

# Post-incident support framework



## – Staff guidance

Being involved in violence, abuse or harassment at work – whether it happens to you or you witness it – can affect both your physical and mental health. People may feel shocked, anxious, angry, lose confidence, struggle to sleep or feel distressed later on.

Prevention of work-related violence is always the priority. However, even with preventative measures in place, incidents can still happen. Evidence shows that staff recover better and feel safer when organisations respond quickly, consistently and with compassion after incidents.

The NHS Staff Council has developed a [post incident support framework](#) to ensure there is a consistent and appropriate response following a violent incident at work.

This framework explains what support you should expect after a work-related violent incident. It exists to make sure:

- you are not left to cope on your own
- incidents are taken seriously
- support is built into normal processes
- action is taken to reduce repeat incidents.

## What incidents are covered

This guidance applies if you experience, witness, or are affected by:

- physical violence
- verbal abuse, threats or intimidation
- online or digital abuse
- sexual assault
- third-party harassment including sexual harassment (from patients, relatives or the public)
- hate incidents or hate crimes.

It applies regardless of:

- why it happened (e.g. due to clinical condition, distress, alcohol misuse or deliberate behaviour)
- whether you were physically injured (verbal abuse can also be harmful)
- whether it happened to you or you witnessed it.

If you were affected, you should be offered support.

## What you should expect

- You have the right to work safely - violence is not part of your job.
- Incidents should be taken seriously - you should be listened to, believed and supported.
- Support should be kind and timely - you should not be blamed or rushed.
- Support should be right for you - people react differently and recovery isn't always straightforward.
- Some staff face higher risk - support should be fair, inclusive and culturally sensitive.

## What should happen straight after an incident?

- Steps should be taken to make the situation safe.
- Any injuries should be checked and treated.
- You should be emotionally supported and offered time out, a change of duties or help getting home.
- You should have access to a quiet, non-public facing space for time out if needed.
- Your manager or supervisor should continue to check in with you after the incident as sometimes the impact isn't felt straight away.

## Reporting incidents

Reporting helps trigger support, identify risks and prevent repeat incidents.

You should:

- use local incident reporting systems and inform your manager or supervisor of the incident if they are not already aware
- be able to report confidentially or anonymously if needed e.g. in cases of sexual assault
- be supported, not blamed for the incident or discouraged from reporting.

You may also wish to contact your trade union or Freedom to Speak Up Guardian.

You should be given feedback on what action the organisation has taken as a result of the incident.

## Ongoing support

Depending on the impact, support may include:

- access to occupational health, counselling or trauma-informed support, either internal or via an employee assistance programme (EAP).
- peer support schemes
- temporary adjustments to work and/or a phased return
- fair handling of sickness absence (If you need to take time off sick, always follow your organisation's sickness absence reporting procedures. Absence related to workplace violence or abuse should not be managed as ordinary sickness absence or counted against you in formal proceedings).

If you are off long-term sick as a result of work-related violence you may be entitled to financial support through the [NHS Injury Benefits Scheme](#). You can speak to your HR/people and OD service or your trade union representative for further advice.

## Police and legal support

Reporting to the police is your choice. As well as physical violence, threats to harm you, hate incidents and harassment can also be reported. If police are involved, you should be supported by your organisation with statements and court attendance.

Check your organisation's policy on time off, as you may be entitled to paid leave for court attendance.