

Debriefing after a violent incident



**A guide for staff in schools
and early years**
November 2024

Debriefing: A UNISON guide for members and branches

This guide has been produced by UNISON Scotland to assist staff working in schools and early years who have been involved in a violent incident at work. It should also be used by UNISON branches to ensure their local authority processes on debriefings after a violent incident are robust and meet these standards as a minimum.

It's important that any worker who has been subject to a violent incident has a debriefing, and this guide sets out how to do this. There is also a flowchart attached that sets out each step - as well as the detailed guide below.

Your Welfare: Debriefing After a Violent Incident

Following any incident involving aggressive or violent behaviour towards you, it is essential that key actions are implemented by your employer. This can be undertaken through an initial 'Hot Debrief' and a follow-up 'Cold Debrief'.

You should seek advice from UNISON, and you can be accompanied by your union representative during your debrief.

Initial or Hot Debrief

This meeting should occur as soon as possible following the incident, but only when you are comfortable to do so. It should be facilitated by a member of the School Management Team or a designated senior staff member. Again, UNISON would advise you speak to your union representative, and you can be accompanied. This should be facilitated by a manager.

The primary objective of this debrief is to ensure your physical and emotional well-being needs are met, and to address any immediate actions that may be necessary.

Relevant concerns to consider at this stage may include:

- Are you upset, stressed or physically hurt? Do you need medical attention?
- Do you require a break from your duties?
- A supportive colleague can be with you, as well as a union rep?
- The option to go home to recuperate? Who else needs to know if you do go home?

With consideration towards your wellbeing, you should complete a Corporate Incident Form once you feel able to do so.

At all stages of this initial debrief, the focus should remain on your welfare. UNISON would advise that it is important to consider who else needs to be informed, such as other senior staff, other support staff or class teachers, or additional personnel supporting the child involved.

Initial or Hot Debrief: Pupils or Young Person

A conversation, where appropriate, should be held with the child or young person involved in the incident. This will not always be possible in ASN settings, where it will be for staff to discuss triggers, non-verbal communications and individual needs. Any discussion should occur following a period of time to allow the pupil or young person to calm down and regulate their behaviour. The initial discussion should aim to confirm that the child is not physically injured

Elements to consider during this conversation may include:

- Is the child physically injured? Do they require medical attention?
- Who is best suited to speak with the child or young person and provide reassurance?
- Who else needs to be informed about the incident - parents/carers, senior management, pupil support

Follow Up or Cold Debrief

UNISON considers this debrief should occur within 48 hours, but only after all parties involved have had sufficient time to both emotionally and physically recuperate. The discussion should establish the events leading up to the incident, but also consider the impact this has had and the emotional context this has created moving forward.

As the affected staff member, you should speak to your union. You can be accompanied by your union representative during the follow up/ cold debrief.

The debrief should begin with an update on what action has been undertaken by senior management to reduce the risk of a similar incident happening again. As a risk to staff has been identified and is now known, this must include drafting a risk assessment on the pupil or young person.

Part of the debrief discussion will need to focus on what alternative actions could have been taken to prevent the incident. The focus of this should only be on identifying solutions for improved practices moving forward and should not or come across as assigning blame to either the staff member or the child/young person involved.

Potential questions to guide the discussion may include:

- What was happening leading up to the incident?
- Looking back, were there any indications that the child or young person was distressed or becoming angry?
- Looking forward, what actions could you or other staff members take to lessen the likelihood of this occurrence?
- How do you currently feel about this incident and the current situation?
- Is there any support you believe would assist you in managing a similar situation in the future?

Follow Up or Cold Debrief – Pupils or Young Person

A separate conversation should be held where possible, with the pupil or young person to understand their perspective on what occurred before and during the incident. It will be important to explore with them how they could have acted differently

This could be guided by asking the following:

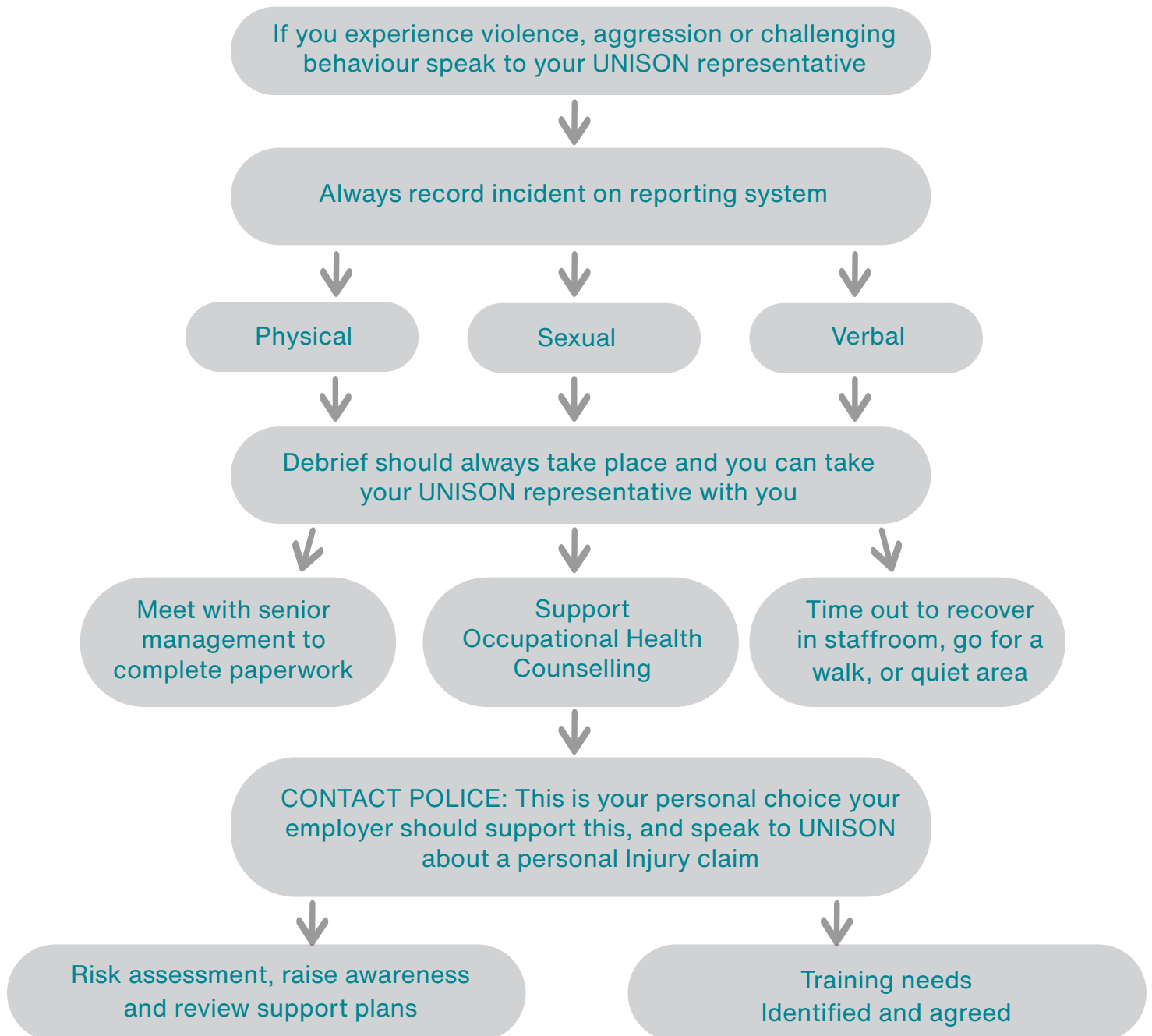
- What was happening prior to the incident?
- What emotions were you experiencing?
- What do you think you could do differently or better in the future?
- Was there something that anyone present at the time did that contributed to your feelings of anger or distress?
- How do you feel about their actions?

At this point, it may be appropriate to ask if a restorative meeting may be acceptable to both parties and may be seen as beneficial moving forward.

UNISON members: please keep this guide handy and refer to it if you or a work colleague are ever affected by violence in the workplace.

UNISON Scotland local government branches: please look at your council's current guidance on violence at work. Please use this guide to assist you. UNISON Scotland's Education Issues Group are available to support branches, if needed.

Debriefing flowchart



**This guide is published by UNISON Scotland's Education Issues Group.
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