

- The intention of any physical intervention must be clear;
- In short, teachers should only intervene physically to restrain or contain a child;
- Where there is a clear danger to the child or others;
- Where all other interventions have failed or are not feasible;
- With the clear intention of removing the child from danger; and
- With the minimum force required to ensure the child's safety.

In some special schools, the use of physical restraint may be part of the school's policy on challenging behaviour. In such cases, staff should be trained in the use of physical restraint as part of an overall behaviour intervention strategy. Where such a policy exists in the school, teachers will normally be required to undertake training in the use of restraint. However, it is important to keep in mind that only a minority of pupils will need to be restrained



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## MANAGEMENT OF PHYSICAL VIOLENCE AT SCHOOL

*Read this*



*An initiative of the Department of Basic Education*



**basic education**

Department:  
Basic Education  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

## Understanding Physical Violence?

Violence can occur in many forms and can cause physical, psychological and/or emotional harm. The focus of this tip sheet is physical violence. Physical violence occurs when one or more individuals deliberately inflict physical harm or pain on at least one other person.

Physical violence includes, but is not limited to:

- scratching or biting;
- pushing or shoving;
- throwing;
- grabbing;
- choking;
- shaking;
- hair-pulling;
- slapping, punching or hitting;
- use of a weapon (gun, knife, or other object); and
- use of restraints or one's body, size, or strength against another person

Physical violence also includes encouraging other people to do any of these things.

Physical violence is a serious issue and may lead to criminal charges.

The longer the physical abuse continues, the more serious the injuries may become and the more difficult it is to eliminate the abusive behaviour.

Physical injury, for example one blow to the head through a fight or a fall can have severe consequences and may lead to brain injury, permanent disability or even death. Remember it may only take one push or punch.

**When faced with a potentially violent situation the following steps may prove useful in de-escalating the situation.**

- Play the role of "*calm, cool, and composed.*" Acting in this manner actually helps a person to remain calm;
- Be assertive and directive but not aggressive. Do not threaten the learner verbally or physically;
- Be as non-intrusive and non-invasive as possible;
- Do not move toward the learner or invade his or her space;
- Communicate expectations verbally and non-verbally;
- Always tell the learner to stop (with an accompanying hand signal);
- Send for help and get rid of the audience (the rest of the bystanders);
- Wait for help (if possible);
- Do not argue and do not respond to verbal abuse.
- It is important that any violent incident is recorded;
- Physical assaults must be met with consequences, which are clear and logical. It is important that the consequences are fairly immediate, implementable, and appropriate. Consequences should never be physically or psychologically harmful or humiliating. A school's Code of Conduct for Learners should outline the sanctions which are used in the school for physical assaults;
- Remember physical intervention carries the possibility of being interpreted as an assault;
- Physical intervention may carry the risk of injury to the child or to the adult involved;
- Any consideration of the use of restraint or containment should only occur, as a last resort, where no other intervention is feasible or effective;

## Get Parents Involved

Just as with learners, keeping lines of communication open with parents is very important. The more that you call parents and talk with them, the more likely it is that when a concern arises you can effectively deal with it together.

## Take part in School Wide Initiatives

Serve on your school's Safe School Committee. By being actively involved, you can assist with the creation of prevention programmes and teacher trainings. These should not only help teachers become aware of warning signs but also provide them with specific directions on what to do about them. Creating effective School Safety Plans that all staff members understand and follow is one key to help prevent school violence

## PRACTICAL STEPS TO FOLLOW

Aggressive and violent behaviour is not a regular occurrence in most schools. However, when such incidents occur, they are serious and cause a great deal of stress for those involved.

An appropriate response to challenging behaviour depends on the type of behaviour being exhibited by the child. Any response to challenging behaviour should be consistent, fair and be the least disruptive response necessary to manage the behaviour.

A considered, proactive response is likely to be more effective than one which is merely reactive, and which may be influenced by an emotional response to the incident.

Adult responses to aggression must be, to the greatest extent possible, both non-aggressive and instructive

Principals and School Governing Bodies have a duty to ensure that schools are **safe, caring, welcoming and in support of quality education**. The promotion of positive behaviour in the school and in the classroom is necessary if these outcomes are to be achieved.

## Violence can occur in a number of settings, including:

- **School-based violence** - this includes violence within the playground and classroom. Physical violence can be directed towards a classmate, among peers and even teachers. School-based violence can also be an extension of other forms of bullying including cyberbullying;
- **Family violence** - this can involve young people being the witness, victim or perpetrator of violence at home. Violence within the context of relationships is another setting in which young people are exposed to violence. Both males and females can be victims or perpetrators of intimate partner violence;
- **Street-based violence** - this is where the perpetrator is unknown to the victim and normally happens in and around settings where alcohol is sold or freely available.

## Implications of violence for children and young people

Violence has the potential to cause multiple types of harm to both the victim and the person who inflicts it. Some of the ways violence can cause young people harm include:

- **Physical harm (disability or death)** - Violence has the potential to cause a range of physical harms to the victim including permanent disability and even death.
- **Mental illness/self harm/suicide** - A number of psychological and emotional difficulties can arise from both experiencing and witnessing violence. Being bullied at school can lead to feelings of suicide among victims due to the intense level of anxiety and distress that violence can cause.
- **Substance use/abuse** - As a way of coping with the effects of violence, victims may turn to drug and alcohol misuse in order to feel better. Victims may also seek out other coping strategies including deliberate self harm or engaging in risky behaviours, which can lead to significant physical and mental health problems.
- **Becoming a perpetrator** - Witnessing or experiencing violence can lead to the victim engaging in violent activity later in life. This can result in legal issues as physically assaulting a person is a crime. Furthermore, the perpetration of violence has been linked to involvement in further acts of violence and other criminal activity, and therefore affects the acts of violence and other criminal activity, and therefore affects the wider community in the long-term.

## Warning Signs

- **Physical indicators:** Bruises, burns, lacerations/abrasions, fractures and any other indications that the person has been physically hurt. The person gives inconsistent explanations for injuries.
- **Changes in behaviour:** Avoids physical contact with others, refuses to undress for gym class, reluctant to go home from school, social withdrawal, etc.
- **Engages in risk-taking behaviours:** Drug or alcohol abuse, speeding, non-protected sexual activity, running away from home, self-harm, suicide attempts, eating disorders, etc.
- **Mental Health:** They look/act depressed, anxious, have panic attacks, seem angry at the world, are aggressive toward others, etc.

These indicators must be taken seriously, especially if someone appears to show multiple ones. Everyone responds differently to abusive situations and *showing some of these signs alone may not necessarily mean that someone is a victim of physical violence.*

### What you can do if you are a victim of physical abuse

- Talk to someone you trust. Keeping the secret of the abuse cannot be easy. For one, you will feel better after you talk to someone and secondly, this person can support you while you are getting help.
- No one deserves to be the victim of any kind of abuse. You must report it to your local police service. That is the only way to put an end to the physical abuse.
- Do not hesitate to talk to your parents or a teacher. What you have been through is quite traumatizing and seeking professional help can assist you in dealing with any feelings or effects you may be experiencing.
- If you are not sure about reporting the abuse or if you have any questions about reporting it, call **Child Line at 0800 55555**. Their



- Openly disobey or disregard authority at school;
- Constantly in trouble for not following instructions;
- Poor academic performance;
- Lack of interest in school work and extra-mural activities offered by the school;
- Obsession with violent games;
- Demonstrates bullying behaviour ;
- Lack of anger management skills; and
- Talking about death or bringing weapons to school;

### Discuss Violence Prevention with learners

If school violence is being discussed in the news, this is a great time to bring it up in class. You can mention the warning signs and talk to learners about what they should do if they know someone has a weapon or is planning violent acts. Combating violence should be a combined effort by all learners, parents, teachers, and administrators.

### Encourage learners to talk about violence

Be open to learner conversations. Make yourself available and let them know that they can talk with you about their concerns and fears about school violence. Keeping these lines of communication open is essential to violence prevention.

### Teach Conflict Resolution and Anger Management Skills

Use teachable moments to help teach conflict resolution. If you have learners disagreeing in your classroom, talk about ways that they can resolve their problems without resorting to violence. Further, teach learners alternative ways to manage their anger.

## Teachers Can Help Prevent Physical School Violence

### Take Responsibility

While most teachers feel that what happens in their classroom is their responsibility, lets take the time to involve themselves in what goes on outside of their classroom.

In between classes, you should be at your door monitoring learner's behaviour. Keep your eyes and ears open. This is a time for you to learn a lot about your and other learners. Make sure that you are enforcing the School Code of Conduct for Learners at this time. If you hear a group of learners cursing or teasing other learners, say or do something.

Do not turn a blind eye – stop inappropriate behaviour immediately.

### Don't Allow Prejudice or Stereotypes in your Classroom

Do not allow prejudicial comments or stereotyping when talking about people or groups.

### Listen to conversations between learners

If you hear something that puts up a red flag, bring it to your principal's attention immediately.

### Get involved in any initiatives led by learners to stop violence

Getting learners involved can be a huge factor in helping to prevent any form of violence at school. Examples of different programmes include peer education, mediation, and mentoring.

### Educate yourself on danger signs

There are many warning signs that show up before actual acts of school violence occur. Some of these include:

- Poor relationships with peers;
- Constant disagreeing with peers;

counsellors are available to help you 24/7, and it is also anonymous so you do not have to worry about giving your name and number.

## What are the risk factors for violence?

Many factors have been linked to an increased likelihood of young people engaging in violent behaviour. While these factors do not directly cause violence on their own, they appear to contribute to the overall risk.

Examples included are:

- witnessing or experiencing violence in the home;
- being bullied;
- substance use (especially alcohol);
- poor interpersonal skills;
- poor school achievement or attitude to schooling;
- behavioural/emotional problems (e.g. antisocial behaviour);
- harsh physical discipline; and
- associating with offending peers, particularly belonging to a gang.



## How can parents help prevent violence among young people?

Parents can help prevent physical violence among young people in a number of ways.

For example:

- Be a good role model to children and young people as they will notice and learn from your behaviour. Show them how to resolve conflict by using non-aggressive strategies in settling disputes you have with others. Teach your child about relationship equality and power sharing, which can reduce the potential for intimate partner violence.
- Be mindful that modelling violent behaviour is likely to teach children and young people to behave in the same manner.
- Foster resilience in your child so they will be better equipped to handle difficulties, and therefore less likely to engage in violence towards others.
- Develop open communication with your child so you can talk with them about violence and assist them in developing non-violent strategies to solve issues. This will also provide an opportunity for them to talk about any issues they may be experiencing, such as at school or in relationships.
- Work with your child's school in the development and implementation of an anti-bullying and school safety policy. Effective policies require the support of the wider school community, including parents. Being involved will also help keep you informed of what avenues of assistance are available to you should you suspect that your child or a young person is the victim of bullying. If they have been bullying themselves then it is important that you work with the school to take steps to help cease the bullying.
- Watch for possible warning signs that suggest your child may be the victim or instigator of violence.
- Remember aggressive behaviour or an obsession with such behaviour may indicate a risk of engaging in violence. When addressing such behaviour, avoid using harsh physical punishment as this will likely reinforce the belief that violence is acceptable.

- Encourage your child to stay in school. Higher levels of education are linked to reduced levels of violence.
- Address behavioural issues by seeking immediate professional help. Some children and young people display hostile or aggressive behaviours that can develop into more violent behaviours later in life.
- Encourage your child to contact Child Line if they are experiencing violence-related issues. This may include dealing with violence that is being committed against them by a bully, a partner or even someone unknown.
- Encourage young victims of violence to seek assistance and support them in addressing the violence. This may involve informing the school or contacting the police.
- Ensure that your child knows that it is not acceptable for anyone to use violence against them and that it is important to report such behavior immediately.
- Limit access to dangerous weapons such as knives or firearms. Acts of violence can occur because dangerous weapons are available.
- Discourage your child from associating with violent peers. A child or young person's peer group is highly influential in terms of how they themselves will behave. Therefore it is important to teach them how to make appropriate choices when it comes to selecting friends.
- Promote tolerance and respect towards others, including tolerance of cultural and social differences between people. Violence occurs in the absence of respect for others, and by promoting tolerance and respect, your child will be less inclined to use violence.
- Speak to your child about the use/abuse of alcohol and illegal substances. Substance use is linked to a greater likelihood of experiencing violence as it impairs judgment and can result in poor choices. Some substances may make a person more aggressive which can lead to violent behaviour