

By the Protective Services Team

# Responding to Violence

\* Strategies for administrators



School boards have a responsibility to create and sustain safe working and learning environments. This responsibility includes the expectation that administrators will be protected from harassment and violence.

The resource [Workplace Violence in School Boards: A Guide to the Law](#) (2023) and associated board policies outline the expectations for providing safe working and learning environments. The resource is derived from the [Occupational Health and Safety Act](#) (OHSA) (2022).

**Note:** The following has been adapted from the above-noted resource and includes information that focuses on protecting administrators from harassment and violence. To make the connection clear, we have replaced the term “worker” (as appears in the OHSA) with “administrator.”

- Under the OHSA, workplace violence includes
- the exercise of physical force by a person against an administrator, that causes or could cause physical injury
  - an attempt to exercise physical force against an administrator that could cause physical injury and
  - a statement or behaviour that it is reasonable for an administrator to interpret as a threat to exercise physical force that could cause physical injury.

- Workplace violence may include
- a one-time occurrence or repeated behaviours, such as hitting or pushing, that cause or could cause physical injury
  - an attempt to exercise physical force against an administrator (e.g., an attempted hit) and
  - behaviour that is reasonable for an administrator to interpret as a threat of violence (e.g., sending a threatening email or posting a threat on social media).



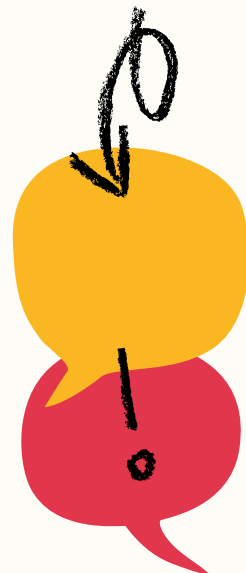
To protect the safety of administrators, the school board must develop a workplace violence policy that includes

- measures and procedures to control the risks identified as likely to expose an administrator to physical injury
- measures and procedures for summoning immediate assistance when workplace violence occurs or is likely to occur
- procedures for an administrator to report incidents of workplace violence to the school board and
- details of how the school board will investigate and deal with incidents or complaints of workplace violence.

**Note:** It is important that schools post relevant information about the workplace violence policy in schools to remind staff, students, families and community members that workplace violence and harassment will not be tolerated.

- In addition, the OHSA requires school boards to
- provide administrators with information related to the risk of workplace violence by a person with a history of violent behaviour
  - develop and include measures and procedures to summon immediate assistance when workplace violence occurs or is likely to occur (e.g., administrators should carry a cellphone or walkie-talkie so they can summon immediate assistance if needed) and
  - investigate and address incidents or complaints of workplace violence as part of the workplace violence program.

If a person is harassing and/or threatening an administrator, the school board must take every reasonable precaution to protect the administrator. If an administrator’s safety is in jeopardy, then the superintendent should collaborate with the administrator to develop a safety plan. The safety plan needs to follow the expectations outlined in the board policy on dealing with violent incidents. It should include concrete steps to protect the ad-





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administrator. When developing a safety plan, the administrator should also consult with the OPC.

**Note:** The Occupational Health and Safety Officer may have a sample template that can be used to complete the safety plan.

Examples of strategies/interventions that may be included in a safety plan include but are not limited to

- informing the appropriate staff about the person who is exhibiting concerning behaviour
- always carrying a communications device (e.g., a walkie-talkie and/or a cellphone)
- parking in a consistent spot that is monitored by a security camera (if available)
- scanning the parking lot before exiting the building
- walking to one's car accompanied by another staff member
- screening the administrator's calls
- keeping the administrator's personal information private (e.g., phone number)
- following the police/school board protocol and, if necessary, calling the police and
- in consultation with the superintendent, issuing a letter of expectation or trespass letter(s).



### Proactive Strategies for Dealing with Students Who Demonstrate Aggressive Behaviour

If there is a student who demonstrates aggressive behaviour, it is advisable that families should be involved and a team meeting be conducted to develop a safety plan. The team meeting should include the staff who work with the student, including both school and board personnel. If the student is identified with special needs, the team needs to ensure that the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) has updated behaviour goals (e.g., teaching prosocial behaviours and self-regulation), and an associated safety plan with interventions. The interventions should focus on understanding the root cause to improve the behaviour.

A safety plan may be created for a student who demonstrates aggressive behaviour even if the student isn't identified. The safety plan should include strategies and interventions to help staff create safe environments and to help students make positive decisions and to support the safety of the student, other students and staff. Examples of interventions that may be included in a safety plan for a student include self-regulation strategies, identifying the staff who will intervene if the student demonstrates aggression, providing proper training for that staff, ensuring that staff wear protective equipment and ensuring that the process will be followed if staff aren't able to de-escalate the aggressive behaviour (e.g., steps to follow when the child escalates, including communication with parents). Following board policy, share the safety plan with staff who work with the student and/or who may interact with the student.

An effective safety plan is "fluid." It should be reviewed regularly, especially after an incident has occurred, to determine why the incident occurred despite the interventions, to review/revise the interventions and to see if the staff involved followed the safety plan.

If a student exhibits aggressive, harmful behaviour, consider implementing progressive discipline. Remember to reflect on mitigating and other factors.





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### Strategies for Dealing with Aggressive Behaviour by a Person Other than a Student

When dealing with a negative interaction and/or physical aggression, the safety of students, staff and administrators needs to be the first priority.

The following strategies will help an administrator address negative behaviour before the interaction escalates.

- Meet with the person in a safe space (e.g., a room with exits). Have another person in the room. Ensure that you have a strategy to exit the meeting if you feel unsafe.
- Be aware of situations that may trigger aggression (e.g., the implementation of progressive discipline).
- Address potential trigger points and try to calm things down (e.g., by thoroughly explaining how the investigation was completed, and how a decision was reached).
- Ensure that you are emotionally in control, and project calmness.
- Use de-escalation techniques (e.g., a calm voice).
- If the person continues to demonstrate aggression, tell the person that you will not accept the abusive behaviour, and will end the conversation if necessary.
- If the behaviour continues, end the conversation and ask the person to leave.
- If the person refuses to leave, walk away and don't return, especially if you believe the person continues to be a threat.

- Contact your superintendent to discuss the next steps. If appropriate, consider sending the person a letter of expectation. A letter of expectation should be created in consultation with the superintendent and/or legal counsel (refer to the OPC tip sheet [Managing Escalated Interactions with Parents](#)).
- Follow the police/board protocol and, if necessary, call the police and/or put the school in a Hold and Secure.



### When the Administrator is a Bystander

There are also strategies that will help an administrator deal with a physical confrontation that doesn't directly involve the administrator.

- Do not intervene in a physical confrontation if there is the potential for injury.
- Get help or designate a bystander to get help.
- Follow the police/board protocol and, if necessary, call the police and/or put the school in a lockdown.
- If the presence of bystanders is a hindrance, ask them to stand back or leave.
- Keep your distance, if possible.
- Use a calm, authoritative voice and tell the person to stop and to leave the building.
- Make sure everyone is safe. If necessary, have a qualified staff member administer first aid and/or call emergency services.
- Consult with your superintendent to discuss the next steps.
- Contact the OPC for advice and support.
- Ensure that the appropriate forms are completed (e.g., a violent incident report).



### When the Administrator is Directly Involved

The following strategies will assist an administrator when dealing with a physical confrontation that involves the administrator.

- Look for visible signs of potential anger (e.g., clenched fists and shaking).
- Be aware of possible escape routes. Don't stand in the way of the person, even if the person is trying to go somewhere they aren't allowed.
- Keep your distance, if possible.
- Use a calm, authoritative voice and tell the person to stop.
- Use de-escalation strategies to try and lessen the person's anger (e.g., tell the person that you care



about their concerns and are willing to meet and discuss those concerns).

- Consider apologizing to the person as appropriate in the circumstances. Sometimes, an apology is all that is needed to de-escalate the situation.
- If the person continues to demonstrate aggression and the administrator has tried to defuse the situation, the administrator should tell the person that the interaction is over and should then walk away (e.g., state, “I’m leaving now.

“We can talk about this later” and then, without being confrontational, calmly walk away).

- Go to a safe place where others can help if the person continues to escalate (e.g., the office).
- If the person follows, don’t engage. Always try and walk away. If the administrator can’t safely walk away, then ask other staff to get help and leave the building.
- Get help or designate a bystander to get help.
- Follow the police/board protocol and, if necessary, call the police and/or put the school in a lockdown.
- If necessary, seek medical help.
- Consult with the superintendent to determine next steps (e.g., sending a letter of expectation or a trespass letter). This should be done in consultation with the superintendent and/or legal counsel.
- Contact the OPC for advice and support.
- Ensure that the appropriate forms are completed (e.g., a violent incident report). ▲

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\*Restrictions apply.

