

Anti-Bullying and Anti-Harassment Procedure

Ben's Centre for Vulnerable People (Sheffield)
Charity Number: 1087606.

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Introduction

We believe that having a culture that is diverse, equitable and inclusive is core to everything that we strive to achieve and that we wish to protect. Protecting our culture and our people is an essential part of seeking to eradicate bullying or harassment at work.

This policy supports this aim by setting out the steps that we will take to investigate and deal with complaints of bullying or harassment, and how we support those affected.

The policy accompanies our Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy. This policy does not form part of your contract of employment, and we reserve the right to amend or withdraw it at any time.

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This policy applies to anyone working for us. This includes employees, workers, contractors, volunteers, interns, and apprentices. The policy also relates to job applicants and is relevant to all stages of the employment relationship. The policy also applies to bullying or harassment by third parties.

Our commitment to you

We believe that a culture of equality, diversity and inclusion not only benefits us, but it supports wellbeing and enables our people to work better because they can be themselves and feel that they belong. We are committed to promoting a working environment based on dignity, trust, and respect, and one that is free from discrimination, harassment, bullying or victimisation.

A toxic workplace culture, where bullying or harassment is tolerated, is harmful to the wellbeing of the workforce as well as the wider business. We therefore adopt a zero-tolerance approach to instances of bullying or harassment.

What we expect from you

We expect you, and every one of our people, to take personal responsibility for observing, upholding, promoting, and applying this policy. Whatever your job is, this is part of your role.

Any dealings you have with third parties, including customers, suppliers, contractors, agency staff and consultants, must be free from discrimination, harassment, victimisation, or bullying.

If any of our people are found to have committed, authorised, or condoned an act of bullying or harassment, we will take action under our Disciplinary Procedure, up to and including dismissal.

There is no justifiable reason to bully or harass someone else. For example, observing a particular religion is not a legitimate reason for bullying or harassing a colleague because of their sexual orientation.

Even if you do not intend to bully or harass someone else, this does not legitimise your behaviour as it is the impact on the recipient that is important.

You should be aware that you can be personally liable for harassment. If you experience bullying or harassment, we encourage you to speak up without delay and to ask for appropriate support.

Who is protected from harassment

The Equality Act 2010 prohibits discrimination because of certain protected characteristics. These are:

- disability; sex; gender reassignment; marital or civil partnership status; race; religion or belief; sexual orientation; and age.

Although pregnancy and maternity and marriage and civil partnership are not specifically protected under the legal provisions on harassment, we consider harassment on any ground to be unacceptable.

Meaning of harassment

Harassment is unwanted conduct which is related to a protected characteristic that has the purpose or effect of:

- violating someone else's dignity; or
- creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for someone.

Harassment can occur where someone perceives another person to have a protected characteristic, for example a perception that someone is transgender even if they are not. Harassment can also arise by association, where someone is harassed because they are associated with someone with a protected characteristic, for example having a family member of a particular religion.

Examples of harassment

Harassment can occur in many forms and can take place either at work or outside work. While this is not an exhaustive list, examples include:

- "banter", jokes, taunts or insults that are sexist, racist, ageist, transphobic, homophobic or derogatory against any other protected characteristic;
- unwanted physical behaviour, for example, pushing or grabbing;
- excluding someone from a conversation or a social event or marginalising from the group;
- derogatory comments about pregnancy, maternity leave or IVF treatment;
- mimicking or making fun of someone's disability;
- derogatory or offensive comments about religion;
- unwelcome comments about someone's appearance or the way they dress that is related to a protected characteristic;
- "outing" (revealing someone's sexual orientation against their wishes), or threatening to "out";
- consistently using wrong names/pronouns following transition of a person's gender identity;
- displaying images that are racially offensive; and
- excluding or making derogatory comments about someone because of a perceived protected characteristic, or because they are associated with someone with a protected characteristic.

Meaning of sexual harassment

Harassment may be sexual in nature. The law defines sexual harassment as:

- conduct of a sexual nature that has the purpose or effect of violating someone's dignity, or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment; and
- less favourable treatment related to sex or gender reassignment that occurs because of a rejection of, or submission to, sexual conduct.

Examples of sexual harassment

Sexual harassment can occur in many forms. While this is not an exhaustive list, examples include:

- physical conduct of a sexual nature, unwelcome physical contact or intimidation;
- persistent suggestions to meet up socially after a person has made clear that they do not welcome this;

- showing or sending offensive or pornographic material by any means including text, video, email or by posting on the internet or social media;
- unwelcome sexual advances, propositions, suggestive remarks, or gender-related insults;
- offensive comments about appearance or dress, innuendo or lewd comments;
- leering, whistling, or making sexually suggestive gestures; and
- gossip and speculation about someone's sexual orientation or transgender status, including spreading malicious rumours.

Bullying

There is no legal definition of bullying. However, we regard it as conduct that is offensive, intimidating, malicious, insulting, or an abuse or misuse of power, and usually persistent, that has the effect of undermining, humiliating, or injuring the recipient.

Bullying can be physical, verbal, or non-verbal conduct. It is not necessarily face to face and can be done by email, phone calls, online (cyber-bullying) or on social media.

Bullying may occur at work or outside work. If the bullying relates to a person's protected characteristic, it may also constitute harassment and, therefore, will be unlawful.

Examples of bullying

While this is not an exhaustive list, bullying may include:

- physical, verbal, or psychological threats;
- excessive levels of supervision; and
- inappropriate and derogatory remarks about a person's performance.

It is important to understand that legitimate, reasonable, and constructive criticism of a person's performance or behaviour, or reasonable instructions given to people in the course of their employment, will not in itself amount to bullying.

Microaggressions

Microaggressions – sometimes called micro-incivilities – are statements, actions, or incidents that are regarded as indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalised group such as a racial or ethnic minority. They are sometimes referred to as "death by a thousand cuts".

Microaggressions generally take one of three forms:

1. Micro-assaults:
Conscious and obvious insults made verbally or non-verbally to a marginalised individual or group, for example directing limp-wristed hand gestures towards a gay colleague and saying "It's just a joke".
2. Micro-insults:
Unintentionally insensitive remarks or assumptions based on stereotypes, for example saying to a person with a disability "You don't look disabled to me".
3. Micro-invalidations:
Where a person denies, or seeks to cancel, the feelings and lived experiences of a marginalised individual or group, for example a white person saying, "I don't think the UK has a problem with racism – some people are just too sensitive".

Serious microaggressions can amount to unlawful harassment, bullying or discrimination but even less serious microaggressions can negatively impact the health and wellbeing of the person experiencing them.

What to do if you are being bullied or harassed

Informal route

Bully/harasser is a colleague

If you feel able to, you may decide to raise the issue with the individual themselves, to make clear that their behaviour is not welcome and to ask them to stop and they may not be aware that their behaviour is offending you. Alternatively, if you do not feel comfortable speaking directly to the individual, you may consider asking your line manager for support.

You may or may not want them to talk to the individual on your behalf and, where possible, we will respect your wishes. However, if the welfare or safety of you or others is at risk or where your allegations are particularly serious, we may have to approach the individual and instigate a formal investigation. In such a case we will, where possible, discuss this with you first.

If you would prefer not to discuss the issue with anyone at work, help and support is also available via our external human resources consultant. This can, should you request, be in confidence.

Bully/harasser is a third party

If you are experiencing bullying or harassment by a third party, for example a client or supplier, we encourage you report this to your line manager.

Formal route

If you are not happy with the outcome of an informal process, or if you feel it is not appropriate to approach the issue informally, you may decide to raise it formally. To make a formal complaint, you should discuss this first with your line manager. If your complaint is about your line manager, you should raise this with the CEO.

While you can raise a formal complaint of bullying or harassment under our Grievance procedure, you may prefer to do so under this policy because it is specifically aimed at dealing with such issues.

You should be aware that you cannot raise a complaint under this policy if you have raised a complaint about the same issue already under the Grievance procedure.

Under the formal procedure within this policy, we will usually:

- ask you to set out your complaint in writing and include as much detail as possible, for example the alleged bully/harasser's name, the nature of the bullying/harassment, the dates of the alleged acts names of witnesses, and details of any action taken to address the matter so far;
- hold a meeting with the alleged bully/harasser to ascertain their response to the allegations;
- carry out further investigations where necessary, including interviewing potential witnesses who we will instruct to keep the matter confidential;
- invite you to a meeting to discuss your complaint in full and where you will have the right to be accompanied by a colleague or trade union representative;
- hold a meeting with you to enable us to ask you further questions in light of any information we have gathered from the alleged bully/harasser and/or witnesses;
- consider all the evidence in full and decide; and
- inform you of our decision and, if we uphold the complaint, instigate disciplinary action up to and including dismissal against the bully/harasser.

We will investigate fully every formal complaint in an objective and confidential way, while also ensuring that we respect your rights as well as the rights of the alleged bully/harasser.

We will use every effort to complete an investigation into bullying or harassment as quickly as possible.

Where the alleged bully/harasser is a third party, we may need to adjust the procedure under this policy to ensure that we conduct appropriate investigations. Should this be necessary we will discuss this with you.

Appeals

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of the formal investigation, you have the right to appeal.

Should you wish to appeal, you should write to the CEO setting out what aspects of the decision you are unhappy with, and the reasons why. Appeals should be submitted without unreasonable delay and usually no longer than five working days after we inform you of the decision.

The CEO will arrange a meeting with you to discuss your appeal in full and to try and reach a satisfactory solution.

You must take all reasonable steps to attend this meeting and you may be accompanied by a colleague or trade union representative.

The CEO will write to you to confirm the outcome of the appeal, which will be final.

Support for those affected or involved

We understand that anyone affected by, or involved with, a complaint of bullying or harassment may feel anxious or upset. We will do what we can to support you.

If you feel you cannot continue to work in close contact with the alleged bully/harasser, we will consider seriously any requested changes to your working arrangements during our investigation into the matter.

Anyone who complains or takes part in good faith in a bullying or harassment investigation must not suffer any form of detrimental treatment or victimisation. If you feel you have suffered such victimisation, please inform your line manager as soon as possible.

Regardless of the outcome of any complaint, we will consider carefully how to best approach any ongoing working relationship between you and the individual concerned. For example, depending on the specifics, we may consider amending the job duties, location or reporting lines of either you or the other person. Alternatively, we may decide workplace mediation or counselling is appropriate.

Sensitivity and confidentiality

Anyone involved with an informal or formal complaint about bullying or harassment, including witnesses, must keep the matter strictly confidential and act with appropriate sensitivity to all parties.

If you are found to have breached confidentiality or acted without due care or sensitivity in a case of bullying or harassment, we may take disciplinary action against you up to and including dismissal, or other appropriate action for non-employees.

Consequences of breaching this policy

If, following a formal investigation, we find that you have committed, authorised, or condoned an act of bullying or harassment, we will deal with the issue as a possible case of misconduct or gross misconduct.

We may take disciplinary action against you, up to and including dismissal, or other appropriate action for non-employees.

Anyone who complains or takes part in good faith in a bullying or harassment investigation must not suffer any form of detrimental treatment or victimisation.

If we find that you have victimised anyone in this way, we will instigate disciplinary action against you up to and including dismissal, or other appropriate action for non-employees, under our Disciplinary procedure.

Training

We expect all our people to proactively support our equality, diversity, and inclusion initiatives by attending events and workshops organised by us to educate themselves on the challenges faced by others, and how to help alleviate these in the workplace.

- All new starters should attend equality, diversity, and inclusion training as part of their onboarding programme.
- Current employees should attend regular equality, diversity, and inclusion training on at least an annual basis.

Record-keeping

We process personal data collected in relation to bullying or harassment complaints in accordance with our data protection policy. In particular, data collected in relation to the investigation of bullying or harassment complaints is held securely and accessed by, and disclosed to, individuals only for the purposes of responding to the complaints and investigating.

You should immediately report any inappropriate access or disclosure of employee data in accordance with our Data Protection Policy as this constitutes a data protection breach. It may also constitute a disciplinary offence, which we will deal with under our disciplinary procedure.

Review

This policy may be reviewed at any time at the request of any member of staff, but it will be automatically reviewed 2-years after initial approval and thereafter on a triennial basis unless organisational changes, legislations, guidance, or non-compliance prompt an earlier review.

Definitions

Ben's Centre ("we", "us", "our")

The Employee ("you")