

Preventing workplace violence and aggression

National guidance material

JANUARY 2021

Disclaimer

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Introduction

This Guide provides information for persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU) on how to manage the risk of violence and aggression in the workplace, including gendered violence.

- Information on preventing and responding to workplace sexual harassment can be found in the Guide: [*Preventing workplace sexual harassment*](#).
- Information on preventing and responding to workplace bullying can be found in the Guide: [*Preventing and responding to workplace bullying*](#).
- Information on managing risks to psychological health and safety can be found in the Guide: [*Work-related psychological health and safety: A systematic approach to meeting your duties*](#).
- Information on family and domestic violence can be found in the Information sheet: [*Family and domestic violence at the workplace*](#).

The information in this Guide is based on the model Work Health and Safety (WHS) laws. These laws have not been implemented in all jurisdictions, although other Australian WHS laws have similar duties. For information on the WHS laws in your jurisdiction see Safe Work Australia's [website](#).

What is workplace violence and aggression?

Workplace violence and aggression can be any incident where a person is abused, threatened or assaulted at the workplace or while they are carrying out work. For example, violence or aggression may happen:

- at a worker's usual workplace
- where a worker is working remotely, including if the person's workplace is their home
- in a place where the worker is undertaking work at a different location (such as a client's home), or
- when a worker is engaging in a work-related activity (such as a work-related corporate event or if you host a work-related social activity like a Christmas party).

Your workers may experience violence and aggression when they are not at work from risks which arise at the workplace. For example, if a worker receives abusive text messages after work from a colleague or client.

You can take action to reduce these risks in the workplace. For example, not requiring employees to use their private mobile phones or personal social media accounts to engage with clients.

If you have management or control of a workplace, you have additional duties under WHS laws, which include taking measures to ensure staff can enter and leave work safely.

You may also have obligations under other laws such as anti-discrimination and workers' compensation laws. You may wish to seek independent advice on your WHS duties and obligations under other laws.

What might violence or aggression look like?

Workplace violence and aggression covers a broad range of actions and behaviours that create a risk to health and safety, for example:

- physical assault such as biting, scratching, hitting, kicking, pushing, grabbing, or throwing objects
- intentionally coughing or spitting on someone
- sexual assault or any other form of indecent physical contact
- harassment or aggressive behaviour that creates a fear of violence, such as stalking, sexual harassment, verbal threats and abuse, or yelling and swearing
- hazing or initiation practices for new or young workers
- gendered violence, which is any behaviour directed at any person or that affects a person because of their sex, gender or sexual orientation, or because they do not adhere to socially prescribed gender roles, that creates a risk to health and safety, and
- violence from a family or domestic relationship when this occurs at the workplace, including if the person's workplace is their home (see the Information Sheet: [Family and domestic violence at the workplace](#)).

Acts such as assault, stalking and obscene or threatening communications (e.g. phone calls, letters, emails, text messages and posts on social media) may be offences under criminal law and should be referred to Police as well as managed under WHS laws

These behaviours can come from a range of sources including:

- **External** violence and aggression from customers, clients, patients, members of the public or from other businesses e.g. between a plumbing and an electrical sub-contractor at the same work site, or a delivery person and a retail worker.
- **Internal** violence and aggression from other workers, supervisors or managers.

It can be:

- physical or psychological,
- verbal, written or online
- one off or repeated incidents
- lower level behaviours such as name-calling through to more serious acts like physical assault, including criminal offences, or
- in person or can include threats by correspondence, electronic means or online (such as via social media platforms).

Violence or aggression may also be gendered in nature. Gendered violence is any behaviour directed at any person or that affects a person because of their sex, gender or sexual orientation, or because they do not adhere to socially prescribed gender roles, that creates a risk to health and safety. This includes violence targeted at someone because they identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer or asexual (LGBTIQ+).

Gendered violence can appear in many forms, for example rigid workplace norms based on gender stereotypes, different uniform requirements for men and women, or negative comments about a worker's sexual orientation or the way they look.

Sexual harassment may also be a form of gendered violence and may be perpetrated by various people including an employer, supervisor, co-worker, client, patient or customer. For information about how to prevent sexual harassment, see the Guide: [Preventing workplace sexual harassment](#).

Who is affected by workplace violence and aggression?

Violence can harm both the person it is directed at and anyone witnessing it. This can have significant economic and social costs for workers, their family, their organisation and the wider community.

Workplace violence and aggression can happen in any industry but is most common in industries where people work with the public or external clients. Higher risk industries include:

- health care and social assistance – this includes nurses, doctors, paramedics, allied health workers, child protection workers, residential and home carers
- public administration and safety – such as police officers, protective service officers, security officers, prison guards and welfare support workers
- retail and hospitality, particularly for new and young workers, including workers at grocery outlets, pharmacies, petrol stations, restaurants, bars and takeaway food service, and
- education and training – including teachers and teachers' aides.

New and young workers may also experience higher rates of workplace violence or aggression in the form of initiation or hazing. These are activities involving harassment or abuse to recognise or accept a person as part of the group. Hazing commonly involves negative, humiliating or distressing experiences for new and young workers which can result in physical and psychological harm. Hazing and initiation practices have been known to occur in workplaces with young apprentices such as construction and trades industries.

Impacts of workplace violence and aggression

Workplace violence and aggression can have significant short and long term impacts on a worker's health. It can contribute to physical injury and illness, as well as cause psychological harm to the person it is directed at and anyone witnessing the behaviour.

Violence and aggression can lead to:

- feelings of isolation, social isolation or family dislocation
- loss of confidence and withdrawal
- physical injuries as a result of assault
- stress, depression, anxiety or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- illness such as cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal disorders, immune deficiency and gastrointestinal disorders e.g. as a result of stress, and
- suicidal thoughts.

It is not just violent incidents such as physical assault which can cause harm. Exposure to lower level but frequent aggression can also have a lasting effect on a worker's health. For example, workers who regularly experience behaviours such as swearing, yelling, name-calling, racist, sexual or gendered comments and taunting may have serious long-term negative impacts on their mental and physical health. This conduct can also escalate to other forms of aggression and violence like physical assault.

Preventing workplace violence and aggression

Duties under WHS laws

A **PCBU** has a duty under WHS laws to eliminate risks to health and safety of workers and other persons so far as is reasonably practicable. If it is not reasonably practicable to eliminate risks, they must be minimised so far as is reasonably practicable.

This means you must do all that you reasonably can to manage the risk of violence and aggression occurring at the workplace (see the Guide: [How to determine what is reasonably practicable to meet a health and safety duty](#)).

- A 'worker' under WHS laws is anyone who carries out work in any capacity for your business, including employees, contractors, subcontractors, outworkers, apprentices, trainees, work experience students and volunteers who carry out work.
- A 'workplace' under WHS laws means a place where work is carried out for a business or undertaking and includes any place where a worker goes, or is likely to be, while at work. This includes a worker's usual workplace, where the worker is undertaking work at a different location (such as a client's home) or engaging in a work-related activity, such as a work-related corporate event.

This means workplace violence or aggression can happen at a worker's usual workplace, where the worker is undertaking work at a different location (such as a client's home) or engaging in a work-related activity (such as a work-related corporate event).

Under WHS laws you must also, so far as is reasonably practicable:

- provide and maintain a work environment that is without risk to the health and safety of workers
- provide adequate and accessible facilities for the welfare of workers to carry out their work
- give workers the necessary information, instruction, training or supervision to do their job safely and without risks to health, and
- consult with workers, and health and safety representatives (HSRs) if you have them, about health and safety issues that may directly affect them.

You must also consult, co-operate and co-ordinate with other businesses you work with, or share premises with, about how they will discharge their WHS duties when they interact with your workers. To do this you should exchange information and work together in a co-operative and co-ordinated way so risks are eliminated or minimised so far as is reasonably practicable.

For example:

- talk to other businesses you interact with (e.g. suppliers, commercial landlords, onsite food vendors or contractors) about potential hazards (such as poor lighting/visibility, people who are known to be aggressive or violent) and expected behaviours of everyone at the workplace
- talk to other businesses that share your worksite or premises about how to manage shared areas such as bathrooms and kitchens to ensure facilities are safe (e.g. secured access at night) and to avoid conflict between workers, and
- talk to other businesses that share your worksite or premises about what you will do if there is a violent or aggressive incident at the worksite or premises (e.g. incident

response procedures and sharing information about incidents or behaviours of concern).

Officers, such as company directors, must exercise due diligence to ensure the business or undertaking complies with the WHS Act and Regulations. This includes taking reasonable steps to ensure the business or undertaking has and uses appropriate resources and processes to eliminate or minimise risks associated with workplace bullying violence and aggression.

Workers also have duties under WHS laws. Workers must take reasonable care of their own health and safety in the workplace, and the health and safety of others who may be affected by what they do or do not do. Workers must also comply with any reasonable instructions, policies and procedures given by their employer at the workplace, including policies and procedures to prevent workplace violence and aggression.

Managing risks

You must do whatever you can to eliminate or minimise the health and safety risks of workplace violence and aggression so far as is reasonably practicable. This process is known as risk management and involves:

- identifying the hazards
- assessing the associated risks
- implementing control measures to eliminate or minimise risks, and
- regularly reviewing control measures to ensure they remain effective.

You must do these things in consultation with your workers and any HSRs if you have them.

More information about the risk management process can be found in the Code of Practice: [How to Manage Work Health and Safety Risks](#) and the Code of Practice: [Work Health and Safety Consultation, Co-operation and Co-ordination](#).

Identifying hazards and assessing risk

To identify the potential for violence or aggression you need to gather information about the hazards in your workplace and assess the associated risk.

Factors that can increase the likelihood and risks of a worker being exposed to violence or aggression include:

- providing care or services to people who are distressed, confused, afraid, ill, affected by drugs or alcohol, or receiving unwelcome or coercive treatment
- enforcement activities e.g. the activities of Police, prison officers or parking inspectors
- working in high crime areas
- handling valuable or restricted items e.g. cash or medicines
- the physical work environment e.g. poor lighting or visibility
- working alone, in isolation or in a remote area with the inability to call for assistance
- working offsite or in the community
- working in unpredictable environments e.g. where other people may pose a risk to workers' safety such as at a client's home
- interacting with customers including face-to-face, on the phone or online
- in relation to gendered violence, low worker diversity, power imbalances along gendered lines, and a workplace culture which accepts and tolerates gendered violence, and
- service methods or policies that cause or escalate frustration, anger, misunderstanding or conflict e.g. low staffing levels, customer service policies, setting unreasonable expectations of the services an organisation or workers can provide.

It is important to consider that workers may be more likely to experience violence and aggression, and/or be differently or more severely affected by it, because of their sex, gender, sexuality, age, migration status, disability and literacy - the risk of experiencing harm rises when a person faces multiple forms of discrimination.

High job demands, low job control, lack of role clarity and poor workplace relationships may also increase stress and conflict within the workplace which may escalate to aggressive or violent behaviour.

You should look out for less serious, but still unacceptable behaviour such as eye rolling, sneering, swearing and name-calling. This conduct can sometimes escalate to more serious forms of aggression and may be an indication of a risk of violence.

You must consult your workers about when they may be exposed to violence and aggression in all parts of their work, including when they are away from a fixed workplace e.g. to provide in-home services or making deliveries.

Violence and aggression may happen between workers within the workplace, but it may also come from third parties such as customers, clients, patients or members of the public. Although it may be difficult to control the actions of third parties, you must still eliminate or minimise the risks of third-party violence and aggression occurring at your workplace, so far as is reasonably practicable.

To identify hazards at the workplace, it may be useful to:

- observe work practices to identify risks of exposure e.g. working alone, contact with the public, or working after hours
- walk-through and inspect the workplace e.g. low visibility in service areas, entries and exits for workers after hours, long customer queues and wait times
- observe customer behaviour and how people interact with workers, including lower level but more frequent behaviours like incivility from customers
- identify whether issues already identified between co-workers, clients, patients or others could escalate to violence
- observe the culture of the workplace to see whether violence or aggression is accepted as normal behaviour - workers may take on this behaviour to participate in the workplace culture without thinking about the consequences to others e.g. name-calling, swearing, sexual or gendered jokes, or hazing new or young workers is seen as a workplace norm
- identify the physical, psychological and emotional demands involved in the work
- observe how managers, supervisors, workers and others interact with one another e.g. poor relationships, cultural or community issues leading to workplace tension, or workers avoiding being around certain people
- conduct confidential worker surveys about incidents or behaviours that have caused discomfort and situations that had the potential to become more violent
- conduct surveys of clients to identify problems with service delivery
- identify factors external to the workplace which may lead to violence or aggressive behaviour impacting your workers e.g. gatherings of people like protests or people affected by drugs or alcohol
- refer to industry standards and guidelines which may highlight risk factors for your particular industry
- examine local crime statistics, and
- monitor information like hazard and incident reports and workers' compensation claims.

After identifying the hazards, you should assess the risks in consultation with your workers. To do this, think about the following:

- Do particular tasks increase or decrease the likelihood of violence and aggression? How often are particular tasks done? Do particular tasks increase or decrease the severity of potential harm?
- Has violence happened before, either in this workplace or somewhere else? If it has happened, how often does it happen?
- What are the potential impacts? Will it cause harm to the health of the worker?

Controlling the risks

The risk of violence can be affected by a number of factors, for example the:

- nature and location of work
- interactions with clients, customers and members of the public, and frequency of interaction, and
- staffing levels and skills.

As these factors will vary between workplaces, the control measures you put in place need to be tailored to your business and to your workers. When deciding what control measures are reasonably practicable for your workplace, you need to consider and weigh up all relevant matters, including (but not limited to):

- the likelihood of workers and other people at the workplace being exposed to violence
- the degree of harm that might result e.g. physical assault can result in serious injury or death, which means the degree of harm is very high; violence can also result in serious psychological injuries like PTSD
- what you know about how to eliminate or minimise risks e.g. securing access to the workplace at night or when workers are alone
- availability and suitability of ways to eliminate or minimise the risk, and
- costs associated with the available ways of eliminating or minimising the risk.

When thinking about control measures, it is important that you consult with your workers, HSRs and health and safety committees if you have them. Engaging workers and others in developing controls will likely result in measures that are more effective and more widely used. You must take the views of workers into account when making decisions and advise them of your decision. You should also consider whether the control measures you introduce create new hazards or risks to health and safety.

This section provides examples of control measures for managing the risk of violence and aggression at the workplace. Further examples for specific industries are provided in [Appendix A](#). Remember the control measures you put in place need to be tailored to your business and to your workers. Not all control measures will be suitable for all workplaces.

Physical work environment and security

The physical work environment can affect the likelihood of violence and aggression and how workers can respond to incidents. Consider the following control measures which may provide the highest protection for workers:

- Security measures such as security personnel, video surveillance, fixed and portable alarm systems.
- Controlling access to the premises e.g. electronically controlled doors with viewing panels that allow surveillance of public areas before the doors are opened from the inside.

- Preventing access when people are working alone or at night e.g. via a security card or code.
- Providing facilities and amenities which give privacy and security, such as private and secure change rooms.
- Introducing a night-time security patrol.
- Installing a service window for night transactions and systems like pay-at-the-pump.
- Separating workers from the public with fixed or removable barriers such as high counters, furniture, screens on counters or screens between a driver and passenger.
- Banning persons with a history of violence from the workplace e.g. patrons at pubs or clients at health services.
- Refusing service to clients who expose workers to violence and aggression. If service is necessary, such as for medical care, put in place additional measures to protect workers and others.
- Providing alternative methods of customer service to eliminate face-to-face interactions e.g. online or click-and-collect services, no contact delivery drops.
- Installing internal and external lighting that provides good visibility.
- Arranging furniture and partitions within the workplace to ensure good visibility of service areas, improve natural surveillance and avoid restrictive movement.
- Ensuring there are no areas where workers could become trapped, such as rooms with keyed locks.
- Implementing appropriate temperature and noise controls, such as in waiting areas.
- Communication and alarm systems are in place, regularly maintained and tested.
- Limiting the amount of cash, valuables and medicines held on the premises and storing them securely e.g. only accept cashless payments.
- Securing any objects that could be thrown or used to injure someone.
- Providing workers and others with a safe place to retreat to avoid violence. In other situations, it may be possible to move the violent person e.g. an aggressive student could be removed from the classroom while the behaviour continues.
- Providing vehicles that are fit for purpose e.g. have central locking devices, tracking devices such as GPS systems to allow drivers in distress to be located, lighting inside the vehicle to allow the driver to be aware of passenger behaviour, and vehicles are well maintained so they do not break down in unsafe locations or times.

Safe work systems and procedures

Work systems and procedures are administrative controls that should be part of the overall violence prevention strategy at your workplace. Work systems and procedures may include:

- Managing expectations of clients and customers by clearly communicating the nature of the products or services you are providing e.g. online and using signage.
- Avoiding the need for workers to work in isolation and monitoring workers when they are working in the community or away from the workplace e.g. a supervisor regularly checking in with the worker throughout their shift.
- Procedures for working in isolation and uncontrolled environments e.g. carrying out situational risk assessments to determine at each visit the safety of a client's home before commencing duties.
- Implementing cash handling procedures (for more information see the Guide: [Transporting and handling cash](#))
- Providing sufficient workers e.g. during peak periods of customer attendance and for the level of care needed for clients.
- Reducing waiting times and missed calls e.g. by training 'relief' workers to take calls or transferring calls to other areas.
- Encouraging workers to escalate problem calls to senior workers.

- Alternating tasks in the workplace (particularly tasks requiring high levels of customer interaction) with other work tasks and ensure workers have regular breaks if aggression or incivility is likely.
- Responsible service of alcohol policy and practices are used.
- Using processes to assess risks of client aggression and violence and whether additional control measures are required for dealings with some clients.
- Where a client is known to have a history of aggression or violence, a management plan is in place that has been developed in consultation with appropriately qualified people and is communicated to all relevant workers.
- Understanding client condition/disability/triggers/care and behaviour management plans.
- Regular handover and information exchange with workers, other agencies, carers and service providers.
- Behaviour and treatment programs are reviewed after incidents or changes in behaviour.
- Using face shields where spitting is a risk.
- Putting up signs at the workplace, such as zero tolerance of aggression and violence, limits on products or services, security cameras are in use, or limited cash is held on the premises.
- Providing your workers with badges to remind customers and clients that a worker is part of the community e.g. labelled with “I’m a son” or “I’m a mother”
- Clearly communicating to clients and customers that any form of violence or aggression is not tolerated e.g. in service agreements, contracts or on signs
- Regularly evaluating work practices, in consultation with workers and their representatives, to see if they contribute to violence.
- Training workers in how to deal with difficult customers, conflict resolution, when and how to escalate issues to senior workers, and procedures to report incidents.
- Implementing workplace policies which set out standards of behaviour and procedures for what a worker should do if they experience or see violence or aggression and how they can report it.

Ensure these work systems and procedures are well understood by all workers (e.g. through training, providing policies electronically or on noticeboards) and implemented consistently across all areas of the business and all levels of worker.

In some circumstances, workers, or their HSRs have the right to refuse to carry out or stop unsafe work. They have this right if there is a reasonable concern that the worker will be exposed to a serious risk to their health and safety from an immediate or imminent hazard.

If a worker stops work because it is unsafe, they need to tell the PCBU as soon as possible. The worker must also then be available to carry out suitable alternative work, including doing other tasks that they are trained or able to do, or performing work from another location such as working from home. In most circumstances, the HSR will need to consult with the PCBU before a worker is directed to stop work.

Workplace policies

A workplace policy can help set out how the workplace will prevent and respond to violence and set expectations about behaviours in the workplace.

You may have separate policies or one policy which covers several WHS issues.

A workplace policy dealing with violence and aggression may include:

- a clear statement that the workplace will not accept any form of violence or aggression, including from clients, customers, members of the public or between workers

- examples of types of behaviours that are and are not allowed
- the control measures implemented to prevent violence at the workplace, including ensuring that the risks of gendered violence are considered and addressed
- the measures and procedures for dealing with violent incidents, both at the time of the incident and after the incident
- the consequences for breaching the policy
- the duties of all levels of workers, including managers and supervisors and your responsibilities as the employer
- how workers can report a concern or incident and encouraging workers to report incidents, no matter how minor
- the process the organisation will undertake when receiving a report or dealing with a concern, and
- information about support services available and referral information for all people involved.

Workplace policies should be developed in consultation with your workers, and their representatives if you have them. All workers should be made aware of policies and procedures in place to manage violence and aggression in the workplace and behaviour standards expected of them.

Addressing violence between workers

Violence may also occur within the workplace between all levels of workers, including supervisors, managers, apprentices and volunteers. Violence can also occur between workers engaged by different employers, for example building contractors at the same site, delivery workers or retail workers with a tenancy at the same shopping centre.

The workplace culture, behaviour standards, policies and procedures that you implement to prevent workplace violence will play a key role in addressing inappropriate behaviour early, and ideally before it escalates.

To manage the risk of internal violence and aggression at the workplace, consider:

- setting, modelling and enforcing acceptable behavior standards for all people in the workplace
- fostering a positive and respectful work culture where violence (including gendered violence) and aggression is not tolerated
- addressing inappropriate behaviour early and the reasons for those behaviours
- regularly reviewing workloads and time pressures with workers
- improving role clarity by ensuring workers have well-defined roles and clear expectations
- providing adequate resources and training to workers so they are able to perform their role confidently and competently
- providing supervision of work and support for workers, especially new, young and inexperienced workers
- encouraging workers to keep records of violent or aggressive behaviours, such as screen shots if inappropriate behaviour occurs online or through phone communication
- making sure workers have a range of ways to report incidents informally, formally, anonymously or confidentially
- ensuring processes and systems for reporting and responding to incidents are widely communicated, fit-for-purpose and regularly reviewed
- providing training to workers in how to respond if violence or aggression is directed at them, what they should do if they witness an incident and how to report an incident
- providing supportive, consistent and confidential response to reports, and

- consulting, co-operating and co-ordinating with other PCBUs who you share a duty with to identify and control risks and resolve issues as they arise.

Encourage reporting of violence and aggression

You should not rely only on formal reports of violence and aggression as there may be a number of reasons why a worker does not report a violent or aggressive incident. For example, workers may:

- consider that violence and aggression is just 'part of the job' or the work culture and that nothing can be done
- believe only the most serious acts of violence and aggression should be reported
- fear being blamed or that it may expose them to additional harm, discrimination or disadvantage (such as losing their job or negative impacts to their reputation or career)
- not understand or know their workplace rights, what behaviour should be reported or how to report it, particularly if workers are culturally or linguistically diverse
- consider the reporting process in place too time-consuming and complex, or
- believe that no action will be taken if they report, particularly if a perpetrator has organisational power over them (such as a manager or supervisor) or is in a position of influence (such as a client).

You should encourage workers to report aggressive or violent behaviour. You can do this by:

- making sure workers have a range of accessible and user-friendly ways to report informally, formally, anonymously and confidentially
- making sure workers know how to report violent or aggressive incidents or behaviours of concern, their right to representation and the support, protection and advice available
- training key workers (contact persons) to receive reports of incidents and give support and advice
- ensuring processes and systems for reporting and responding to incidents are widely communicated and regularly reviewed
- providing supportive, consistent and confidential responses to reports, and
- implementing systems to prevent retaliation and victimisation of people involved in reports of violence and aggression.

Information, instruction, training and supervision

You should provide your workers with information, instruction, training and supervision to support your overall strategy for preventing workplace violence and aggression.

Training, instruction and information should be delivered to workers at all levels of an organisation and be easily accessible. It must be provided in a form that can be understood by all workers, for example workers who are culturally or linguistically diverse.

Depending on the size and nature of your business, this may be done by:

- verbally informing all workers about the workplace policies
- displaying the policy on notice boards
- publishing the policy on the staff intranet or emailing it to workers
- distributing brochures or displaying posters, and
- providing training about violence and aggression, including through induction processes for new workers.

Training and information should cover:

- the nature and causes of violence in the organisation or industry sector, including potential triggers
- the control measures implemented at the workplace to prevent violence and aggression, both from external sources like clients and customers and from within the workplace e.g. from other workers
- workplace procedures, including when and how to escalate issues to senior workers, security or Police, and what to do during an incident (such as retreating to a safe location)
- personal safety outside the workplace, such as not wearing a uniform, name tag or identifying information outside of work, considering publicly available information such as social media platforms, not sharing personal details with clients, silent phone number and electoral roll registration
- verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to de-escalate conflict and identify signs of aggression
- how to use any personal safety equipment provided like duress alarms
- how a worker may conduct a situational risk assessment, for example when workers visit client homes or work off-site
- workplace policies, including acceptable standards of behaviour, consequences for breaches and how violence and aggression will be managed in the workplace, and
- how to report incidents and the support available.

Reviewing risk control measures

Risk management is an ongoing process. You should review your risk management systems regularly to ensure the risk of violence continues to be eliminated or minimised as far as practicable.

A review should occur:

- after instances of violence and aggression - this can help identify and address any underlying factors that may increase the risk of violence and aggression occurring, including whether you need to adjust control measures and whether response procedures worked the way they were supposed to
- when workers or their representatives indicate that risk control measures are ineffective or not as effective as they should be
- when an HSR or health and safety committee request a review
- when a significant change at the workplace has or may have introduced new or different hazards and risks, including the work environment, work tasks, systems, processes or procedures, and
- at regular intervals e.g. annually.

When reviewing control measures, consider whether they can be improved by implementing new control measures, making changes to the physical work environment, work policies or procedures, or providing additional training. Ensure any control measures implemented do not introduce new hazards or risks to health and safety.

Keeping records on reports of violence and aggression and actions taken can be useful in analysing trends, identifying systemic risk factors, and can be an important source of information for boards and governing bodies. Records with identifying information must be kept confidential.

Responding to incidents

If a worker or anyone at your workplace is in immediate danger, call 000.

Responses to violence will vary depending on the nature and severity of the incident.

You should have a response system in place to address what to do at the time of an incident and after an incident, including internal reporting and notifications required by external agencies such as Police and WHS regulator.

Workers should be trained in these policies and procedures, for example:

- using calm verbal and non-verbal communication, de-escalation and distraction techniques
- seeking support from other workers
- asking the aggressor to leave the premises or disconnecting the aggressor from the phone call
- activating alarms, or alerting security personnel or Police, and
- retreating to a safe location.

Immediately after an incident occurs at the workplace, you should:

- address immediate safety issues and ensure that everyone is safe
- provide first aid or urgent medical attention where necessary
- provide individual support where required, including psychological support to the victim and other workers
- report criminal acts such as physical assault, sexual assault and threats to harm someone to Police on 131 444, and
- record what happened, who was affected and who was involved.

Depending on the circumstances, even if a matter has been referred to Police or other agency, the WHS Regulator may still be involved. For example, you may need to notify your state or territory WHS regulator if the incident is a 'notifiable incident' (see our Factsheet: [Incident notification](#) for more information).

You may also decide to contact the WHS regulator or other agencies for assistance and information. This will assist you to assess whether your existing risk controls to prevent violence and aggression are effective, if your response procedures worked the way they were supposed to and whether new risks have been identified that also need to be managed to prevent future incidents.

Incident management policies and procedures should be developed and implemented in consultation with HSRs and workers who are likely to be affected by violence or aggression.

After an incident, you should review your risk management systems to identify and address factors that may have increased the risk of violence and aggression, evaluate what worked and what could be improved.

Reviewing systems of work

After an incident, you should review your risk management systems to identify and address factors that may have increased the risk of violence, evaluate what worked and what could be improved.

When investigating an incident, consider the following:

- investigate as soon as possible after the incident, so that you can find out information when the people involved can remember events and the order in which they happened

- collect information such as what happened, where it happened and why it happened by conducting interviews, reviewing written reports, training records and workplace policies
- look for causes by considering all aspects of the incident such as the environment, work tasks, systems and procedures, responses and people involved
- review the risk control measures to identify if they worked as intended and how they could be improved, and
- consider privacy and confidentiality when keeping information and records.

This process should be undertaken in consultation with workers and their representatives if you have them. Any conclusions you reach should be documented and communicated to all relevant parties, such as HSRs, health and safety committees and affected workers. This documentation should include a summary of the incident, what has been done and what will be done in the future.

If a matter has been referred to Police, the incident should still be investigated to assess whether risk controls are effective and if the response procedures worked the way they were supposed to.

Confidentiality

It is important that workplaces develop supportive environments in which workers feel safe to discuss their concerns about violence and aggression, or to report incidents.

All workers should be made aware of any mandatory reporting obligations which you have as the employer, either under state and territory laws or as part of the worker's employment contract, which may limit confidentiality.

To create an environment where workers feel confident to talk about their experience of violence or aggression, you should demonstrate that such information will be kept private and confidential. Confidentiality is important because workers may not be willing to talk about their experience without knowing it is confidential.

You should take all reasonable steps to ensure any information disclosed by workers is kept confidential and secure. Discuss with your workers how this information will be handled and how they can maintain the confidentiality of all parties involved. In most cases, de-identified information about a complaint or issue should be used to improve your prevention and response initiatives.

Ensuring confidentiality should not prevent the parties involved from seeking support, such as through an employee assistance program, or bringing along a support person or representative to meetings.

Violence and aggression in the workplace can be a complex issue and you may wish to seek further advice from your employer organisation or a WHS and employment law professional.

Resources and support services

- Guide: [Handling and transporting cash](#)
- Guide: [Preventing workplace sexual harassment](#)
- Guide: [Preventing and responding to workplace bullying](#)
- Guide: [Dealing with workplace bullying – a worker’s guide](#)
- Guide: [Work-related psychological health and safety: A systematic approach to meeting your duties](#)
- Model Code of Practice: [How to manage work health and safety risks](#)
- Model Code of Practice: [Work health and safety consultation, co-operation and co-ordination](#)
- Model Code of Practice: [Managing the work environment and facilities](#)
- Queensland Government: [Prevention and management of work-related violence and aggression in health services](#)
- Queensland Government: [Violence and aggression incident investigation tool](#)

Family and domestic violence information

- Information Sheet: [Family and domestic violence at the workplace](#)
- Fair Work Ombudsman: [Employer guide to family and domestic violence](#)
- Australian Human Rights Commission: [Domestic violence policy and procedures](#)
- Queensland Government: [Individual risk assessment and safety management plan](#)
- Queensland Government: [Workplace risk management guide for domestic and family violence](#)
- Queensland Government: [A workplace approach to employees who use or may use violence and abuse](#)
- Western Australia Government: [Fact sheet 2 indicators of family and domestic violence](#)
- Northern Territory Government: [Domestic, family and sexual violence](#)
- Northern Territory Government: [Family safety framework](#)
- Office of the Australian Information Commissioner: [Privacy](#)
- [1800 RESPECT](#)
- [DV Work Aware](#)
- [Our Watch](#)
- [White Ribbon Australia](#)
- [Men’s Referral Service](#)
- [Kids Helpline](#)

Appendix A Industry hazards and control measures

This table provides examples of hazards and risks which may lead to violence in your industry. It also provides examples of control measures for managing those risks.

Every workplace is different and the examples in this table are not exhaustive and may not be reasonably practicable for your business. You should consult with your workers to identify any additional hazards and risks of violence at your workplace. The control measures you put in place need to be tailored to your business and your workers in order to eliminate or minimise the risk of violence so far as is reasonably practicable.

Retail and Hospitality

Potential hazards

- Frequent contact with the general public
- Workers are handling valuable or restricted items e.g. cash or medicines
- Workers are working in isolation or at night
- Workers are providing services to people who are affected by drugs or alcohol
- Stock shortages, restrictions on services, refund or returns policies do not meet expectations
- Insufficient workers available to serve customers, particularly during seasonal trading peaks
- Waiting times, delivery times or processing times do not meet expectations
- Workers do not have the information on-hand to respond to customer requests or are insufficiently trained

Example control measures

- Banning persons with a history of violence and aggression from the workplace
- Provide alternative methods of customer service to eliminate or minimise face-to-face interactions, such as online or click-and-collect services
- Ensure access to the premises is appropriately controlled when people work alone or at night

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- Increase security measures such as security personnel, video surveillance or duress alarms
 - Ensure internal and external lighting provides good visibility
 - Furniture and partitions are arranged to allow good visibility of service areas and avoid restrictive movement
 - Ensure the physical environment is clean and has appropriate noise and temperature controls
 - Separate workers from the public, e.g. with protective barriers, screens or raising the height of counters
 - Limit the amount of cash, valuables and medicines held on the premises and implement cash handling procedures (for more information see the Guide: [Transporting and handling cash](#))
 - Ensure there are no objects that could be thrown or used to injure someone
 - Workers and others have a safe place to retreat to avoid violence
 - Customer facing signage advising zero-tolerance of abuse and violence at the workplace
 - Clearly inform customers of the nature and limits of the products or services you are providing e.g. online and using signage
 - Provide information as soon as possible on the availability of services/products, processing delays or waiting times
 - Avoid workers needing to work in isolation and provide sufficient workers during periods of high customer attendance
 - Monitor workers when they are working alone or away from the workplace e.g. a supervisor checks in regularly throughout the shift
 - Rotate workers to limit contact time with customers
 - Workers are trained in de-escalating aggressive behaviour (signs of aggression, verbal and non-verbal communication strategies)

Public transport

Potential hazards

- Working at night, alone or in isolated areas e.g. visibility is reduced, workers do not have access to assistance from others
- Working in high crime areas
- People may be affected by drugs or alcohol

Example control measures

- Install fixed or removable barriers such as screens between drivers and passengers

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- Where possible, board customers using rear doors to distance from driver
 - Block off area closest to driver to ensure a safe distance from passengers
 - Security cameras to record activities within the vehicle to discourage violent behaviour
 - Increase services in peak times to avoid delays/over-crowding
 - Silent alarms (such as an external light), radio communication and reliable duress systems to allow drivers to safely request help
 - Vehicle tracking devices such as GPS systems to allow drivers in distress to be located
 - Improved lighting inside the vehicle that allows the driver to be aware of passenger behaviour
 - Providing well-maintained vehicles so they do not break down in unsafe locations or times
 - Limit cash transactions and provide safe storage areas for cash
 - Security or Police presence during high risk times
 - Signage to direct passenger actions, such as:
 - zero tolerance of aggression and violence
 - security cameras are in use
 - limited cash is held by the driver
 - do not speak to driver while the vehicle is in motion
 - requesting passengers to exit by rear doors (where able), and
 - encouraging client reporting of incidents to relevant authorities
 - Safety controls at change over points or end of shift (e.g. lighting in car park, security cameras)
 - Workers are trained in de-escalating aggressive behaviour (signs of aggression, verbal and non-verbal communication strategies)
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Delivery drivers

Potential hazards

- Working at night, alone or in isolated areas
- Working in high crime areas
- People may be affected by drugs or alcohol

Example control measures

- Implement no contact delivery drops
- Silent alarms (such as an external light), radio communication and reliable duress systems to allow drivers to safely request help
- Vehicle tracking devices such as GPS systems to allow drivers in distress to be located
- Central locking devices on all delivery vehicles
- Providing well-maintained vehicles so they do not break down in unsafe locations or times
- Workers are trained in de-escalating aggressive behaviour (signs of aggression, verbal and non-verbal communication strategies)

Taxi and ride-share services

Potential hazards

- Working with cash
- Working at night, alone or in isolated areas
- Working in high crime areas
- People may be affected by drugs or alcohol.

Example control measures

- Fixed or removable barriers such as screens between drivers and passengers
- Security cameras to record activities within the vehicle to discourage violent behaviour
- Silent alarms (such as an external light), duress alarm, mobile or radio communication allowing drivers to safely request help
- Vehicle tracking devices such as GPS systems to allow drivers in distress to be located
- Providing well-maintained vehicles so they do not break down in unsafe locations or times
- Improved lighting inside the taxi to allow the driver to be aware of passenger behaviour
- Promoting the use of credit card payments to limit the amount of cash in the vehicle
- Terms and conditions of use explicitly state that abuse and violence towards drivers will not be tolerated and is a condition of use of the service
- Workers are trained in de-escalating aggressive behaviour (signs of aggression, verbal and non-verbal communication strategies)

Health, aged care and community services

Potential hazards

- Providing care or services to people who may be:
 - distressed, afraid, ill, angry or incarcerated
 - have unreasonable expectations of what an organisation and/or worker can provide them
 - affected by drugs or alcohol, or

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- receiving unwelcome or coercive treatment
 - Limited knowledge of client's behavioural trigger
 - Workers are working in isolation, offsite, in the community or a client's home
 - Working in an environment where other people may pose a risk to workers' safety e.g. client's family and friends
 - Changes to procedures and patients are struggling to adjust
 - There are peaks in workloads and not enough workers available
 - The time it would take for another person to attend the client's house to support the worker
 - Workers are handling restricted items e.g. medicines

Example control measures

- Electronically controlled doors with viewing panels that allow surveillance of public areas before the doors are opened from the inside
- Communication and alarm systems are in place, and regularly maintained and tested
- Providing personal duress alarms and training workers in their use
- Facility has safe glass only e.g. laminated, toughened or Perspex (including picture frames, mirrors etc.)
- Providing services in a more secure environment (e.g. community centres) where possible
- Signage directs and assists clients and the public to find their way
- Internal and external lighting assists visibility and service areas have good visibility for workers
- There is a safe room/place to retreat for worker and others' safety
- No access to dangerous implements or objects that could be thrown or used to injure workers
- Install a physical barrier in cars between the driver and the client
- Providing well-maintained vehicles so they do not break down in unsafe locations or times
- Client intake assessments include screening for aggression and violence
- Regular handover and information exchange with workers, other agencies, carers and service providers
- Workers are trained in carrying out situational risk assessments and determining at each visit the safety of a client's home as a workplace before commencing duties
- Behaviours and what triggers them are identified – strategies to avoid/address behaviours and triggers are implemented
- Behaviour and treatment programs are reviewed after incidents or changes in behaviour

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- Where a client is known to have history of aggression, a management plan is in place that has been developed in consultation with appropriately qualified people, ensuring that all workers who may have contact with the client are informed
 - Workers are trained in de-escalating aggressive behaviour (signs of aggression, verbal and non-verbal communication strategies)
 - Worker levels are adequate for the level of care needed and take into account the range of activities undertaken (such as peak periods, transfers, meal times, night work, emergency responses, acute care/crisis, and respite)
 - Workers are rotated into alternate duties to reduce exposure
 - Reviewing the requirement for working alone and providing additional service providers where required

Education

Potential hazards

- Dealing with students or parents who may be distressed, angry or affected by drugs or alcohol
- Working in unpredictable environments
- Limited knowledge of student's behavioural triggers
- Workers are working in isolation, offsite or in the community
- Lack of supervision and monitoring systems

Example control measures

- Expulsion or suspension of students with a history of violence and aggression towards others
- Communication and alarm systems are in place, and regularly maintained and tested
- Ensure there are no objects that could be thrown or used to injure someone
- Ensure workers and others have a safe place to retreat to avoid violence, or the student can be taken to a designated area which separates them from others
- Workers do not work alone with high-risk students
- Conduct environmental risk assessments to identify hazards like restricted exits, or furniture or partitions blocking natural surveillance
- Clearly inform students and parents of any changes to well-known procedures and new procedures which they may not be familiar with
- Workers are monitored when working alone, in the community or away from the workplace e.g. supervisor checks in regularly throughout the shift

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- Workers are trained in de-escalating aggressive behaviour (signs of aggression, verbal and non-verbal communication strategies)

Enforcement – Police, protective services and security services

Potential hazards

- Dealing with people who may be distressed, afraid, ill, angry, incarcerated, or affected by drugs or alcohol
- Working in unpredictable environments
- There are not enough workers available
- Workers are working in isolation, offsite or in the community
- Lack of supervision and monitoring systems

Example control measures

- Communication and alarm systems are in place, and regularly maintained and tested)
- Internal and external lighting assists visibility
- Operational procedures for working in isolation and uncontrolled environments
- Workers are monitored when working in the community or away from the workplace e.g. supervisor checks in regularly throughout the shift
- Procedures and back up are in place for workers working alone or in isolation
- Number of workers is adequate and takes into account the range of activities undertaken (such as work environment, peak periods, night work, and emergency services)
- Systems are in place to map and record areas/places of concern
- Work practices are evaluated to see if they contribute to aggression and violence
- Skill level, training and experience of workers is appropriate for duties allocated to them
- Workers are rotated into alternate duties to reduce exposure
- Workers are inducted on violence prevention measures before starting work
- Workers are trained in de-escalating aggressive behaviour (signs of aggression, verbal and non-verbal communication strategies)
- Workers receive regular support and supervision