www.crimestoppers-uk.org

Bully Online is the world's largest internet resource on workplace bullying and related issues www.bullyonline.org

Suzy Lamplugh Trust

Suzy Lamplugh Trust helps everyone – men, women and children – to gain the knowledge and confidence they need to avoid violence and aggression and live safer lives. We do this by providing positive, practical guidance which individuals can adapt to meet their specific needs and lifestyles.

Suzy Lamplugh Trust delivers training and conferences on many different workplace safety issues and has a number of other resources you may find useful.

For more information about our personal safety resources, training, conferences and fundraising, please visit our website at www.suzylamplugh.org or call 020 7091 0014.

Suzy Lamplugh Trust

Tel: 020 7091 0014

info@suzylamplugh.org

Facebook: [@suzylamplughtrust](https://www.facebook.com/suzylamplughtrust)

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Twitter: @live_life_safe
Tel: 020 7091 0014
info@suzylamplugh.org

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