TOOLBOX TALK · HEALTH & SAFETY

Violence at Work: *It Is Not Part of the Job*

Employer duties under health and safety law, abuse from customers and the public is a workplace hazard to be controlled, not something to put up with.

Last reviewed: August 2026 HSE · Violence at Work guidance England, Scotland and Wales ukworkrights.co.uk

In Northern Ireland, similar duties come from Northern Ireland's own health and safety law. Contact HSENI (Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland), not the HSE.

THE RISK

What counts as violence at work

- HSE defines it as **any incident where a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work**
- It includes **verbal abuse and threats**, not only physical assault
- Highest-risk roles: **retail, hospitality, healthcare, transport, social care, security, enforcement and lone working**
- Common triggers are **money, alcohol and drugs, waiting, refusal of service and enforcement of rules**
- Effects include **anxiety, sleep problems, loss of confidence and people leaving the job**
- Under-reporting is severe because staff are told, or assume, that **it comes with the territory**
- Assaults causing certain injuries are **reportable under RIDDOR**

'IT'S PART OF THE JOB' IS NOT A SAFETY POLICY

Abuse from the public is a workplace hazard. Employers must assess and control it in the same way as any other risk. Being told to accept it is not the employer discharging their duty.

THE CONTROLS

What employers must do

- **Assess the risk** of violence for the roles and locations where it is foreseeable
- Design it out where possible: **queue management, cash handling, staffing levels, layout, lighting and screens**
- **Training in de-escalation** and in when to withdraw
- Clear arrangements for **lone workers**, including check-ins and a way to summon help
- A **reporting system that is used**, including for verbal abuse and threats
- **Support after an incident**: time out, someone to talk to, and help reporting to the police
- A visible position that **abuse of staff is not tolerated**, backed by action
- Reviewing incidents to find patterns rather than treating each as a one-off

REPORT THE NEAR MISSES TOO

Threats and verbal abuse are the pattern that precedes assault. If only physical incidents get recorded, the risk assessment is built on a fraction of the picture.

YOUR RIGHTS

What you're entitled to

- A workplace where the **risk of violence has been assessed and controlled**
- **Training and support** for foreseeable aggression in your role
- To **report incidents**, including verbal abuse, and have them recorded
- To **call the police**. An employer cannot stop you reporting a crime committed against you
- Protection from **detriment for raising safety concerns** (Employment Rights Act 1996 s.44 and s.100)
- Reasonable adjustments if you develop a condition such as anxiety or PTSD (**Equality Act 2010)**
- You may be able to claim through the **Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority** after a violent crime at work

IF IT'S A CRIME, IT'S STILL A CRIME AT WORK

Assault, threats and harassment do not stop being criminal because they happened behind a counter. You are entitled to report them to the police, whatever your employer's preference.

COMMON QUESTIONS

Frequently asked questions

Q Does verbal abuse really count as violence at work?

Yes. HSE's definition covers any incident where a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work. Verbal abuse and threats are included, and they should be reported and recorded. They are usually the pattern that precedes physical assault.

Q Can my employer stop me calling the police?

No. If a crime has been committed against you, you are entitled to report it. An employer may prefer incidents handled internally, but they cannot prevent you contacting the police, and pressuring you not to could itself amount to detriment.

Q Is an assault at work reportable under RIDDOR?

It can be. The responsible person must report it to HSE where a person is injured by a physical assault arising out of or in connection with work. This applies if the injury meets the RIDDOR thresholds (a specified injury, or incapacity for more than seven days).

FOR WHOEVER RUNS THIS TALK

Delivery notes & attendance record

Before you start

Handle this one carefully. People may have recent experiences they have never reported. Make clear that abuse from the public is a hazard the employer must control, exactly like a dangerous machine, and that reporting is not weakness.

Questions to ask the team

1. Has anyone been threatened, abused or assaulted at work in the last few months?
2. Was it reported, and if not, what stopped you?
3. Which situations or times of day feel most risky here?
4. What would really help: different staffing, screens, training, a way to call for help?

The law behind this talk

Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 s.2; Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 reg. 3; Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013

Employers must give workers comprehensible information, instruction and training on the risks they face, Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 s.2(2)(c) and Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 reg. 10. Keep the record below as evidence that you did.

Attendance record

Topic	Violence at Work: It Is Not Part of the Job
Date	
Site / location	
Delivered by	
Actions agreed	
Next talk due	

Attendees

Name	Signature

Use the Print handout button to print this record. General information only, not legal advice. This toolbox talk is generic material and is not a substitute for a suitable and sufficient risk assessment by a competent person. Employers remain responsible for their duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

FREE H&S GUIDES

Violence at Work *free guide*

Get plain-English information on your rights and your employer's legal duties.

HSE INFOLINE
0300 003 1647
hse.gov.uk

ACAS
0300 123 1100
acas.org.uk

CITIZENS ADVICE (ENGLAND)
0800 144 8848
citizensadvice.org.uk

CITIZENS ADVICE (WALES)
0800 702 2020
citizensadvice.org.uk

CITIZENS ADVICE SCOTLAND
0800 028 1456
cas.org.uk

UK WORK RIGHTS
Violence at Work
ukworkrights.co.uk/toolbox-violence.html

General information only, not legal advice · © UK Work Rights Ltd · Company No. 17228507 · ICO Registration No. ZC239465 · Registered office: 71–75 Shelton Street, Covent Garden, London, WC2H 9JQ · hello@ukworkrights.co.uk
Published by UK Work Rights Ltd
Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0.

OTHER WAYS TO GET HELP

Ways to contact Acas

- Helpline: 0300 123 1100, Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm.
- Another language: call the helpline and ask for an interpreter. Acas says it can provide one straight away.
- Welsh: Acas can provide its services in Welsh if you ask.
- Cannot hear or speak on the phone: Relay UK, 18001 0300 123 1100, on the Relay UK app or a textphone. You type what you want to say and get text replies from the adviser.
- British Sign Language (BSL): call the helpline through the InterpretersLive! video relay service, in your browser or on the InterpretersLive! app. The interpreter calls Acas and translates between you and the adviser.
- If you cannot call the helpline (for example, you find it hard to speak on the phone, you are not in the UK, or you don't have enough phone credit), use the Acas accessibility form to ask for advice another way. Acas usually replies by email within 10 working days, by BSL or lip reading video call within 2 working days, or by phone within 5 working days. Acas reviews these requests Tuesday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.
- Early conciliation: if your case is already in conciliation, contact your conciliator. Their details are in your "Introducing Your Conciliator" email.
- Training, mediation support, collective conciliation or arbitration (not advice): Acas Training and Customer Services, 0300 123 1150, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, or email events@acas.org.uk. Relay UK: 18001 0300 123 1150. You can ask for an interpreter or call through InterpretersLive!. To book a BSL interpreter in advance for any Acas service, email events@acas.org.uk or call 0300 123 1150.

OTHER WAYS TO GET HELP

Ways to contact Citizens Advice in England

- Adviceline: 0800 144 8848. Usually open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, not on public holidays. Free from mobiles and landlines. At busy times you might wait up to an hour. If you call from a mobile you'll be asked for your postcode.
- Cannot hear or speak on the phone: Relay UK. Dial 18001 then 0800 144 8848, using the app or a textphone. There's no extra charge.
- Money or debt: debt helpline 0800 240 4420, Monday to Friday 9am to 8pm, Saturday 9.30am to 1pm, not on public holidays. Relay UK: 18001 then 0800 240 4420.
- Online chat with an adviser: debt problems (Monday to Friday 9am to 8pm, Saturday 9.30am to 1pm); claiming Universal Credit (Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm); energy bills or supply, consumer problems, or any other problem (Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm).
- Your local Citizens Advice: search by postcode or town on the Citizens Advice website. Most can only help if you live or work in their area.

OTHER WAYS TO GET HELP

Ways to contact Citizens Advice in Wales

- Advicelink: 0800 702 2020. Monday to Friday 8am to 7pm, Saturday 9am to 1pm, not on public holidays. Free from mobiles and landlines. At busy times you might wait up to an hour.
- Cannot hear or speak on the phone: Relay UK. Dial 18001 then 0800 702 2020, using the app or a textphone. There's no extra charge.
- Online chat with an adviser: usually Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.
- Your local Citizens Advice: search by postcode or town on the Citizens Advice website.

OTHER WAYS TO GET HELP

Ways to contact Citizens Advice in Scotland

- Free phone line to your local bureau: 0800 028 1456. Say the first part of your postcode and you'll be put through.
- British Sign Language (BSL): make a free BSL call to an adviser through the Contact Scotland BSL website or app (video relay interpreting on a computer, tablet or mobile). Contact Scotland BSL is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- Language or access needs: tell the bureau and they'll do their best to meet them.
- Applying for Universal Credit for the first time: Help to Claim helpline 0800 023 2581, Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm, or webchat on the Citizens Advice Scotland website. There's also a BSL service for Universal Credit applications.
- Defined contribution pensions (aged 50 or over): Pension Wise, 0800 138 3944, or +44 20 3733 3495 from outside the UK.
- NHS complaints in Scotland: Patient Advice and Support Service (PASS), 0800 917 2127, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.
- Gambling Support Service advice line: 0800 328 1131, Monday to Friday, 10am to 3pm.
- Your local bureau: find its contact details and opening times by postcode on the Citizens Advice Scotland website.
- If you cannot hear or speak on the phone, you can use Relay UK to make the call by typing. Use the free Relay UK app, or a textphone: dial 18001 first, then the number.

OTHER WAYS TO GET HELP

Ways to contact HSE

- Tell HSE about a health and safety issue: use the online form, or call 0300 003 1647 and HSE will fill it in for you. Building safety (Building Safety Regulator): 0300 790 6787.
- Ask HSE about health and safety, or reach a named person at HSE: use the online form, or call 0300 003 1747.
- Both lines: Monday and Tuesday 8.30am to 5pm, Wednesday 10am to 5pm, Thursday and Friday 8.30am to 5pm.
- Fatal and major injuries only: Incident Contact Centre, 0345 300 9923, Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 5pm. Report everything else online.
- Out of hours, only after a work-related death, a serious incident with several casualties, or one causing major disruption: duty officer, 0151 922 9235.
- Cannot hear or speak on the phone: HSE says it provides a text relay service for people who are D/deaf, hard of hearing or have a speech impairment.
- If you cannot hear or speak on the phone, you can use Relay UK to make the call by typing. Use the free Relay UK app, or a textphone: dial 18001 first, then the number.
- Website information in another format (accessible PDF, large print, easy read, audio or braille): use HSE's online contact form. HSE replies within 21 days.
- Other languages: HSE publishes translated information in many languages (hse.gov.uk/languages).

KEEP GOING

More free *toolbox talks*

TOOLBOX TALK

Lone Working

ukworkrights.co.uk/toolbox-loneworking.html

TOOLBOX TALK

Mental Health at Work

ukworkrights.co.uk/toolbox-mentalhealth.html

TOOLBOX TALK

Whistleblowing

ukworkrights.co.uk/toolbox-whistleblowing.html

FREE GUIDE

Health and safety at work

ukworkrights.co.uk/guide-health-safety.html