



# School and Parental Relationships Policy<sup>1</sup>

## Guidance for Staff in Dealing with Parents

### Avoiding an Incident

Parents, or members of the public, may arrive in a tense, agitated state and how they are initially dealt with might well make the difference between a minor exchange of words and an aggressive confrontation.

As a school we expect all staff, and particularly teachers, to be positive and proactive in managing relationships with parents. A quick word at the end of the school day or a phone call to a parent you may not see can avert many problems and reassure parents so incidents are much less likely to occur. We expect all staff to take responsibility for being thorough in resolving incidents that happen in the course of the school day by liaising with other staff, fully investigating incidents and communicating with staff and parents. It is important to be honest and realistic with parents and always do what you say you will do.

Members of staff are entitled to support from the school leaders in handling a potentially difficult parent interview, so, if you have any concerns you should discuss them with your line manager. Sensitivity towards parental difficulties is an asset. Many adults are still influenced by their own schooling and other childhood experiences, as well as their consequent expectations for their own children. Over anxious, or even ambitious, parents can feel very vulnerable.

Preparation is an essential ingredient in ensuring that interviews/meetings prove constructive rather than confrontational.

The school advises all staff not to engage in work related conversations with parents/carers etc. outside of the school boundary. Staff that do, risk breaching confidentiality guidelines and may also be putting themselves at unnecessary risk of abuse.

#### **Always try to:**

Prepare in advance by:

- Ensuring there is enough space in the room, whilst also making it appear intimate and relaxing
- People can need greater personal space than normal when upset or angry and the proximity of others can be more threatening
- Having the facility to raise the alarm readily available (a member of staff nearby/door open/mobile phone next to you switched on)
- Considering having a colleague present, or pre-arranging with a colleague to check that all is well, if you have reason to believe that the visitor has a previous history of aggression or violence, or appears to be aggressive or violent
- Gathering information that might help
- Ensuring the layout of the room is not intimidating for visitors and allows you to escape quickly; if possible position your chair/desk with the door behind you
- Positioning seating at equal height so that the parent does not feel patronised, and, if possible, at a 45 degree angle as this is less threatening. Avoid barriers if it is safe to do so
- Remove an angry or upset person from an audience, or, if easier, remove the audience and don't leave them waiting unnecessarily. The fewer people that are involved in an incident, the easier it is for an aggressor to back down without losing face
- Keep the discussion as calm and friendly as possible, paraphrasing what has been said and using sympathy and empathy where appropriate
- Summarise what has been said and follow through. This will help to build trust and respect.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the GMB Yorkshire & North Derbyshire Schools Forum Zero Tolerance Policy



## **Minimise a parent/visitor's frustration by:**

- Being yourself. Do not hide behind authority, status or a job title. By using your name instead of a description of your status, you are presenting yourself as another human being. Later on, it may be important to explain what authority or status you have in order to reassure the visitor that you are in a position to act on their behalf
- Keeping the visitor talking and explaining the problem, their perception of what has happened, why they feel aggrieved. Use verbal and non-verbal prompts (saying 'mmm' or 'yes' or nodding) to keep them talking. Use open questions to encourage them to talk and explain. Use positive body language, smile if appropriate
- Listening and allowing the visitor to express any complaint, without preventing them from finishing what they have to say. Listen empathetically without pre-judging or patronising. Listen also for the feelings, concerns and possible intentions behind their words
- Responding promptly, paying attention and showing that you do care about their problem. Don't keep leaving the room as this gives the message that you have other more important matters to deal with.
- Being polite, pleasant and reassuring and do not show anger. Resist arguing. It is very tempting to respond and become engaged in an argument, especially if you are the butt of aggression or accused in some way, but it is far more likely to result in conflict or confrontation than contribute to defusing the situation
- Paying attention to your body language so it is as non-threatening as possible
- Avoid aggressive or defensive stances, such as arms folded, hands on hips or waving fingers or arms. Try to relax your facial muscles and convey openness and empathy with the speaker. Make eye contact, but avoid constant eye contact that may be threatening or trigger aggression because it is perceived as staring
- Trying to explain clearly in jargon free language precisely what your difficulty is in giving the aggressive person what they want. Repeat it until you are understood because upset people do not always hear the first time
- Not making any promises, which you know you, cannot keep as this may make things worse for you or your colleagues at a later date.

## **Handling an Incident – General Principles**

If someone becomes aggressive, abusive or threatening, consider whether or not you can cope with the situation. You should not feel you have to cope with it alone: you should seek help from other people, or leave altogether. If a situation appears to be getting out of control, make an excuse and leave and immediately report the incident to the headteacher/assistant headteacher.

It is important that you:

- Know whether you are in a position to offer the parent a realistic and reasonable answer to their expectations
- Consider whether you feel able to handle the situation
- Be confident you have back up
- Be assured you can summon help
- Have a plan of how to approach the problem.

First keep calm, relax, allow yourself time to think and decide the best course of action. Ask yourself if what has occurred so far in the exchange means that someone else, who has been briefed by you, would be better placed to handle the situation.

## **Possible Warning Signs**

Someone who is potentially, or about to become, violent can give out signs and signals that constitute a recognisable warning:

- Agitation
- Tapping the table
- Loud speech/shouting
- Muscle tension in face, hands, limbs; fidgeting, hand-wringing; clenching fists
- Drawing breath in sharply



- Colour of face: pale is dangerous – the body is ready for action; a red face is likely to indicate a bark worse than the bite, but this could change
- Finger- wagging or jabbing
- Inability to be still, even pacing about
- Swearing
- Staring eyes
- Sweating
- Oversensitivity to ideas, suggestions
- Rapid mood swings

This is not an exhaustive list but seeks to provide illustrations of such behavior.

### **Over the Telephone**

If a parent, carer or member of the public begins to exhibit aggressive or abusive behaviour (e.g. use of foul language or verbal threats or insults) towards any member of staff during a telephone call, the member of staff should:

- Calmly state that the language used is unacceptable and that they will end the call if it continues
- Try to establish the name and contact details of the complainant (and the nature of the complaint if possible) and state that a member of the Leadership Team will return their call as soon as possible
- End the call. Make notes of what was said immediately on termination of the call and then report the incident to a member of the Leadership Team.

A member of the Leadership Team will contact the complainant to establish the nature of the complaint and try to resolve the issue.

### **Written Abuse**

If a member of staff receives written correspondence, e.g. letter, e-mail or text of an aggressive, threatening or abusive nature from a parent, carer or member of the public, this shall be reported immediately to a member of the Leadership Team and a copy retained as evidence.

The receiving member of staff will not reply to the correspondence without first agreeing the response with the Leadership Team member or, if more appropriate, the LT member will respond on their behalf.

Whilst the school will make every effort to resolve any issue raised by the complainant, consideration may also be given to involving the police, especially where threats of violence have been made.

Every effort must be made to minimise the likelihood of written abuse through not communicating using personal email or social media direct mail. Only use the secure school email for communicating with parents and other staff (on school related matters).

### **It should always be remembered that:**

- The physical safety of employees is more important than the security of buildings or property
- When violence is threatened it is important that reasonable effort is made to control the situation
- If a situation is out of control it is better to retreat and get away if possible
- In controlling an incident, involvement of members of the public should be avoided
- If an implement has been involved in an attack, this should be retained, provided this can be done without any risk
- Physical intervention or restraint should always be regarded as an absolute last resort

### **Action to be taken following an incident**

- Seek medical attention, if required
- Report verbally to your headteacher/manager as soon as possible. Other staff may be at risk from the same person
- Complete a LA 'Aggression Towards Employees Form (obtained from the office) and pass to your headteacher/manager for investigation, having sought Union advice, if appropriate
- Take time with your headteacher/manager to discuss the incident and your feelings



- Ask for assistance if you need it
- Consider Police involvement, if they are not already involved

In all cases of assault causing actual injury the employee sustaining the injury is advised to make a formal complaint to the Police against the assailant. Regardless of their decision, the headteacher will report any such incidents to the local authority who may decide to involve the police.

Employees have joint responsibility with their employer to review any incidents and identify the need for appropriate training and counselling, and specific strategies to reduce the level of risk.

## **Guidance for Headteachers/Managers**

People with responsibility for staff management need to be committed to the objective of reducing aggression and violence to employees and ensuring that all staff receive appropriate training.

It is important to ensure that new members of staff are aware of this policy and procedures as part of their induction to the school and that they have access to appropriate training. Therefore this policy and guidance is referred to in the staff handbook and given to all new employees as part of their induction to the school.

Staff should be aware that they can expect support from their Headteacher in managing parent interviews well.

A formal notice is displayed at the entrance(s) to the school informing visitors of the school's expectations about behaviour.

## **Action to be taken following an incident**

- Provide access to a private area for as long as necessary where the member of staff can sit with a friend or colleague
- Provide assistance, if necessary, for the member of staff to go home/visit their GP/attend hospital etc. A medical assessment of any injury should be made as soon as practicable and, in case of visible injuries, it is helpful to obtain photographs
- Make time for the employee to talk to you.
- Explain the employee's right to involve the police if they so wish
- Contact the Police if appropriate
- Provide the opportunity for the member of staff to consult his/her trade union representative before submitting their completed form
- Report the incident to the LA
- Carry out a thorough investigation into the incident
- Obtain written statements from witnesses as soon as possible after the incident (the sooner the better)
- All evidence obtained should be retained to support any action taken
- Maintain regular contact with the person if they are off work because of the incident
- Make the member of staff aware of the availability of occupational health advice and telephone-based professional counselling through the Employee Assistance Programme
- Review risk assessments and procedures following an incident and amend if necessary without delay
- Ensure other relevant staff are informed of the incident and of any changes to working practices.

## **Role of Local Authority**

Advice and support is available from the Local Authority through the Legal Team.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Personal Safety Policy and the Dignity at Work Policy.



## Appendix A

**(Warning letter, from the headteacher: to parent/carer with child/ren at the school)**

Send by Recorded delivery

Dear

I have received a report about your conduct at the school on **(enter date and time)**.

**(Add factual summary of the incident and of its effect on staff, pupils, other parents.)**

I must inform you that the governing body will not tolerate conduct of this nature on its premises and will act to protect its staff and pupils.

Therefore if, in the future, I receive any reports of conduct of this nature I will be forced to consider removing your permission to enter the school grounds and buildings. If you do not comply with that instruction I will be able to arrange for you to be removed from the premises and prosecuted under Section 547 of the Education Act 1996. If convicted under this section, you are liable to a fine of up to £500.

Nevertheless, I wish to give you an opportunity to give me in writing any comments or observations of your own in relation to the report which I have received about your conduct. These comments may include any expressions of regret on your part and any assurances you are prepared to give about your future good conduct. To enable me to take a decision on this matter at an early point, you are asked to send me any written comments you wish to make by **(state date ten working days from the date of letter)**.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher



## Appendix B

### **(Banning Letter, from the governing body: to parent/carer with child/ren at the school)**

Send by Recorded delivery

Dear

I have received a report from the headteacher at Hoylandswaine Primary School about your conduct on **(enter date and time)**.

#### **(Add factual summary of the incident and of its effect on staff, pupils, other parents.)**

I must inform you that the governing body will not tolerate conduct of this nature on its premises and will act to protect its staff and pupils. On the advice of the headteacher I am therefore instructing that until **(add date)** you are not to reappear on the premises of the school. If you do not comply with this instruction I may arrange for you to be removed from the premises and prosecuted under Section 547 of the Education Act 1996. If convicted under this section, you are liable to a fine of up to £500.

For the duration of this decision you may bring your son(s)/daughter(s) **(complete as appropriate)** to school and collect them/him/her **(delete as appropriate)** at the end of the school day, but you must not go beyond the school gate.

The withdrawal of permission for you to enter the school premises takes effect straightaway. However, I still need to decide whether it is appropriate to confirm this decision. Before I do so, I wish to give you an opportunity to give me in writing any comments or observations of your own in relation to the report, which I have received from the headteacher. These comments may include any expressions of regret on your part and any assurances you are prepared to give about your future good conduct. To enable me to take a decision on this matter at an early point, you are asked to send me any written comments you wish to make by **(state date ten working days from the date of letter)**.

If on receipt of your comments I consider that my decision should be confirmed, or extended, you will be supplied with details of how to pursue a review of the circumstances of your case.

In any event, the decision to withdraw your permission to enter the school premises will be reviewed by **(complete as appropriate)**. That review will take account of any representations that you may have made and of your subsequent conduct.

Yours sincerely,

Chair of the Governing Body



## Appendix C

**(Letter updating a banning letter, from the governing body, confirming the ban: to parent/carer with child/ren at the school)**

Send by Recorded delivery

Dear

On **(give date)** I wrote to you informing you that on the advice of the headteacher, I had withdrawn permission for you to come onto the premises of Hoylandswaine Primary School until **(insert date)**. To enable the governing body to determine whether to confirm this decision, or to impose it for a longer period, I gave you the opportunity to give your written comments on the incident concerned by **(give date)**.

I have not received a written response from you / I have now received a letter from you **(delete either sentence as appropriate)** dated **(insert date)** the contents of which I have noted.

In the circumstances, and after further consideration of the headteacher's report, I have determined that the decision to withdraw permission for you to come onto school premises should be confirmed/extended. **(delete as appropriate)** I am therefore instructing that until **(insert date)** you are not to come onto the premises of the school without the prior knowledge and approval of the headteacher. If you do not comply with this instruction I may arrange for you to be removed from the premises and prosecuted under Section 547 of the Education Act 1996. If convicted, you are liable to a fine of up to £500.

Notwithstanding this decision the headteacher and staff at Hoylandswaine Primary School remain committed to the education of your child/children **(delete as appropriate)**, who must continue to attend school as normal under the arrangements set out in my previous letter.

The governing body will take steps to review the continuance of this decision by **(give date)**. When deciding whether it is necessary to extend the withdrawal of permission to come onto the school's premises, the governing body will take into account the extent of your compliance with the decision, any appropriate expressions of regret and assurances of future good conduct received from yourself and any evidence of your co-operation with the school in other respects.

**(Include the following wording where the incident has arisen within the context of a parental complaint against the school)** Finally I would advise you that I have asked the headteacher to ensure that your complaint **(give brief details)** is considered under the appropriate school procedure. You will be contacted about this by the school in due course.

If you wish to pursue the matter further, you have a right to a review of the circumstances of this case by the school's governing body.

Yours sincerely,

Chair of the Governing Body



## Appendix D

**(Letter updating a banning letter, from the governing body, withdrawing ban: to parent/carer with child/ren at the school)**

Send by Recorded Delivery

Dear

On **(insert date)** I wrote to you informing you that, on the advice of the headteacher, I had temporarily withdrawn permission for you to come onto the premises of Hoylandswaine Primary School. To enable me to determine whether to confirm this decision for a longer period, I gave you the opportunity to let me have your written comments on this incident by **(insert date)**

I have not received a written response from you / I have now received a letter from you dated **(insert date)**, the contents of which I have noted. **(delete either sentence as appropriate)**

In the circumstances, and after consulting with the headteacher, I have decided that it is not necessary to confirm the decision, and I am therefore restoring to you the permission to come onto the school premises, with immediate effect.

Nevertheless I remain very concerned at the incident which occurred on **(insert date)**, and I must warn you that if there is any repetition of your behaviour on that occasion, I shall not hesitate to withdraw permission for you to come onto the premises

Yours sincerely,

Chair of the Governing Body



## Appendix E

**(Letter, from the governing body, following formal review of a banning letter, extending ban: to parent/carer with child/ren at the school)**

Dear

I wrote to you on **(insert date)** withdrawing permission for you to come onto the premises of Hoylandswaine Primary School until **(insert date)**. In that letter I also advised you that I would take steps to review this decision by **(insert date)**.

I have now completed the review. However, after consultation with the headteacher, I have determined that it is not yet appropriate for me to withdraw my decision. **(Give a brief summary of reasons)**

I therefore advise that the instruction that you are not to come onto the premises of Hoylandswaine Primary School without the prior knowledge and approval of the headteacher remains in place until **(insert date)**.

I shall undertake a further review of this decision on **(insert date)**.

If you are dissatisfied with this decision, you have a right to request a review of the decision by the Governing Body.

Yours sincerely,

Chair of the Governing Body



## Appendix F

**(Letter, from the governing body, following formal review of a banning letter, ending ban: to parent/carer with child/ren at the school)**

Dear

I wrote to you on **(insert date)** informing you that I had withdrawn permission for you to come onto the premises of Hoylandswaine Primary School until **(insert date)**. In that letter I also advised you that I would take steps to review this decision by **(insert date)**.

I have now completed the review. After consultation with the headteacher, I have decided that it is no longer necessary to continue with the ban and I am therefore restoring to you the permission to come onto the school premises, with immediate effect.

I trust that you can now be relied upon to act in full co-operation with the school and that there will be no further difficulties of the kind which made it necessary for me to prevent you entering the premises.

I should point out that if there is any repetition of your behaviour, I shall not hesitate to withdraw permission for you to come onto the premises once more.

Yours sincerely,

Chair of the Governing Body