



Workplace Violence: It's not part of the job

The Nova Scotia Teachers Union does not believe that workplace violence is part of a teacher's job. That's why the NSTU campaigned, successfully, along with other major public sector unions in Nova Scotia, to have Violence in the Workplace Regulations passed under the Nova Scotia Occupational Health and Safety Act in 2007.

Workplace Violence is defined as:

- threats, including a threatening statement or threatening behaviour that gives an employee reasonable cause to believe that the employee is at risk of physical injury,
- conduct or attempted conduct of a person that endangers the physical health or physical safety of an employee.

Here are some tips on how to use the Workplace Violence Regulations to ensure that your employer is taking all reasonable steps to prevent violence in schools and to adequately respond to incidents of workplace violence.

Ask to see your School's Workplace Violence Prevention Plan

Every school is supposed to conduct a violence risk assessment at least once every five years, and if a significant risk of violence is identified, the school is required by law to have a Workplace Violence Prevention Plan.

The Workplace Violence Regulations require that the employer make a copy of the workplace violence prevention plan available for examination at the workplace by any employee in that workplace.

Ask the principal for the Plan and ask yourself:

Does the Plan set out reasonable measures to eliminate the risk of violence in the workplace?

Does the Plan have a process for providing employees who are exposed to a significant risk of violence with information on the nature and extent of the risk of violence?

Does the Plan require training for employees exposed to a significant risk of violence on their rights and responsibilities, the measures taken by the employer to reduce the risk, how to recognize situations with the potential for violence and how to respond appropriately?

Does the Plan clearly set out how to report, document and promptly investigate incidents of violence?

Have these parts of the Plan actually been carried out in practice?

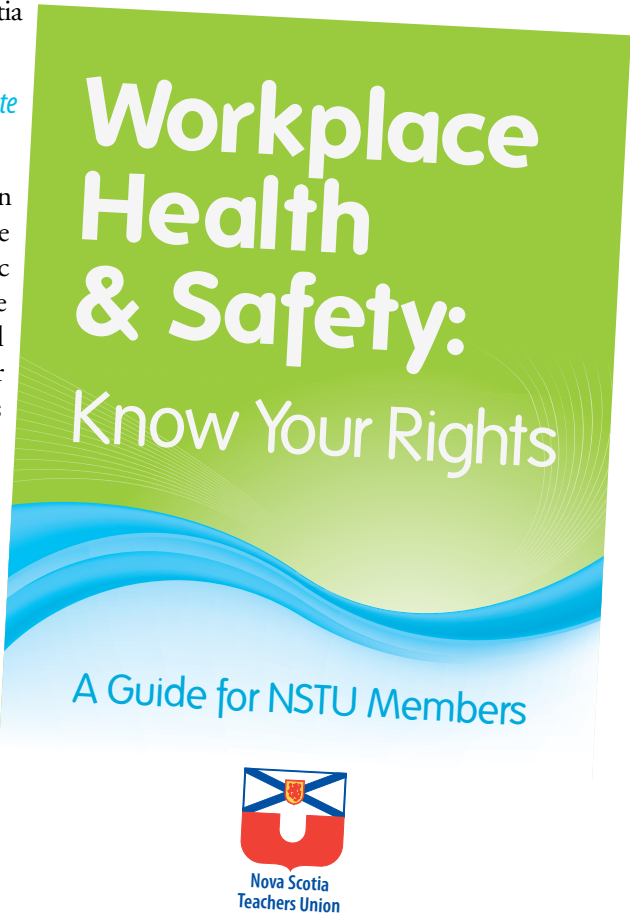
Bring your concerns about the Plan to the attention of the principal and the Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee.

If you feel that the Workplace Violence Prevention Plan is inadequate, or that the Plan is not being carried out in practice, bring your concerns to the attention of the principal. If you are not satisfied with the principal's response, bring your concerns to the attention of the Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee and ask the Committee to make specific recommendations to the principal in writing. The principal has to respond within 21 days. If you are not satisfied with the response of the Committee, bring your concerns to the attention of an Officer with the Occupational Health and Safety Division of the Nova Scotia Department of Labour.

Suggest specific measures to eliminate the risk of violence in the school.

As someone who works in the school every day, you have the expertise to suggest specific measures to best ensure that the risk of violence in the school is reduced or eliminated. For example, if your concern relates to the risk of violence from students, consider whether to suggest that the following measures be included in the Plan and be carried out immediately:

- Installation of a panic button and development of a protocol on the use and response to the panic button, testing of the panic button, and training on the use of and response to the panic button.



- Purchase of two-way radios and development of a protocol on the use of and response to a call on the two-way radio, testing of the two-way radios, and training on the use of and response to a call on the two-way radios.

- Development of a protocol to ensure that any new employee, including substitute teachers, exposed to a risk of violence is shown the Plan and is provided with specific information about the risk.

- Mandatory training in non-violent crisis intervention during school hours for all employees at risk of violence.

- Seek interventions from outside agencies such as the IWK Health Centre.
- More frequent interventions and longer more intensive visits from behavioural specialists.

If you are concerned that an individual might have a history of violent behaviour, ask for specific information on the nature and extent of the risk.

If you are working with an individual who you believe has a history of violent behaviour, ask the principal for specific information on the nature and extent of the risk that the individual poses, and on any factors that might increase or decrease the extent of the risk. You have a right to be provided with that information.

Promptly report an incident of workplace violence to the principal and to the Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee.

Every employer has a statutory duty to take every precaution that is reasonable in the circumstances to ensure the health and safety of people at the workplace. You have the right, and possibly a duty, under the Occupational Health and Safety Act, to immediately report an incidence of violence to the principal. If you are not satisfied with the response, report it to the Committee. Ask the Committee to make written recommendations to the principal. If you are not satisfied with the Committee's response, you may go to an Officer of the Occupational Health and Safety Division of the Department of Labour.

Seek assistance from your NSTU Staff Officer.

Don't delay in reporting a concern about workplace violence to your principal. However, as soon as possible, ask your NSTU staff officer for assistance. He or she can assist you with the process, involve the Board office, keep the matter on the front burner, and help you either with a complaint to the Division of Occupational Health and Safety or in filing a grievance, should that be necessary.

Remember: don't accept workplace violence as just "part of the job."