



Health & Safety for **SCHOOL**
SUPPORT STAFF



BRITAIN'S GENERAL UNION

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The GMB, Britain's General Union, is the union for all school support staff. The GMB represents thousands of school support staff including Caretakers/Site Managers, Playground Assistants, Classroom Assistants, Catering Staff, Special Needs Assistants, Cleaners, Admin Officers, Clerical Assistants and Mid Day Supervisors.

The GMB recognises that work in schools has changed. Support staff are taking on duties over and above what they are paid for, are working more hours and are having more contact with pupils. In short, support staff make a vital contribution towards the smooth running of schools.

With this increased role can come an increased risk to health and safety. This leaflet has been produced to highlight some of the common health and safety hazards faced by support staff in schools. The GMB is committed to working with schools to improve health and safety standards, and to ensure you receive the health and safety rights you are entitled to. If you have any concerns about your safety at work, the GMB is always on hand to offer help and advice to our members.

Join the GMB, the union for all school support staff, and ensure you receive the same protection and advice as thousands of your colleagues. If you are not yet a member of the GMB - JOIN TODAY!!

Health and Safety Issues

Stress

In recent years, everyone working in schools has been under more pressure. Changes, such as the increased numbers of children with special educational needs, have made everyone's job more difficult. Most support staff have new duties and responsibilities, some of which are not included in their job description.

Changes and pressure at work, especially if coupled with the demands of domestic and family commitments, can increase the risk of stress. Support staff, who may not be recognised as suffering the symptoms of stress-related illness, are especially vulnerable. Some support staff may even find their jobs under threat if stress causes them to miss work through long-term sickness.

The GMB has wide experience of dealing with stress at work. By talking to Heads about the causes, we can offer practical advice about the measures that can, and should, be taken to reduce the risk of stress for school support staff.

Bullying/Harassment

Bullying and harassment can lead to stress related illness, resulting in reduced job performance, absenteeism and a high staff turnover. Victims of bullying can suffer a number of symptoms including anxiety, tension, depression, lack of concentration, headaches etc.

Examples of bullying can include:

- verbal, written and/or visual intimidation - e.g. threats, shouting and swearing at the victim.

- Insults to humiliate the victim in front of others or behind the victim's back.
- physical intimidation, including assault.
- isolation and lack of support for difficult tasks, or excessive supervision.
- unfair allocation of work, changing work without consultation to include impossible deadlines; taking credit for the victim's work etc
- refusing reasonable requests for training or blocking promotion.

The GMB is aware that such behaviour does occur in some schools and we are working to eliminate it. The GMB will give appropriate advice and support to any member who feels that they are being bullied or harassed.

Assaults and Allegations

It is a sad fact of life that anyone working with children is vulnerable to allegations of assault or violence, either from children or from their parents.

While the safety of children must be paramount at all times, staff also have rights. These include the right to be treated fairly and for a clear and open investigation into any allegations.

The GMB offers free legal advice to members who have been assaulted at work, or had allegations made against them. We also have vast experience of representing our members in disciplinary and grievance hearings. Our track record of supporting members and advising on problems at work is second to none - whatever the circumstances. For protection at work, you need the GMB.



Slips and Trips

The most common kind of accident at work is slip and trip injuries. This can be a particular problem for staff working in kitchens and dining rooms, but slips and trips can occur anywhere in schools.

The risk of slip and trip injuries to support staff can be greatly reduced by:

- carrying out risk assessments to consider potential slip and trip hazards such as: spills of liquids, wet floors, unsuitable footwear, rain and snow, uneven surfaces and trailing cables etc.
- tidying up potential obstructions, and
- where this is not possible, providing warning signs or hazard cones.

Manual Handling

In schools, manual handling injuries can be caused by carrying heavy weights such as boxes and equipment, from lifting work, and from any work that involves lowering, pushing, pulling, carrying or moving loads by hand or by bodily force.

If these operations are not carried out safely it can result in injuries to the back, hands, arms and feet. Caretakers/Site Managers are particularly at risk from such injuries.

Employers have a legal duty to avoid the need for manual handling as far as is reasonably practicable. If this is not possible an assessment of the risk of injury from any manual handling must be carried out; and measures must be put in place to reduce the risk of injury from manual handling.

Work with VDU's

Excessive keyboard work can lead to Work Related Upper Limb Disorders (RSI etc) as well as other problems such as eye, back and neck strain.

A risk assessment should have been carried out on any workstations in school. This assessment should ensure that admin officers and clerical assistants can carry out work safely. The assessment should take into account a number of issues including the suitability of the seat and desk, the amount of time staff spend working on VDU's, the temperature and lighting around workstations. Training should be provided for staff who are regular VDU users.

Your employer should also consent to give all designated VDU users a free eyesight test and be prepared to pay for at least part of the cost for suitable glasses should these be deemed necessary.

Hazardous substances

It is possible for support staff, especially caretakers, to come into contact with hazardous substances either through working with them or through indirect means such as loading and delivery.

There are laws covering work with any potentially hazardous substance. The regulations covering chemicals at work, known as The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1999 (COSHH), state that chemicals should be controlled by:

- carrying out an assessment of the possible risks of using or moving a hazardous substance,
- where possible eliminate the need to use the hazardous substance,
- if this is not possible substitute the hazardous substance with another substances less dangerous,
- as a last resort providing protective equipment.

Infections

Support staff in schools can become exposed to a number of infections either through direct contact with an infected pupil e.g. German Measles or Chicken Pox or contact with potentially infected body fluids when cleaning up vomit or blood e.g. Hepatitis. Caretakers are especially at risk.

Under the COSHH regulations schools should have procedures in place for dealing with infection hazards such as safe disposal of contaminated waste and should provide protective equipment such as gloves.

Schools should also have an infection control policy for infectious diseases such as meningitis and TB.

Building Work/Contractors

A regular occurrence in schools is the presence of contract builders carrying out building and renovation work.

It is vital that this work is managed properly so that any work that is carried out is supervised and nothing is done by the builders that could put school staff or children at risk.

It is also important that work is carried out tidily and is arranged so that tools, rubble, sharp objects etc are not left lying around allowing children pick them up or play with them.



To achieve health and safety improvements requires a strong union. If you are not yet a member of the GMB join today and ensure that your workplace is safer.

REMEMBER IF YOU ARE NOT A MEMBER OF THE GMB WE CAN'T HELP YOU!

Independent research has shown that people who are in a trade union are 50% LESS LIKELY TO HAVE AN ACCIDENT than those who are not in a trade union.

The GMB is Britain's general union, and health and safety is top of our agenda. The GMB is the leading union for health and safety. We have 25,000 Safety Representatives who offer advice and help on health and safety problems. To back up our Representatives each of our 10 Regions has a specialist Health and Safety Officer. The union also has a National Health and Safety Department with 4 staff to support the Regional specialists. JOIN THE GMB NOW!

SCHOOL SUPPORT STAFF ARE SAFER IN THE GMB

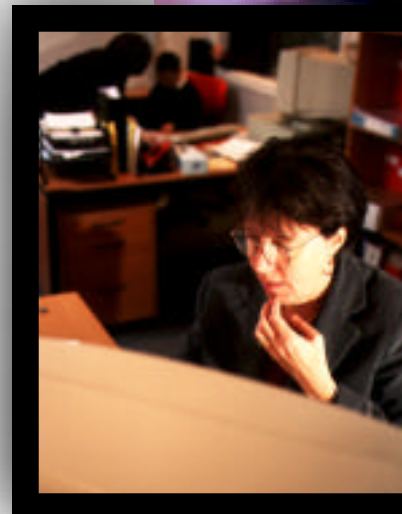
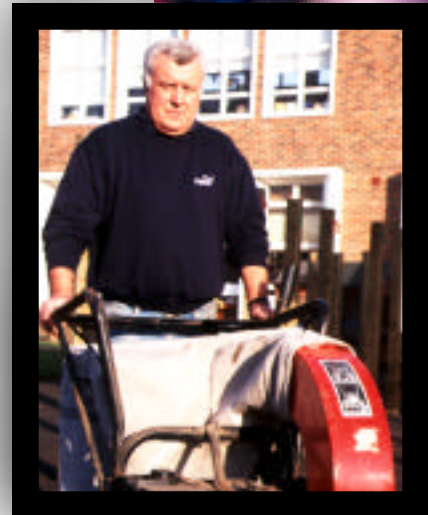
HEALTH AND SAFETY PROBLEM AT WORK?
CONTACT THE GMB, BRITAIN'S GENERAL UNION



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School support staff are safer in **THE GMB!**