

	<b>WORK-RELATED VIOLENCE</b>	<b>Document No:</b>	<b>WHS-PRO-035</b>
		<b>Approval Date:</b>	<b>3/09/19</b>
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	<b>Responsible Officer:</b> Employment Relations Manager	<b>Review Date:</b>	<b>3/09/21</b>
		<b>Expiry Date:</b>	<b>N/A</b>
		<b>Issue No:</b>	<b>3/09/19</b>
<b>Authorising Officer:</b> Business Manager, General Secretariat			

## 1. Purpose

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference aims to provide and maintain, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of workers including providing a work environment that is safe and without risks to health.

## 2. Scope

This procedure applies to all ACBC workers.

## 3. Related Documents

### [ACBC Work Health & Safety Policy](#)

ACT : Work Health and Safety Act 2011

NSW : Work Health and Safety Act 2011

NT : Work Health and Safety (National Uniform Legislation) Act

QLD : Work Health and Safety Act 2011

SA : Work Health and Safety Act 2012

TAS : Work Health and Safety Act 2012

VIC : Occupational Health and Safety Act 2007

[WHS-PRO-007 Risk Management Process](#)

## 4. Definitions

### **Work-Related Violence**

Work-related violence involves incidents in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work. This definition covers a broad range of actions and behaviours that can create a risk to the health and safety of workers.

Examples of work-related violence can include:

- Biting, spitting, scratching, hitting, kicking
- Pushing, shoving, tripping, grabbing
- Throwing objects
- Verbal abuse (threats, yelling, name calling, swearing etc.)
- Threatening someone with a weapon, armed robbery
- Sexual assault

### **Workplace**

A workplace can be any place where an ACBC worker is required to work. A workplace can be an office, home or any other place where a worker is required to be during the course of work. It can also be a place where a work-sanctioned function is being held.

### **Health and Safety Representative (HSR)**

A Health and Safety Representative nominated and elected by employees at a workplace in accordance with the relevant State or Territory legislation.

### **Supervisor**

The Supervisor is a Bishop, Priest, Agency Head, Director, Manager, Coordinator or Team Leader, who is responsible for the day-to-day supervision of workers.

## 5. Responsibilities

### Agency Heads

Agency Heads are responsible for:

- Ensuring that processes are in place to provide a workplace that is as free as reasonably practicable of risk to health and safety at the workplace
- Creating a supportive workplace

### Supervisors

Supervisors are responsible for:

- Making sure that the risks of work-related violence have been identified and control measures have been implemented
- Consulting workers on risk identification and control of work-related violence
- Providing workers with training in awareness and control of work-related violence
- Encouraging workers to report work-related violence
- Investigating reports of work-related violence and implementing measures to prevent recurrence
- Embedding control measures into standard practices
- Offering support and access to the ACBC employee assistance program (EAP) to workers who may have experienced work-related violence

### Workers

All workers should:

- Assist in risk identification and control of work-related violence
- Take reasonable care of their own health and safety at work and take care not to endanger the health and safety of others in the workplace
- Comply with this procedure at all times while on work-related duties and at any time while representing the ACBC
- Inform their supervisor if they believe that this procedure is not being followed
- Consider accessing the ACBC employee assistance program if they have been affected by work-related violence

### Health and Safety Representative (HSR)

The Health and Safety Representative (where appointed) should:

- Assist workers to comply with ACBC requirements
- Assist in developing and reviewing this procedure
- Participate in consulting with employers on health and safety issues
- Alert their supervisor of any hazards relating to work-related violence in the workplace

### Employment Relations Manager (Office for Employment Relations)

The Employment Relations Manager will:

- Provide advice and information regarding the identification and control of work-related violence
- Assist Agencies to provide training and awareness of work-related violence

## 6. Occurrence of Work-Related Violence and Risk Factors

**External or intrusive work-related violence** can occur when a person has no connection to a workplace and their main objective is to obtain cash or other valuables. This can occur in places where people believe cash or other valuable items are kept.

The key risks include:

- Working alone or in an isolated or remote area;  
(**Note:** remote and isolated work refers to situations where workers may be exposed to risks because the nature or location of their work means they are unable to call for assistance in an emergency)
- Working offsite

- Having only a few workers on site
- Working at night or outside business hours
- Working in unpredictable environments
- Communicating face to face with members of the general public or clients
- Handling or transporting cash and/or valuables.

**Client-initiated work-related violence** involves a person in the care of an organisation or someone who is seeking or may have obtained a service.

The **key risks** include:

- Providing care to people who are in distress, afraid, ill or incarcerated
- Contact with people who may be under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- Service methods which may cause frustration, resentment or misunderstanding
- Providing care or services to people who have unreasonable expectations of what an organisation and/or worker can provide them
- Handling cash or valuables
- Working alone or in an isolated area

## 7. Prevention of Work-Related Violence

Incidences of work-related violence may be prevented through risk management of activities which may involve any of the risk factors outlined in the previous section.

The ACBCs standard processes for risk management can be used to document risk identification, assessment and control. (See [WHS-PRO-007 Risk Management Process](#))

### Identify the risk

Workers and Supervisors must consult to determine the activities where the worker may be at risk of experiencing work-related violence. In identifying risks, consider the following:

- How often is the task done? Does this make harm more or less likely to occur?
- Has it happened before, either in this workplace or somewhere else? If it has happened, how often does it happen? Consult incident/hazard reports/local crime statistics to determine the frequency of occurrence
- What are the consequences? Will it cause minor or serious injury, or death?

### Assess the risk

Assess the identified risks using the risk assessment matrix in [WHS-PRO-007 Risk Management Process](#).

Determine the level of risk in terms of its likelihood and consequence.

If a risk is rated as Medium or High, it must be addressed as soon as possible and the risk assessment and control must be documented using the Risk Assessment and Control Form ([WHS001](#)).

### Control the risk

There are many ways to control the risk of work-related violence. In determining control measures, refer to the "hierarchy of control" in [WHS-PRO-007 Risk Management Process](#). The hierarchy of control states that elimination of a risk is the most effective way to control it. If this is not possible, then the risk should be controlled through substitution, engineering, administration or protection from the risk. In most cases where elimination of the risk is not possible, a combination of controls can be used to minimize the risk.

Eliminating a risk may involve changing the way a task is carried out. For example eliminate cash handling in a public place by introducing an electronic payment system.

Engineering controls could include introducing access control cards to prevent unauthorized entry, and monitoring through CCTV.

Administrative controls include documented cash handling procedures as well as procedures to be followed when working in remote locations or working in isolation.

The physical work environment can assist to minimise the risk of work-related violence. Examples of control measures are:

- Ensuring that the building is secure, maintained and fit for purpose
- Where possible, ensuring that workers are separated from the public e. g. with protective barriers or screens
- Ensuring that access to the premises and vulnerable areas is appropriately controlled
- Allowing no public access to the premises when people work alone or at night
- Ensuring that workers can see who is coming into the premises and restrict access when necessary
- Ensuring that communication and alarm systems are in place, regularly maintained and tested
- Store cash and valuables securely
- Displaying 'limited cash/no cash held' signs
- Considering installing safe glass – e.g. laminated, toughened glass or perspex (including in picture frames and mirrors)
- Ensuring that there is no access to dangerous implements or objects that could be thrown or used to injure someone
- Installing good internal and external lighting to assist visibility
- Ensuring that workers have a safe place to retreat to (and to escort others to)
- Ensuring that furniture and partitions are arranged so movement is not restricted and there is good visibility of all service areas
- Displaying appropriate signage to direct clients and visitors
- Using security measures e.g. CCTV, anti-jump screens and timer safes.

Work systems and procedures are administrative controls and should be part of the overall work-related violence prevention strategy. Examples of administrative controls which can be used to minimise the risk of work-related violence are:

- Developing and implementing cash-handling procedures e. g. electronic funds transfer only, locked drop safes, carrying small amounts of cash, varying banking times
- Where possible, limiting the amount of cash and valuables held on the premises
- Implementing procedures for working in isolation and in uncontrolled environments
- Implementing responsible service of alcohol practices at work-related functions
- Implementing procedures for opening and closing the workplace
- Implementing procedures for workers to “check in” when they are working in the community or away from the workplace
- Evaluating work practices to see if they contribute to aggression
- Providing training in identifying aggressive behaviours and their triggers, and strategies to address them
- Ensuring that an identification system is in place – e. g. workers and authorised visitors are clearly identified

### **Review of Risks and controls**

A review of risk control measures should occur:

- When a worker or HSR feedback indicates risk control measures are ineffective or not as effective as they should be
- When an HSR or health and safety committee requests a review
- When there have been significant changes in the work environment or work tasks
- After an incident
- As part of the regular review cycle of procedures and effectiveness of control measures

The completed Risk Assessment and Control Form ([WHS001](#)) must be signed by the supervisor and the workers involved.

The original should be held at the Agency office and made available to workers. For Medium to High risk activities, a copy of the completed Risk Assessment and Control Form ([WHS001](#)) must be forwarded to the Office for Employment Relations.

## 8. Training

The ACBC will provide training to support the overall approach to prevention of work-related violence. The training can include:

- Violence prevention measures (as part of induction)
- Awareness of workplace procedures, including emergency response
- Ways of de-escalating aggression – e.g. identifying signs of aggression, verbal and non-verbal communication strategies, encouraging reasoning, listening carefully and acknowledging concerns
- Situational risk assessment – e.g. when meeting people in other workplaces or working off-site
- Positive behaviour strategies and managing behaviours of concern
- Communication skills

## 9. Responding to Incidents of Work-Related Violence

When an incident occurs, a number of actions can be taken after considering the situation. These may include:

- Setting off a duress alarm or pressing a panic button
- Calling another worker to assist with the situation
- Asking the aggressor to leave, using calm verbal and nonverbal communication
- Retreating to a safe location
- Calling the Police
- Implementing the internal emergency response process
- Implementing the external emergency response process

## 10. Responding to Verbal Abuse

Occasionally workers may be subjected to verbal abuse either in person or over the telephone. Verbal abuse can be:

- the use of language that is insulting, threatening, mocking
- yelling
- cursing
- teasing
- name calling or using hurtful labels to define a person (e.g. liar, child opportunist etc.)
- blaming someone for something over which they have no control

### Strategies to deal with verbal abuse

**Do not engage with the person emotionally.** When a person is speaking to you in an abusive way, they are attempting to control your behaviour by obtaining a reaction. A natural response is to try to defend yourself and in turn to manage their behaviour. The better way to respond to the situation is to attend to your own behaviour and keep it in check. Some ways to do this are as follows:

- Remind yourself that nobody has the right to put you down, and that what is happening is not something you deserve.
- Don't let yourself be dragged into an argument or an ugly scene. Do not defend yourself against accusations and insults. Say something like, "I'm sorry you feel that way."

**Set Boundaries.** Explain that you will not engage with the abusive behaviour, set consequences, and stick to them. E.g. say "I would be happy to talk to you about this issue, but I am not going to speak to you when you are yelling/insulting me/threatening me/putting me down/speaking in a sarcastic tone of voice. If the abusive person says they are just joking, say "I don't like that joke, and I am not interested in talking to you when you talk to me like that."

- If the verbal abuse continues, set a consequence. E.g. say, "I will talk to you about this when we can both act calmly; however, I will not stay here and be abused. If you keep speaking to me in that tone, I will terminate this phone call/ leave my desk."

- Make sure to follow through on whatever consequence you set. If you said you will leave the desk, leave the desk; if you have said that you will terminate the phone call, terminate the phone call.

**Walk away.** If a boundary you set is crossed, or if you feel unsafe, leave. If you are being verbally abused by someone you don't know or don't have any reason to talk to, walk away if you feel safe doing so. If you are being randomly verbally abused by someone you don't know, either stay silent or say, "I would appreciate that you not speak to me in that tone of voice," and move on to a place of safety as soon as you can. Return only if it is safe. If the abuser is more inclined to stay angry, to escalate into violence, or to seek some sort of revenge, stay away.

**Get help.** If you are being verbally abused report the abuse to your Supervisor and ask them to assist.

## 11. Reporting Incidents

In many cases incidents of work-related violence are not reported. Workers can feel embarrassed, helpless or powerless to bring about change. Workers must be encouraged to report incidents of work-related violence so that the incident can be addressed and similar incidents in the future can be prevented.

Workers should report incidents using the ACBC's standard procedure for reporting and investigating incidents and hazards ([WHS-PRO-018 Reporting and Investigating incidents and Hazards](#))

## 12. Records

Diary notes

Risk Assessment and Control Form ([WHS001](#))

Incident/Hazard Reporting & Investigation forms ([WHS009](#))