

# GUIDE TO PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION: VIOLENCE AGAINST EDUCATION PERSONNEL

This is a **Violence-free zone**



www.esqqe.net



Centrale des syndicats du Québec

Centre de recherche et d'intervention  
sur la réussite scolaire





# Summary

## INTRODUCTION

### 1. RECOGNIZING SCHOOL VIOLENCE

- 1.1 Definition of school violence
- 1.2 Manifestations of violence
  - 1.2.1 Physical violence
  - 1.2.2 Verbal violence
  - 1.2.3 Psychological violence
    - 1.2.3.1 Intimidation harassment
    - 1.2.3.2 Distinguishing conflict from relationships of dominance (victimization)
  - 1.2.4 Sexual violence
  - 1.2.5 Cyberaggression (cyberbullying)

### 2. UNDERSTANDING VIOLENCE EXPERIENCED IN SCHOOL: CAUSAL FACTORS AND CONSEQUENCES

- 2.1 Personal factors
- 2.2 Organizational factors
- 2.3 Consequences of violence for victims
- 2.4 Consequences of violence for school organization

### 3. TAKING ACTION AGAINST VIOLENCE

- 3.1 What can you do to prevent violence?
  - 3.1.1 Report the situation
  - 3.1.2 Take individual action (take action as individuals)
  - 3.1.3 Take collective action (take action as a group)
- 3.2 What should you do when an act of violence occurs?
  - 3.2.1 What should you do following a critical incident?
  - 3.2.2 What should you do in situations of harassment and intimidation?

### 4. GET SUPPORT FROM YOUR UNION IF YOU ARE A VICTIM OR WITNESS OF VIOLENCE

#### Concept:

Danielle Leclerc (Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières)  
Claire Beaumont (Université Laval)  
Line Massé and Michelle Dumont (Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières)  
Luc Allaire and Pierre Lefebvre (Centrale des syndicats du Québec)

#### Partners:

Centrale des syndicats du Québec (CSQ)  
[www.csq.qc.net](http://www.csq.qc.net)  
Centre de recherche et d'intervention sur la réussite scolaire (CRIRES)  
[www.ulaval.ca/crises](http://www.ulaval.ca/crises)

# Introduction

The use of violence in interpersonal relationships is of growing concern to society, because today, we know much more about the short- and long-term effects on victims and the indirect consequences for witnesses. Violence that occurs in the workplace places serious constraints on quality of life for employees when they are performing their duties. In fact, the personnel working in these settings have voiced concerns about their ever-growing sense of insecurity in the face of the many forms violence to which they can be exposed.

This guide is addressed to employees of the education network. It is intended to heighten their awareness of violence in the workplace. It is designed for all education personnel, i.e., teaching, professional and support staff as well as administrative employees.

Since individual, group and organizational factors can influence the likelihood of being a victim of violence in educational institutions (Steffgen and Ewen, 2007), this guide proposes concrete ways of preventing violence and intervening in situations of violence, both for individuals and groups.

However, this document only provides an overview of the interventions that education personnel can implement to improve the work environment. You are asked to learn more about this issue by consulting the references provided at the end of the guide.

We begin by explaining how to recognize violence in the educational community. Second, we describe the causal factors that provide you with a better understanding of violence and its consequences. Third, we suggest several types of action that can be undertaken to counter violence. Fourth, we explain how your union can provide you with support if you are a victim of or a witness to violence.



Cut me some slack • Take a deep breath • Cool it • That's enough • Are you done? • Come on! • Cool your jets • Be zen • Take it easy • Take it down a notch • Cool your jets • Relax • R-E-S-P-E-C-T • Wait for your turn • Listen to me • Relax Max • Tone it down • Don't walk all over me • I'm chilling out • Lighten up • Take a deep breath • That's enough • Are you done? • Come on! • Cool your jets • Be zen • Stay calm • Take it down a notch

Cut me some slack • Take a deep breath • Cool it • That's enough • Are you done? • Come on! • Cool your jets • Be zen • Take it easy • Take it down a notch • Cool your jets • Relax • R-E-S-P-E-C-T • Wait for your turn • Listen to me • Relax Max • Tone it down • Don't walk all over me • I'm chilling out • Lighten up • Take a deep breath • Cool it • That's enough • Are you done? • Come on! • Cool your jets • Be zen • Stay calm • Take it down a notch

Cut me some slack • Take a deep breath • Cool it • That's enough • Are you done? • Come on! • Cool your jets • Be zen • Take it easy • Take it down a notch • Cool your jets • Relax • R-E-S-P-E-C-T • Wait for your turn • Listen to me • Relax Max • Tone it down • Don't walk all over me • I'm chilling out • Lighten up • Take a deep breath • Cool it • That's enough • Are you done? • Come on! • Cool your jets • Be zen • Stay calm • Take it down a notch

Cut me some slack • Take a deep breath • Cool it • That's enough • Are you done? • Come on! • Cool your jets • Be zen • Take it easy • Take it down a notch • Cool your jets • Relax • R-E-S-P-E-C-T • Wait for your turn • Listen to me • Relax Max • Tone it down • Don't walk all over me • I'm chilling out • Lighten up • Take a deep breath • Cool it • That's enough • Are you done? • Come on! • Cool your jets • Be zen • Stay calm • Take it down a notch

Cut me some slack • Take a deep breath • Cool it • That's enough • Are you done? • Come on! • Cool your jets • Be zen • Take it easy • Take it down a notch • Cool your jets • Relax • R-E-S-P-E-C-T • Wait for your turn • Listen to me • Relax Max • Tone it down • Don't walk all over me • I'm chilling out • Lighten up • Take a deep breath • Cool it • That's enough • Are you done? • Come on! • Cool your jets • Be zen • Stay calm • Take it down a notch

Cut me some slack • Take a deep breath • Cool it • That's enough • Are you done? • Come on! • Cool your jets • Be zen • Take it easy • Take it down a notch • Cool your jets • Relax • R-E-S-P-E-C-T • Wait for your turn • Listen to me • Relax Max • Tone it down • Don't walk all over me • I'm chilling out • Lighten up • Take a deep breath • Cool it • That's enough • Are you done? • Come on! • Cool your jets • Be zen • Stay calm • Take it down a notch

Cut me some slack • Take a deep breath • Cool it • That's enough • Are you done? • Come on! • Cool your jets • Be zen • Take it easy • Take it down a notch • Cool your jets • Relax • R-E-S-P-E-C-T • Wait for your turn • Listen to me • Relax Max • Tone it down • Don't walk all over me • I'm chilling out • Lighten up • Take a deep breath • Cool it • That's enough • Are you done? • Come on! • Cool your jets • Be zen • Stay calm • Take it down a notch

Cut me some slack • Take a deep breath • Cool it • That's enough • Are you done? • Come on! • Cool your jets • Be zen • Take it easy • Take it down a notch • Cool your jets • Relax • R-E-S-P-E-C-T • Wait for your turn • Listen to me • Relax Max • Tone it down • Don't walk all over me • I'm chilling out • Lighten up • Take a deep breath • Cool it • That's enough • Are you done? • Come on! • Cool your jets • Be zen • Stay calm • Take it down a notch

Cut me some slack • Take a deep breath • Cool it • That's enough • Are you done? • Come on! • Cool your jets • Be zen • Take it easy • Take it down a notch • Cool your jets • Relax • R-E-S-P-E-C-T • Wait for your turn • Listen to me • Relax Max • Tone it down • Don't walk all over me • I'm chilling out • Lighten up • Take a deep breath • Cool it • That's enough • Are you done? • Come on! • Cool your jets • Be zen • Stay calm • Take it down a notch

# 1 RECOGNIZING VIOLENCE AT SCHOOL

When we talk about violence in schools, the first thing that comes to mind is violence observed among pupils, students or toward personnel. We often forget the other types of violence that education personnel can be exposed to in the exercise of their duties: parental violence, violence among colleagues, hierarchical violence, violence of an organizational nature.

In Québec, a study conducted by the CEQ (1998) indicated that approximately one teacher in ten had experienced a violent situation in his/her workplace. Psychological violence was reported in 70% of cases, whereas physical violence was reported by 24% of the respondents. Students were identified as the aggressors in over half of the cases (53%), two-thirds of which occurred in secondary school. Persons in a position of authority were identified as the instigators of aggression in 26% of these cases and work colleagues in 21% of cases.

A more recent study (Girard, Laliberté and Dompierre, 2003) associated physical violence experienced by school personnel with

15% of reported incidents, compared with 80% for psychological violence and 6% of sexual violence. In 89% of situations of physical violence, the aggressor was a student; in 5% of cases, a colleague. As for cases of psychological violence, 39% of the instigators were students, 25% were colleagues, 18% were parents and 7% were persons in a position of authority.

## 1.1 Definition of school violence

Currently, there is no consensus for a shared definition of what is meant by school violence. For Hirigoyen (2001), violence in the workplace includes “any abusive behaviour, manifested in words, acts and written messages intended to cause injury to the physical and psychological integrity of an individual, jeopardize his/her job or to degrade his/her working conditions.” This concept of violence refers to many situations, practices, events and behaviours perceived to be intolerable by the persons who are subjected to them (Furlong and Morrison, 2000). More

recently, Jeffrey and Sun (2006) proposed a definition of school violence that takes into consideration differences in perception and individual tolerance thresholds. This last definition seems to more closely reflect the experience in Quebec schools:

An attitude or an act based on the abusive use of force or power; an attitude or an act that causes harm to others; an attitude or an act that causes injury to a legal entity or a person; an attitude or an act that endangers safety; a brutal, disrespectful, intimidating, devaluing, discriminatory, threatening attitude or act, etc. (Jeffrey and Sun, 2006, p. 68).

## 1.2 Manifestations of violence

Despite many different definitions encountered in the literature, violence is considered to be any means used by an individual (or by a group) to exert power over another individual. This definition, although very broad, can be applied to different aspects of life. However, it focuses on the fact that the individual seeks to impose his/her point of view, even his or her authority, and implies that the individual may have access to wide variety of means to exert this power.



In more concrete terms, violence in schools can take many different forms: “micro-violence” (unruly behaviour, oppositional behaviour), sexual violence, uncivil behaviour (hurtful remarks, crude remarks), humiliation and racism. The means that perpetrators use change and evolve over time. This is why we include cyberbullying as a manifestation of violence, because it is becoming more widespread, causing serious psychological damage to victims, both teachers and students alike. The harmful effects extend to aggressors and to their families who can be held accountable for their actions.

In order to identify the many forms that violence can take in the schools, the most frequently occurring types are described below.

### 1.2.1 Physical violence

Of all forms of violence, physical violence, although the most easily identified, is not necessarily the most painful for victims. A psychological injury caused by public humiliation, low self-esteem or harassment leaves deep wounds that take a long time to heal. Physical violence is manifested in tangible ways by such acts as shaking, hitting, causing injuries (bites, bruises, etc.). This type of violence impairs the individual’s physical integrity and can cause physical injuries and long-term physical and psychological sequela. Perpetrators of physical violence are usually students, and more often at the elementary school level than at the secondary school level (Bélanger et al. 2006; Girard, Laliberté and Dompierre, 2003).

### 1.2.2 Verbal violence

This form of violence, which is becoming more widespread, involves humiliating an individual with derogatory, intimidating messages or threats of physical aggression. Verbal violence is expressed through warnings, blackmail, and orders and is often used to intimidate another individual. It may be intended to create tension in the individual, to maintain a person in a state of fear and may also take the form of shouting rude remarks or insults at adults in authority.

### 1.2.3 Psychological violence

Psychological violence consists of derogatory, humiliating or controlling attitudes and remarks, which result in the denigration of a person’s sense of self-worth. Sometimes it is conveyed in a punitive relationship that consists of ignoring the presence of the individual or of refusing to communicate. This form of passive violence is subtle and is not always expressed verbally. However, psychological aggression in the workplace is usually characterized by intimidation and harassment.

#### 1.2.3.1 Intimidation/harassment

Intimidation is a behaviour intended to frighten and threaten victims to coerce them into acting against their will. Since there is a variety of existing definitions that sometimes confuse the terms intimidation and harassment, for our purposes, we consider harassment the repeated intimidation of a victim. It includes abusive behaviours, committed by one or several persons, manifested in unilateral actions, words, acts, gestures or writing, that are directed against an individual. The repetition of these gestures results in injuring the individual’s psychological or physical integrity, and the victim usually feels powerless about the situation.

Intimidating behaviour can harm a victim even though it may occur only once. Hence the importance of taking immediate action, as on the first occurrence of intimidating behaviour, to prevent the perpetrator’s behaviour from advancing to harassment.

In a situation of intimidation or harassment, it is hard for the victim to defend him-/herself. A relationship of dominance is then established, and the aggressor(s) will attempt to denigrate or discredit the victim. The means used by the aggressor can take the form of verbal, written, gestural or other types of threats, mocking, vandalism, sabotage, blackmail, theft, or insulting, humiliating, vexatious or obscene remarks. Several authors have identified certain behaviours that are characteristic of harassment in the workplace, i.e., 1) preventing the victim from speaking out; 2) isolating the victim; 3) discrediting the victim with his/her colleagues; 4) discrediting the victim in his/her work and 5) compromising the victim’s health and security (Leymann, 1996; Hirigoyen, 1998; Field, 2001; Soares, 2002). Indirect aggression can also take the form of excluding the victim from peer groups.

Psychological violence can take many forms, and aggression can be perpetrated by pupils, students, parents, colleagues or administrative personnel.

#### 1.2.3.2 Distinguishing conflict from relationships of dominance (victimization)

Sometimes a mere sigh can trigger overt or latent conflict. Verbal or physical violence can originate in an unarticulated or unresolved conflict between two people. According to Deutsch (1973), conflict is a state of incompatibility between the desires and goals of two individuals. A conflict arises when the actions of one individual aim to attain his/her personal goals by interfering with the needs and actions of another individual. The presence of conflicts indicates unease which sometimes masks a deeper problem, hence the importance of reading the warning signs before a mere sigh develops into a conflict, then into outright violence. In addition, frequent or unresolved quarrels drain energy and exhaust and demotivate people in the workplace.



Conflicts do not necessarily indicate abuse in an organization. On the contrary, if no conflicts ever arose, no important problems would be pointed out, which would interfere with making improvements to working conditions. Moreover, new ideas or challenges often emerge from conflicting points of view that are openly shared and discussed without hurting individuals.

Conflicts are not inherently good or bad; what's important is to focus on the management of conflict. People should opt for constructive strategies, or win-win situations based on the idea that a conflict is the symptom of problem to be solved rather than a battle to be won.

However, most cases of psychological violence do not arise from latent conflict between two individuals. This is why it is important to distinguish between manifestations of aggression between two individuals and situations of victimization. In the first case, the parties (adults or students) may confront each other in a conflict, and this confrontation may involve two opponents with equal power, i.e., there is not necessarily a relationship of dominance between the parties (for example: a fight between two students, quarrels or disagreements between two colleagues). When we speak of intimidation, harassment, threats or social exclusion, the situation is different because of relationship of dominance exercised by the aggressor(s).

Victims of harassment or intimidation are not necessarily in conflict with their aggressors, because the latter seek out their victims based on characteristics that distinguish them and make them vulnerable. In this type of situation, interventions that aim to help parties solve their conflict may prove ineffectual, because this is not a conflictual situation, but rather a relationship of dominance between the aggressor and the victim (Naylor and Cowie, 1999).

In most cases, the victim remains silent out of fear of the perpetrator. This situation requires another type of intervention: first of all, the victim needs support so that he/she denounces the aggressor; the victim then requires help to restore self-esteem. For people who intimidate or harass, a different type of intervention is required to end behaviours causing destructive domination.

## 1.2.4 Sexual violence

This type of violence refers to any type of bullying behaviour of a sexual nature. Although there is little documentation in the schools, this kind of aggression may be practised by pupils, students, parents, colleagues or superiors in the hierarchy. It may involve leering, hurtful remarks, insinuations or allusions concerning a person's private life. Acts involving sexual touching and aggression are more fully described in the Criminal Code of Canada, because these behaviours are considered crimes committed against the victim.

## 1.2.5 Cyberaggression (cyber-bullying)

The term cyberaggression or cyber-bullying designates the fact of using the Internet to injure the dignity of others. The victim of cyber-bullying may be subject to insults, threats or hateful comments directly through e-mail, instant messaging or broadcasting on Web sites. Aggressors who master technology can even create their own Web sites.

The latest cell phones have integrated cameras which add another dimension to the problem. In Canada, 64% of young people aged 15 to 29 years own a cell phone and 50% of them can take photos with them. This new technology is used inappropriately by pupils and students who engage in what is called happy slapping: filming violent scenes involving education personnel and posting them on Web sites. In Québec, this is a relatively new phenomena although it seems to be gaining ground. In France, the practice is not new, and since January 2007, Sarkozy's draft legislation on delinquency now recognizes happy slapping as a crime against persons.

## 2 UNDERSTANDING VIOLENCE EXPERIENCED IN SCHOOL: CAUSAL FACTORS AND CONSEQUENCES

Many individual and organizational factors are closely associated with the risk of becoming a victim of violence at school (Steffgen and Ewen, 2007).

### 2.1 Personal factors

According to Jeffrey and Sun (2006), younger teachers are subject to the most violence at school. People who experience difficulty affirming themselves, who are anxious or emotionally fragile are at higher risk of being targets of aggressors. A victim's lack of social and interpersonal skills deprives him/her of a social network, which is considered a factor in protecting against victimization (Cole, Grubb, Sauter, Swanson and Lawless, 1997).

Poor knowledge of class management or types of intervention with more difficult students may also contribute to escalating aggression at school. Adults may become victims of violence because of personal characteristics such as sexual orientation, ethnic origins, physical appearance, political opinions, etc.

### 2.2 Organizational factors

The quality of the school environment has often been considered as an indicator of the level of violence among students. It is also relevant to the victimization of teachers. However, some schools are less affected by violence than others. The conditions observed in these "safe" schools make it possible to identify a number of facts that explain why some settings are more resistant than others to school violence (Debarbieux et al. 2003; Gittens, 2006).

The organizational factors that promote the maintenance of a positive educational atmosphere are:

- Cooperative work among adults (coaching for young teachers);
- Conflict management among them;
- Constant monitoring of students (schoolyard recreation periods and the classroom);
- A clear, consistent disciplinary system;
- Acceptance of shared disciplinary tasks;
- Stable teaching teams, stable seniority;
- Community activities practised in conjunction with the school;
- Parental involvement and cooperation.

The size of the school, working as a substitute teacher or starting to teach during the school year also increase the risk of being involved in situations of violence (Jeffrey and Sun, 2006).

Effective intervention plans implemented in the school include:

- The establishment of a clear policy that everyone is familiar with (pupils or students, personnel, parents);
- The presence of a social skills training program for all pupils or students (peaceful management of conflict and anger, principles of communication, etc.);



- Specific interventions planned for victims and aggressors;
- Stimulating educational training sessions involving students;
- The participation of pupils or students in the development of the school's rules and school affairs;
- Peer mutual support systems;
- Appealing extra-curricular activities that motivate students.

### 2.3 Consequences of violence for victims

Victims of violence suffer significant psychological effects (depression, dropping out, suicide, substance abuse, etc.), and this is also true when adults are victimized and subjected to violence in educational institutions.

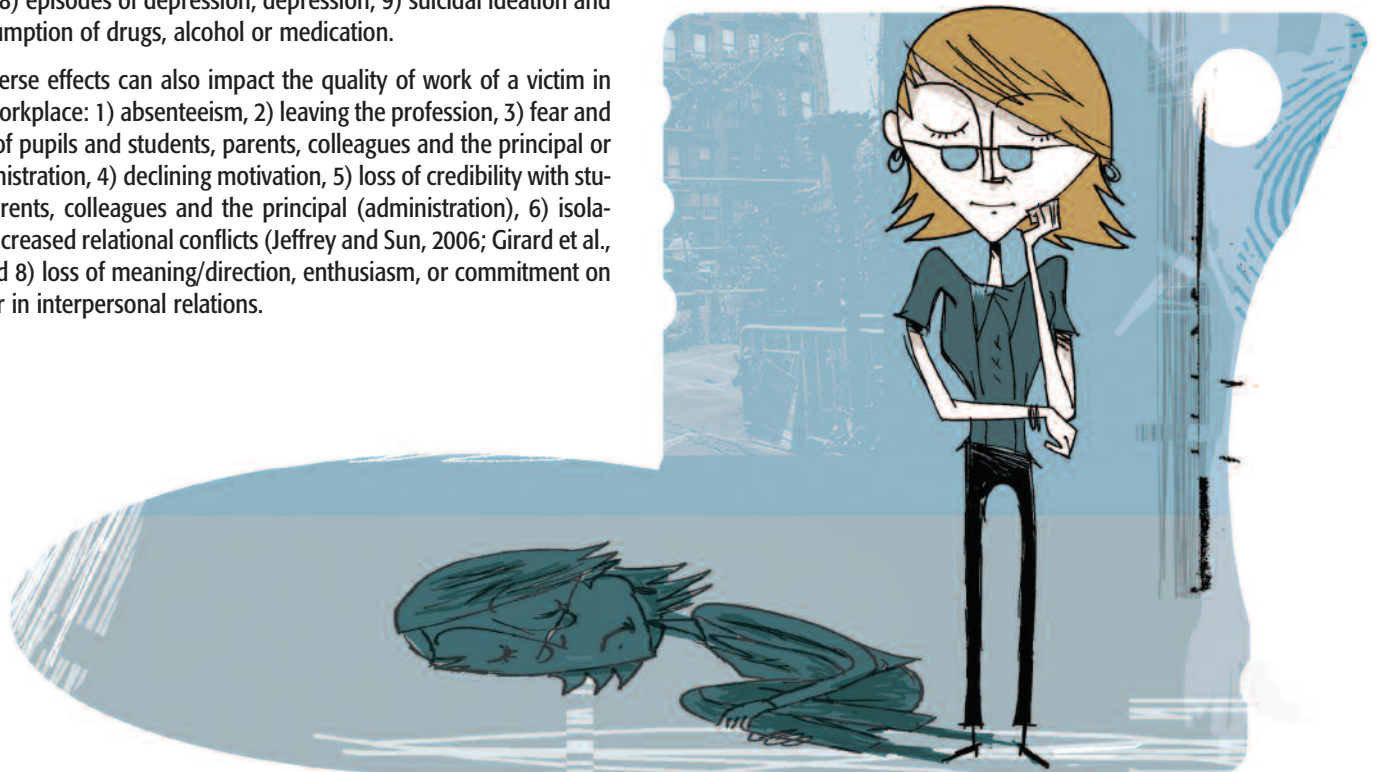
Many psychological and physical impacts are associated with victimization. The physical symptoms are 1) sleep disorders, 2) fatigue, 3) headaches and stomach aches, 4) palpitations and 5) digestive problems. The psychological symptoms observed include 1) increased stress, and insecurity, 2) feelings of incompetence, 3) lowered self-esteem, 4) fear of being judged by others, 5) frustration, 6) emotional distress, 7) burnout, 8) episodes of depression, 9) suicidal ideation and 10) consumption of drugs, alcohol or medication.

Such adverse effects can also impact the quality of work of a victim in his/her workplace: 1) absenteeism, 2) leaving the profession, 3) fear and mistrust of pupils and students, parents, colleagues and the principal or the administration, 4) declining motivation, 5) loss of credibility with students, parents, colleagues and the principal (administration), 6) isolation, 7) increased relational conflicts (Jeffrey and Sun, 2006; Girard et al., 2003) and 8) loss of meaning/direction, enthusiasm, or commitment on the job or in interpersonal relations.

### 2.4 Consequences of violence for school organization

Many effects of violence experienced in educational institutions are observed at the organizational level. It is important to address and intervene to limit adverse effects on adult victims, pupils or students, the work atmosphere and relations with parents. The adverse effects on the organization include high absenteeism rates, high staff turnover rates, a decline in teamwork cohesion and increased risk of errors in performing daily tasks. If harassment or intimidation on the part of colleagues occurs, cliques may form and undermine both the overall atmosphere and interpersonal relations.

Aggression among staff members may also constitute a significant adverse effect, along with the deterioration of the employer-employee relation of trust. Undermining the image or the reputation of the school may also constitute a significant side effect that has to be taken into consideration, because a reputation will take years to restore.





# 3 TAKING ACTION AGAINST VIOLENCE

## 3.1 What can you do to prevent violence?

Many kinds of action can be taken to prevent instances of violence or to limit the consequences. These actions have to be adjusted to the circumstances. Here are a few suggestions for better managing these situations.

### 3.1.1 Report the situation

- Recognize that violence in the workplace is a real, undesirable problem in organizations and that addressing it is a priority.
- Identify previous violent incidents with the different personnel categories, analyze them and draw up a profile of the situation specific to your workplace. This profile will be useful identifying problem situations and establishing priority action.
- Cultivate ties/connections with other decision-making bodies and organizations that can help prevent violence: governing board, board of directors, community organizations, public safety, etc. Evaluate the assistance and support that can be obtained from them.

### 3.1.2 Take action as individuals

- Identify risk and protection factors that exist in your work environment in order to determine those aspects that can help you to take a preventive position on violence (taken from Assess, 2006):
  - **As an individual**, become aware of your strengths and limitations, your experience, your understanding of violence, your physical and psychological condition, duties and degree of integration;
  - **For others**, identify client groups at risk (students with behaviour disorders or significant psychopathological disorders), visitors (parents, strangers, etc.), social roles (teachers, secretary, principal/administration, etc.), other staff members, members of the surrounding community and the specific cultural and social situation of the school;
  - **In terms of facilities**, consider whether or not certain objects are potential weapons, identify access to communication systems (intercom, Internet, telephone), to facilities and furnishings and to the security system;

- **In terms of the environment**, locate doors and exits, isolated locations, layout of facilities and furnishings, open and closed areas, waiting rooms and the school's immediate surroundings (park, wooded area, vacant lot, proximity of a police station, etc.);
- **In terms of organizational parameters**, take into account the number of employees, rules, procedures and policies, team work, the emergency intervention plan and available assistance;
- **In terms of time**, consider the schedule, opening hours, breaks and movement of students and staff;
- **In situational terms**, is there potential for a crisis situation, or an atmosphere of anxiety or insecurity in the establishment linked to a specific event, a declared threat or warning signs?
- Establish individual strategies by determining concrete actions to confront situations of aggression and to ensure your safety. These strategies might include identification of exits for leaving the premises quickly and actions to undertake to defuse a violent situation.
- Make professional development a means of enhancing professional and personal self-awareness to improve classroom management skills and to practise interventions in order to prevent or intervene when pupils or students engage in aggressive behaviours.
- Identify resources and persons that can assist you with violent incidents (support programs for employees, unions, etc.) as well as possible forms of recourse.

### 3.1.3 Take action as a group

- Create a task force to set up an action plan addressing problems of physical and psychological violence and an **emergency plan** for crisis situations. It is important that employees of all job classes and various organizations in the community likely to be involved (police, community groups, etc.) be represented. The action plan must take into account the institution's specific characteristics, its culture and practices in the work environment.
- Develop a **code of ethics** for all personnel categories. The code of ethics deals with interpersonal relations and it must provide for a workplace that is free of harassment, intimidation and violence.

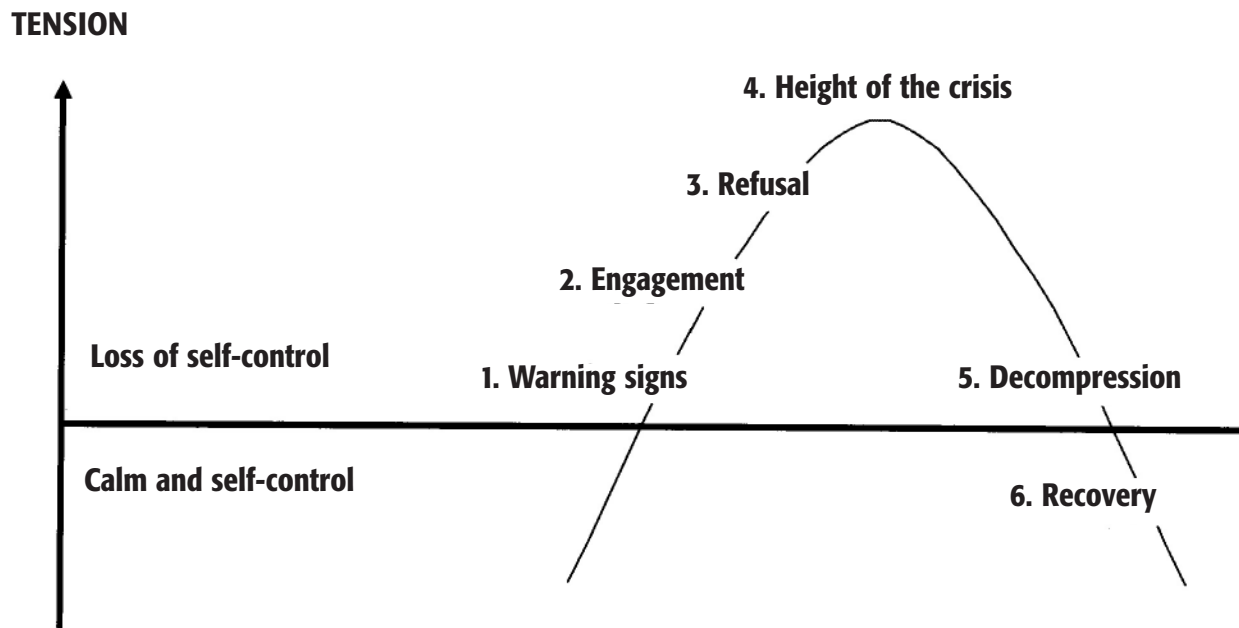
- Formulate a **code of conduct** in the establishment for pupils and students and, if need be, for parents. This code deals with acceptable and unacceptable behaviours, as well as consequences for non-compliance with the code.
- Formulate **procedures** indicating how visitors must behave while in the school.
- Adopt a **policy** on violence to formalize your intent, determination and commitment to prevent violence and the methods to be used. Its content must be defined jointly and in good faith by employers and employees so that the chosen goals and methods are shared by everyone. Girard, Laliberté and Dompierre (2003, p. 109) suggest some useful elements to include in a policy:
  - Guidelines on violence concerning the form, the nature, the object or the source (violence committed among pupils or students, by students towards adults or adults towards adults or pupils);
  - Procedures facilitating the reporting of incidents of a violent nature;
  - Explicit procedures for processing complaints;
  - Procedures for investigation, case analysis and review, and appeal mechanisms;
  - Procedures for accessing external specialized resources that can provide support to persons who need it following a violent incident;
  - Emergency measures to be undertaken when violent events occur;
  - Measures and sanctions to be implemented for aggressors;
  - Measures aimed to prevent conflicts and their impacts.
- Ensure that everyone is informed of the policy and the procedures implemented by the organization
- Apply the established policy in a fair and consistent way to everyone, by not tolerating any act of violence within the establishment or during events that it organizes.
- Constantly revise the policy in light of events.
- Establish an emergency intervention team in which each member has well-defined roles and responsibilities (Beaumont and Sanfaçon, 2006). It is important to ensure that a leader is appointed to direct operations and that substitutes are identified should front-line persons be unavailable in the event of a crisis. Adopt instructions for individuals and the organization arrived at by a consensus between managers and intervention teams. Establish a list of telephone numbers required in such cases.
- Improve the physical organization of educational institutions both inside and outside, in order to eliminate risk factors in a context of violence. This may involve upgrading the lighting in parking lots, installing a security desk at the entrance of the school, or a barrier to block direct access to secretaries, etc.
- Ensure training for personnel about the specific aspects of violence (difficult client groups, recognition of different forms of violence, warning signs of violent events, actions to be undertaken in cases of violence, defusing violent situations conflict resolution, communication techniques, safe physical interventions).

### 3.2 What should you do when an act of violence occurs?

Despite the implementation of violence prevention precautions and measures, violent incidents may occur. What should be done when it happens? Different ways of effectively managing a crisis situation can be considered, depending on the nature of the work situation, assessment of the violent person's potential dangerousness, and the evolution of the crisis situation, which has six different phases (see Figure 1).

The type of intervention chosen must always reflect the objectives of security and ethics and ensure that the various players take responsibility. Table 1 presents recommended interventions and interventions to be avoided, depending on how the crisis situation evolves.

**Figure 1: The phases of a crisis of violence (or aggression)**



Note: The terms used in this figure are defined in Table 1.

# Table 1: Do's and don'ts depending on how the crisis situation evolves <sup>1</sup>

PERSON IN CRISIS	PERSON DEALING WITH THE SITUATION	
	What you should do	What you should not do
<b>Phase 1 Warning signs: be attentive to the first signs of tension in order to intervene as soon as possible</b>		
<p><b>Precipitating factors</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sense of injustice or personal feeling of powerlessness.</li> <li>• Emotional recall (the situation resembles an unpleasant situation experienced in the past and causes the person to relive strong emotions).</li> <li>• Acute stressor (pain, intoxication, intense fear, situational crises, etc.).</li> <li>• Physical health problems or pain.</li> <li>• Accumulated frustration.</li> </ul> <p><b>Behavioural signs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exaggeration or noticeable change in behaviour: head/shoulders back to frighten (aggressive posture), cold look, hands on hips, finger-pointing, etc.</li> <li>• Psychomotor agitation: moving about, pacing waving arms, trembling, etc.</li> <li>• Physiological reactions: rapid breathing, perspiring, flushed or pale complexion, etc.</li> <li>• Indicators of frustration: complaining, whining, raised tone of voice, aggressive expressions or actions (bared teeth), threatening gestures with a fist, etc.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gauge the potential dangerousness of the person in crisis: emotional tension, conditional cooperation resistance to cooperation, destructive behaviour (throwing or breaking objects), psychological intimidation, active resistance, physical aggression, serious assault, uttering serious threats. In the last three cases, the crisis must be physically managed to stop the aggressive action. In the last case, you have to buy time, negotiate, make the area secure and call an emergency intervention team.</li> <li>• Ensure your personal protection: stay at a safe physical distance; ensure you have access to an exit so you can quickly leave; plan on a pretext to withdraw or a diversion; remain in communication with colleagues to get rapid assistance.</li> <li>• Try to establish contact with the person in crisis.</li> <li>• Show that you are receptive or provide assistance.</li> <li>• Adopt an empathetic attitude and use active listening; ask questions to help the person in crisis verbalize his/her frustrations; allow the person to express him/herself.</li> <li>• Say nothing; give the person time to express him/herself.</li> <li>• Repeat the last words spoken by the person to complete his or her thoughts and encourage him/her to keep on talking.</li> <li>• Tell the person what you observe without making any judgement on the motives for his/her behaviour.</li> <li>• Speak in a calm, slow and reassuring voice.</li> <li>• Withdraw and allow the person to calm down.</li> <li>• Play down the situation with humour in order to defuse the atmosphere without denying the seriousness of the situation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make remarks about the observed aggressiveness.</li> <li>• Ask the person to apologize for his/her actions or words.</li> <li>• Make the person feel guilty or judge the person.</li> <li>• Speak loud or give orders.</li> <li>• Prevent the person from expressing his/her frustration.</li> <li>• Emphasize your status of authority or his/her status to make yourself heard.</li> <li>• Touch or push the aggressor.</li> <li>• Confront the aggressor or look down on the aggressor.</li> <li>• Adopt an aggressive posture: place your hands on your hips, point a finger, cross your arms.</li> <li>• Stay in a place that is potentially dangerous or near any instruments that can be used as weapons.</li> <li>• Give orders.</li> </ul>



PERSON IN CRISIS	PERSON DEALING WITH THE SITUATION	
	What you should do	What you should not do
<b>Phase 2 Engagement: process the crisis in words and try to defuse the situation</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agitation increases.</li> <li>• Asks unproductive questions, argues, is agitated, while refusing to calm down.</li> <li>• No longer feels constrained or any social inhibitions.</li> <li>• Communicates aggressively.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue with empathetic listening.</li> <li>• Mirror the person's feelings.</li> <li>• Issue an instruction to explain what is expected of the person or what he/she must do; frame the conflict with requests and suggestions.</li> <li>• Bring the person back to the topic or the request expressed.</li> <li>• Remember the context of the intervention (people's roles, purpose of the intervention, etc.).</li> <li>• Maintain psychological distance: do not allow yourself to be upset by the individual's aggressive speech.</li> <li>• Create a diversion by drawing attention to something besides the reason for the tension.</li> <li>• Separate adversaries (distance them from each other, break eye contact).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Show signs of impatience, condescension or lack of attention.</li> <li>• Raise the tone (which is also discouraged during phase 1).</li> <li>• Try to control or intimidate the person.</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 3 Refusal/ escalation: establish limits</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopts defensive behaviours: offers excuses, complains, contradicts him/herself, accuses or insults others, cries, while refusing to calm down.</li> <li>• Starts to lose control.</li> <li>• His/her remarks may seem incoherent and unrelated to the situation or to your remarks; the tone rises.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set behavioural limits for the aggressive person in crisis by explaining which behaviour is to be stopped, the reason why this behaviour cannot be tolerated and the consequences that will follow if the behaviour does not stop.</li> <li>• Inform the person of the positive consequences if he/she complies with the instructions given. Make the person feel he/she has a choice.</li> <li>• Boundaries must be clear, simple, reasonable and applicable.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make ill-thought-out threats or name illogical consequences or consequences disproportionate to the act committed.</li> <li>• Moralize.</li> <li>• Enter into a long discussion about the consequences of these actions.</li> <li>• Raise the tone.</li> <li>• Physically restrain the person.</li> </ul>

# Table 1: Do's and don'ts depending on how the crisis situation evolves<sup>1</sup> (cont'd)

PERSON IN CRISIS	PERSON DEALING WITH THE SITUATION	
	What you should do	What you should not do
<b>Phase 4 Height of the crisis: protect yourself and possibly withdraw</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completely loses self-control and has a crisis of anger, adopting verbally aggressive behaviours (yelling, insults, swearing, etc.) or physically aggressive behaviour (hitting, throwing objects, breaking objects, etc.).</li> <li>• May assault others nearby or attack the physical environment.</li> <li>• May also inflict self-injury.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask the person to withdraw to a calm place or to calm down, using a firm, but calm voice.</li> <li>• Ask others present to move away.</li> <li>• Slowly approach the person, if possible, and try to gently touch him/her; if the aggressiveness escalates, withdraw and wait.</li> <li>• Create a diversion or withdraw.</li> <li>• If the safety of the person or the safety of others present is threatened, ask for help and implement the available emergency measures.</li> <li>• Back away toward the exit.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stand with your arms crossed facing the person in a defensive position, say that you are expecting him/her to calm down.</li> <li>• Express exasperation or insult the person.</li> <li>• Push the person to a wall or restrain the person against an obstacle.</li> <li>• Deny the person the right to speak.</li> <li>• Raise your tone of voice.</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 5 Decompression: let the aggressor collect his/her wits</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tension released, both physical and emotional.</li> <li>• Afterwards, the person is often completely exhausted and emptied out.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make the person feel safe and find a peaceful place to rest.</li> <li>• Allow the person a short period of time (10 to 30 minutes) so he/she can quietly collect his/her wits or recover.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immediately undertake a discussion with the person about the motives for his/her crisis.</li> <li>• Give a sermon or reproach the person</li> <li>• Immediately name a negative consequence.</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 6 Recovery: re-establish contact</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The person is calm and regained self-control.</li> <li>• Agitation and tension have dissipated.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At this point, suggest a possible transition, such as moving to another place.</li> <li>• Gently re-establish contact with the person.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Force the person to talk, even if he/she is not ready.</li> <li>• Interpret the situation for the person without allowing the person to talk.</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> Taken and adapted from Massé and Lanaris, Program d'intervention à l'intention des parents d'enfants présentant un trouble de déficit d'attention/hyperactivité, Chenelière/McGraw-Hill, forthcoming.

## Keys to success

- Do not engage in a power struggle to establish your authority, do not make threats or give ultimatums.
- Do not make contact via a relationship of dominance.
- Ask yourself if you are the right person to intervene (based on the roles defined by the establishment and your own interpersonal skills).
- Ensure that only one person intervenes with the individual in crisis.
- Allow the person in crisis to express his/her feelings and frustrations.
- Show empathy.
- Avoid giving orders.
- Avoid judging or blaming the other and attributing motives to his/her behaviours or psychological state.
- Make slow gestures, and keep to a calm tone.
- Take time, don't upset the person in crisis.
- Don't intervene on the topic of behaviours, unless the immediate safety of someone is compromised (stick to the level of observations or expression of emotion).
- Do not focus on previous events.
- Maintain a calm but firm tone of voice, do not raise the tone or take a threatening attitude.
- Use physical restraint as a last resort, only at the height of the crisis and if you feel comfortable doing so. If not, turn to the people on the intervention team who have received specific training.
- Intervene as a team by letting a leader speak, direct the situation and make the decisions.
- Obtain the support of people who will make the setting safe and provide assistance if need be.

### 3.2.1 What should you do following a critical incident?

When you are a victim of or witness to violent acts, several types of intervention must be implemented in order to lessen the consequences of these events and to avoid recurrence. Examples are provided below, identifying the people who must take action.

**In the situations given below, each person's responsibility is indicated as follows:**

**V: victim**

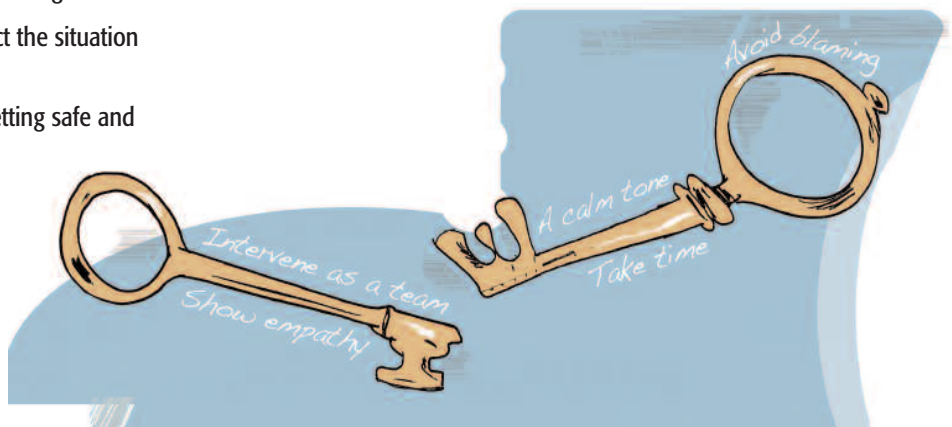
**W: witness**

**U: union (delegate)**

**A: administration**

**C: colleagues**

- Immediately following a critical incident, within 72 hours at most, give first aid to the victim (respond to his/her physical needs, allow the person to leave the workplace or direct him/her to medical resources if necessary) and offer psychological support (try to comfort the person, make him/her feel safe, calm the person and reassure the person about his/her reactions) [AW].
- Immediately following a critical incident, provide support to witnesses and the actors involved: do a post-event review with all those involved and witnesses to promote debriefing and to help them detach from the event [AC].
- Obtain assistance, if necessary, to complete administrative forms [A].
- A few days after the critical event, check on the victim's state of health and offer psychological services [A].



### 3.2.2 What should you do in situations of harassment or intimidation?

- Stop violent behaviours
  - Resolve the situation so that no one is injured [VWUA].
  - Intervene verbally right after an incident, firmly indicate that the behaviour is unacceptable and have a conversation with the aggressor to make him/her understand that you are upset about having been targeted, but not intimidated by the situation [VWUA].
  - In the event of physical violence, take the victim to a safe place where support and follow-up are provided, while distancing the aggressor from the place of the incident [WUA].
- Determine, describe and indicate violent behaviours
  - Document the details of the incidents associated with violence: Nature of the aggression, the people involved, location of the incidents, the time, underlying reasons (personal characteristics, work, etc.), tone used, formulation (exact words), circumstances, number of times and repercussions [VWU].
  - Consult a colleague, a resource person from the employee support program to confirm impressions about situations experienced and if necessary help victims to formulate their complaints or obtain assistance [AWU].
  - If necessary, report the events to the school administration or to the appropriate authorities [VWAU].
- Evaluate situations of violence
  - Implement a complaint-processing structure, evaluate their relevance, make a judgment about violent incidents and make recommendations [AU].
  - Evaluate complaints in terms of the scope, frequency, duration and gravity, in order to choose the relevant means of settlement [AU].
- Intervene following situations of violence
  - Refer to the employee support program to find solutions or to ensure it intervenes with the employer in order to help solve the problem [V].
  - Intervene directly with the aggressor to reinforce his/her sense of empathy, make him/her take responsibility, help him/her be accountable for his/her actions and to improve his/ her social skills [A].
  - Impose the defined sanctions on the perpetrator of the violent incident. The sanctions must reflect the gravity of the actions, and be fair. They may take the form of a reprimand, a suspension, a dismissal or legal proceedings [A].

The support and involvement of the institution's administration are indispensable, particularly when situations involve students, parents or work colleagues. If it concerns a conflictual situation that causes aggressive behaviours between two people, the administration may implement mediation sessions with the help of a person who is competent in this field, to help both parties to settle their conflict without aggression. When intimidation or harassment is involved, mediation is not pertinent, because the victim must be believed, and the aggressor denounced. Acts of violence are thus unilateral, and reparation must be made to the victim, who must be assured that the violence will stop. The aggressor must understand that he/she is subject to serious sanctions if he/she persists in aggressive behaviour. The administration has a crucial role to play in explaining the roles and responsibilities of personnel, in establishing the establishment's code and policy concerning violence in the school environment.



## 4 GET SUPPORT FROM YOUR UNION IF YOU ARE A VICTIM OF OR WITNESS OF VIOLENCE

The CSQ's Declaration of Principles covers commitments pertaining to the following areas:

- Fundamental freedoms and human rights;
- The fight against discrimination in all its forms;
- The rights of children and young people and realizing their rights to education and health;
- The rights of senior citizens, particularly their right to grow old in security and with dignity;
- The quality of life in activist environments and in workplaces, through the elimination of sexism, racism, homophobia, sexual, racial, homophobic and psychological harassment, as well as any other forms of violence.

Your union has made these commitments, and it is also your ally in dealing with violence in your workplace. It is in a position to support the prevention procedures implemented in work settings, by making representations to the employer, and it can also accompany you through certain procedures to redress a wrong that you have sustained. Indeed, only the union can represent you before a grievance arbitration tribunal; based on its policies and practices, it can also represent you before the CSST. Moreover, it can direct you to other resources that can help you with other issues such as the Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse du Québec, help centres for victims of criminal acts, and assist you with any other issues.

In a more immediate way, following a violent incident, the union can conduct an investigation to determine causes and the appropriate prevention measures to ensure violence doesn't recur. It can also ensure that the measures implemented by the employer yield the expected results.

However, the best guarantee of success for union interventions lies with the statements made by people involved in any violent situation that causes injury to education employees. The union encourages victims of violence to step forward and report these situations and supports victims in putting an end to such situations. Moreover, the employer is obligated to keep a register of minor accidents and incidents that do not cause absence from work, insofar, of course, as these events are reported. The union is entitled to obtain a copy of this register. Moreover, a sick leave following violent incident in the workplace can be compensated by the CSST, which is more beneficial than disability insurance.

## Conclusion

The main purpose of this document is to show people working in the educational community how to recognize the various forms of violence to which they might be exposed, and to provide them with a few concrete means of dealing with it. Since victims of violence may experience significant adverse effects on their personal, social and professional lives, it is very important that they learn about the solutions available to them.

A non-comprehensive list has been provided in this text to illustrate the wide range of interventions in the field of violence prevention and intervention with violence and aggressive behaviours. Victims of violence in the educational community should not feel that they are alone and they should be aware that support measures have been designed to put an end to these situations.

Finally, violence prevention in educational institutions involves everyone.

All stakeholders have an important role to play to maintain a healthy atmosphere in educational institutions and to ensure that everyone feels safe.

Your union has joined forces with experts in the field of violence prevention, provided you with an information and intervention tool to ensure you are better equipped to confront school violence.

## References

- ASSTSAS, Association paritaire pour la santé et la sécurité au travail du secteur affaires sociales, (2006). *Training Omega*, Montréal.
- BEAUMONT, C. and C. SANFAÇON (2006). *Intervention en situation de crise*, cited in MASSÉ, L. N. DESBIENS and C. LANARIS (editors), *Les troubles de comportement à l'école: prévention, évaluation et intervention*, Montréal, Gaëtan Morin éditeur, pp. 161-193.
- BÉLANGER, J., C. GOSSELIN, F. BOWEN, N. DESBIENS and M. JANOSZ (2006). *L'intimidation et les autres formes de violence à l'école*, cited in MASSÉ, N., N. DESBIENS AND C. LANARIS (editors), *Les troubles de comportement à l'école: prévention, évaluation et intervention*, Montréal, Gaëtan Morin éditeur, pp. 161-193.
- BRITISH COLUMBIA MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (2001) *Focus on Harassment and Intimidation. Responding to Bullying in Secondary School Communities*, Victoria. [www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/docs/fob\\_sec.pdf](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/docs/fob_sec.pdf)
- CENTRALE DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT DU QUÉBEC (1998). *Résultats de l'enquête sur la violence en milieu de travail et en milieu de vie*, Comité de la condition des femmes, Québec.
- COLE, LL. L., P. L. GRUBB, S. L. SAUTER, N. G. SWANSON and S. LAWLESS (1997). "Psychosocial Correlates of Harassment, Threats and Fear of Violence in the Workplace," *Scandinavian Journal of Work Environment and Health*, 23(6), pp. 450- 457.
- DEBARBIEUX, É., Y. MONTOYA, C. BLAYA, J. DAGORN AND S. RUBI (2003). *Microviolences et climat scolaire: évolution 1995-2003 en écoles élémentaires et en collèges*, recherche commanditée par le Conseil régional Aquitaine et le Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, available on the Internet at: [www.obsviolence.com/autres\\_languages/anglais/oevs\\_anglais.html](http://www.obsviolence.com/autres_languages/anglais/oevs_anglais.html)
- DEUTSCH, M. (1973). *The Resolution of Conflict*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press.
- FIELD, T. (2001). *Bully in Sight: How to Predict, Resist, Challenge and Combat Workplace Bullying*, England, Success Unlimited.
- FURLONG, M. and G. MORRISON (2000). "The School in School Violence: Definitions and Facts," *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 8(2), pp. 71-82.
- GIRARD, S.-A., A. LALIBERTÉ and J. DOMPIERRE (2003). *Prévention de la violence en milieu de travail: Outil de sensibilisation*, Direction de santé publique de Québec
- GITTENS, C. (2006). *Réduction de la violence à l'école: un guide pour le changement*, Les éditions du Conseil de l'Europe.
- HIRIGOYEN, M.-F. (1998). *Le harcèlement moral – la violence perverse au quotidien*, Paris, Sirois.
- HIRIGOYEN, M.-F. (2001). *Malaise dans le travail: Harcèlement moral: démêler le vrai du faux*, Paris, Sirois.
- JEFFREY, D. and F. SUN (2006). *Enseignants dans la violence*, Saint-Nicolas, Les Presses de l'Université Laval.
- LEYMANN, H. (1996). *Mobbing: la persécution au travail*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil.
- NAYLOR, P. and H. COWIE (1999). "The Effectiveness of Peer Support Systems in Challenging School Bullying: the Perspectives and Experiences of Teachers and Pupils," *Journal of Adolescence*, 22, p.p. 467- 479.
- STEFFGEN G. and N. EWEN (2007). "Teachers as Victims of School Violence – The Influence of Strain and School Culture," *International Journal on Violence and Schools*, 3, pp. 81-93.
- SOARES, A. (2002). *Quand le travail devient indécent: le harcèlement psychologique au travail*, Montréal, Centrale des syndicats du Québec.

## For more information

BC Confederation of Parents Advisory Councils (BCCPAC) (2003), *Call it Safe. A parent guide for dealing with bullying in elementary schools*. Victoria. Available on the Internet: [www.bced.gov.bc.ca/sco/elem\\_callsafe.pdf](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/sco/elem_callsafe.pdf)

BC Confederation of Parents Advisory Councils (BCCPAC) (2003), *Call it Safe. A parent guide for dealing with harassment and intimidation in secondary schools*. Victoria. Available on the Internet: [www.bced.gov.bc.ca/sco/sec\\_callsafe.pdf](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/sco/sec_callsafe.pdf)

CÔTÉ, C. (1995). *Prévenir la violence dans les écoles. Idées et références*, Montréal, Quebec, Guérin Éditeur Limitée.

DOWN, T. (1990). *POUCE: La prévention en milieu scolaire de la violence faite aux femmes*, Ottawa, Canadian Teacher's Federation.

GOUDREAU, R. (2004). *PACI-RAIDE*, Saint-Georges-de-Beauce, Commission scolaire Beauce-Etchemin.

LOSLIER, S. and N. POTHIER (2001). *Droits et libertés... à visage découvert*, Montréal, Chenelière McGraw Hill.

MASSÉ, LL., N. DESBIENS and C. LANARIS (2006). *Les troubles du comportement à l'école: Prévention, évaluation et intervention*, Montréal, Gaëtan Morin éditeur.

BRITISH COLUMBIA MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (2004). *Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools: A Guide*. Victoria, available on the Internet at: <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/sco/guide/scoguide.pdf>

BRITISH COLUMBIA MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (1998). *Responding to Critical Incidents. A Resource Guide for Schools*, available on the Internet at: <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/docs/critinc.pdf>

RYAN, C., Fred MATTHEW and J. BANNER (1994). *Projet communautaire de lutte contre la violence dans les écoles: un modèle de partenariat entre la police et l'école*, Hull, Solliciteur général Canada, Secrétariat du ministre.

## Web sites:

Centrale des syndicats du Québec: [www.csq.qc.net](http://www.csq.qc.net)

International Journal on Violence an Schools: [www.ijvs.org](http://www.ijvs.org)

Canadian Observatory on School Violence Prevention

[www.preventionviolence.ca](http://www.preventionviolence.ca)

This is a **Violence-free zone**



[www.esq.qc.net](http://www.esq.qc.net)



Centrale des syndicats du Québec

Centre de recherche et d'intervention  
sur la réussite scolaire

