

Reducing the risk of violence when driving students

Driving students to and from appointments and events in the community can expose workers to violence and other undesirable behaviours. Students have hit workers while they were driving, grabbed the steering wheel, or exited moving vehicles. Some of these incidents have resulted in injuries and crashes.

Consider alternatives to driving

As with any workplace hazard, avoid driving where possible. Alternatives to driving students include the following:

- Arrange for parents to do the driving.
- Bring needed services to students (for example, schedule school visits).
- Use an alternative transportation service, such as a bus, taxi, or HandyDart, while a worker accompanies the students.

When arranging alternative transportation, any information needed to protect the safety of other workers must be shared.

If alternatives are not appropriate, the next step is to carry out a risk assessment.

Assess the risk

A violence risk assessment helps determine whether or not a trip should be taken, the steps needed to protect the worker, and the

requirements for the vehicle. The assessment must cover the duration of the trip and should complement existing documents (for example, employee safety plans).

Both the driver and the student (where appropriate) should actively participate in the risk assessment process.

The first step in the risk assessment should consider the following:

- Any history of the student behaving in a way that has put others at risk of injury
- The student's potential reactions to trip-related stressors (for example, overstimulation, other people in the vehicle, or negative perception of the destination)

In the Regulation

Violence is defined in section 4.27 of the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation as "the attempted or actual exercise by a person, other than a worker, of any physical force so as to cause injury to a worker, and includes any threatening statement or behaviour which gives a worker reasonable cause to believe that he or she is at risk of injury."

If the first step in the risk assessment determines that it might be safe to drive a student, then the second step is to examine student-centred factors such as the following:

- The student's status at the time of the trip, including his/her:
 - Current mental and emotional state
 - Recent changes in behaviour
 - Impulsivity
- The student's readiness to be a passenger, including his/her willingness to:
 - Follow the driver's instructions
 - Refrain from distracting the driver
 - Wear a seat belt
 - Keep the vehicle doors closed
- The student's needs during the trip (for example, food or toileting)

If the results of the risk assessment suggest that a safe trip is unlikely, postpone or cancel the trip in the interests of everyone's safety.

Use an appropriate vehicle

- Select a reliable, roadworthy vehicle that is the right size and configuration for the student and any required equipment.
- Ideally, the driver should have control over door locks and windows.
- Remove objects that might be used as weapons (for example, loose items or hot drinks).
- Ensure the vehicle is equipped with emergency equipment, including a first aid kit.
- When needed, install a physical barrier between the driver and the student.

When to make other arrangements

Make other arrangements to transport the student when any of the following apply:

- The student's health or safety is at risk. (Call 911.)
- The driver might need to carry out a task other than driving (for example, distracting the student).
- A second worker may be required to restrain the student.

Plan for a successful trip

If the violence risk assessment determines that the trip can be completed safely, the next step is to plan for a successful trip.

Consider the following in your planning:

- Reducing risk during the trip
 - Ensure the driver is aware of your road safety policy and will operate the vehicle safely.
 - Determine the ideal time for travel (for example, based on the student's needs, traffic, and weather conditions).
 - Keep the number of people in the vehicle as low as possible.
 - Select the safest route possible (not necessarily the most direct route). Limit the number of stops.
 - Follow safe driving practices to avoid agitating the student (for example, do not speed, change lanes excessively, or drive aggressively).

- Implementing other administrative procedures
 - Document the destination, route, and estimated duration of the trip. And record the contact information of the driver and his/her supervisor.
 - Encourage the driver to store the phone number of the supervisor or school in his/her mobile phone for quick access in case of an emergency. The person receiving a call from the driver must know what actions to take to assist the driver.
 - Establish criteria for cancelling a planned trip.
 - Assign a second worker to the trip, but only if the additional worker's purpose is to calm the student (not to physically protect the driver).

All decisions to drive need to align with your policies on driving.

And despite all this planning, a last-minute change of circumstances may mean that the *trip needs to be postponed or cancelled* in the interests of everyone's safety. The driver needs to have the final decision about whether to go ahead with a trip.

While this document relates to the risk of violence and other undesirable behaviours, there are other considerations for worker health and safety while driving. These considerations include musculoskeletal injury, infection control, working alone, etc. Other risk assessments may be needed to address these situations.

When workers use their personal vehicles

Employers are responsible for the safety of their workers while they drive students, and must take steps to minimize those risks. Those responsibilities do not change when workers use their own vehicles to drive students. There are insurance, liability, and professional practice issues that are beyond the scope of this document.

Plan for the unexpected

Provide guidance to workers about when to stop a trip and actions to take if something goes wrong (including when to call 911). A few examples of unexpected occurrences include the following:

- Involvement in a motor vehicle incident
- Mechanical breakdown of the vehicle
- Student behavioural or medical issues that develop during the trip

Report incidents and changes

Workers must report any incidents to their supervisor. They must also report any indications that the risk assessment or work practices need updating.

Resources

- **Education Enews**

Sign up for regular health and safety updates through the Education Sector Enews. It covers regulation changes, new publications, upcoming events, and other relevant topics.

www2.worksafebc.com/Portals/EducationSector/EducationSectorNews.asp?reportID=37070

- **Safety at Work centre — Education sector**

The Safety at Work centre provides information and resources on topics specific to employers and workers in the education sector.

worksafebc.com/education

- **WorkSafeBC Prevention Information Line**

WorkSafeBC officers are available to answer questions about workplace health and safety, worker and employer responsibilities, and reporting a workplace accident or incident. Anonymous calls are accepted.

Phone 604.276.3100 in the Lower Mainland, or 1.888.621.7233 (621.SAFE) toll-free in Canada.

- **Plan Before You Drive Students:
Reduce the Risk of Workplace Violence**

This three-minute video complements the bulletin. It is intended to generate discussion about some of the decisions you need to make before getting behind the wheel.

www2.worksafebc.com/Publications/Multimedia/Videos.asp?ReportID=37594

