Workplace Violence at Schools – Struck-By Incidents: When Students Strike Teachers Meeting Kit



WHAT'S AT STAKE

Let's be honest, we all come to school with the same goal: to create a positive and productive learning environment. As educators, we pour our hearts and souls into teaching and nurturing our students, and a safe workplace is essential for us to do our jobs effectively. Now, while it's thankfully not a common occurrence, incidents where students physically strike teachers do happen, and they're a serious form of workplace violence. These incidents can have a real impact, causing both physical and emotional harm – not just to the teacher involved but also to the overall school atmosphere. It affects our ability to teach, students' ability to learn, and the feeling of safety we should all have at school.

WHAT'S THE DANGER

These incidents, where students strike teachers, can vary in severity, from a push or shove to something much more serious. But even what might seem like a "minor" incident can have a lasting impact. Let's break down the types of incidents we're talking about and some of the things that can contribute to them:

Types of Incidents – What We're Talking About:

We're talking about a range of physical actions, including things like pushing, shoving, or grabbing, which often happen in the heat of the moment, maybe out of frustration or impulsivity. But these actions can still cause real physical harm and create a sense of unease. Then there are the more serious incidents, like hitting, kicking, or punching, which can result in significant injuries. Even throwing objects, whether intentional or not, can be dangerous, especially if the object is hard or thrown with force.

Contributing Factors – Why Does This Happen?

There are often underlying factors that contribute to these situations.

Sometimes, students are dealing with emotional or behavioral challenges that affect their ability to control their impulses. A simple disagreement between a student and a teacher can escalate into a physical confrontation if it's not handled carefully. And if we, as educators, aren't equipped with effective de-escalation strategies, it can be harder to prevent a situation from turning physical.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Alright, let's get real about how we can make our school a safer place when it comes to student aggression. It's not just about reacting when something happens; it's about being proactive and setting the stage for safety from the start.

Proactive Prevention – Setting the Tone:

Think of it this way: the best defense is a good offense. In this case, our "offense" is building strong connections with our students. When they feel seen, heard, and respected, they're much less likely to act out physically. It's about creating a classroom where everyone feels valued and safe. Effective classroom management plays a huge part too. Simple things like clear expectations, consistent routines, and positive reinforcement can work wonders in preventing behavioural issues before they even begin.

For example, imagine a student is getting visibly upset during a group project. Instead of jumping in with corrections or getting frustrated yourself, try saying something like, "Hey, I can see you're feeling stressed. Let's take a quick break and then come back to this. What do you think?" That simple act of acknowledging their feelings and offering a solution can often diffuse the situation. And remember: we're a team! If you have concerns about a student's behavior, don't hesitate to talk to school counselors, administrators, or other support staff.

Responding in the Moment – Acting Smart and Safe:

Now, let's talk about the tougher scenario: what if a student becomes physically aggressive? Your absolute top priority is always your own safety and the safety of other students. Here's a breakdown of the key steps to take in the moment:

- **Create Distance:** Your first action should be to create physical space between yourself and the student. This helps protect you and gives you time to assess the situation. Move other students away from the immediate area to ensure their safety as well.
- **Attempt Verbal De-escalation (If Safe):** If it's safe to do so, try to calm the student down using verbal de-escalation techniques. Speak calmly and firmly, using a neutral tone of voice. Avoid arguing, raising your voice, or making any threatening gestures. Simple phrases like, "I can see you're upset. Let's talk about this."
- **Activate Emergency Procedures Immediately:** Time is of the essence. Immediately activate your school's emergency procedures. This could involve using a classroom phone or intercom to call the office, activating a panic button, or following your school's specific lockdown or crisis protocol.
- **Physical Intervention (Last Resort Only):** This is critical: do not physically engage with the student unless there's an immediate, life-

threatening danger to yourself or others. If you absolutely must intervene to prevent serious harm, use the minimal force necessary. Remember, untrained physical intervention can escalate the situation and put everyone at greater risk.

- **Document Everything:** As soon as the situation is under control, it’s vital to document everything: the date, time, location, what happened, and any witnesses.

Post-Incident Actions – Taking Care of Us and Following Up:

Once the situation is resolved, reporting the incident to your supervisor and following all school reporting procedures is essential. This helps the school track incidents, identify patterns, and implement appropriate follow-up actions.

FINAL WORD

Creating a safe school environment where teachers feel protected from physical harm is a shared responsibility. Let’s commit to working together to make our school a place where everyone feels safe, respected, and supported.