

Dignity at work guidance

This guidance should be read in conjunction with the Dignity at work policy

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What to do if you feel you are being harassed or bullied

Harassment and bullying can be carried out by anyone, whatever their organisational position. Although harassment and bullying by colleagues (staff or volunteers) and managers may be the most common forms, harassment or bullying 'upwards' is not unknown. Harassment and bullying can also be carried out by customers, service users or contractors.

Giving feedback on unacceptable behaviour

While some behaviour will generally be seen as unacceptable, for example racist comments, what is generally found to be acceptable or unacceptable does change over time.

Everyone has the right to their own views on what behaviour is acceptable and to have their feelings respected by others. We expect all staff to be prepared to make reasonable changes and adapt sometimes; but remember there has to be some give and take amongst people working together.

You may be able to resolve the situation informally by talking to the person concerned, as they may not be aware that their behaviour is unwelcome, upsetting or causing offense. An informal discussion may help them to understand the effects of their behaviour and agree to change it.

You could approach the person yourself, or with the support of another colleague. You need to make clear to them:

- the specific behaviour that is bothering you
- how you feel about the behaviour (e.g. it's offensive, unwelcome, intimidating, as appropriate)
- that you would like to discuss it and you would like it to stop.

You may want to add that if the behaviour continues, you intend to or may consider making a formal complaint.

Most people find challenging a colleague in this way is quite difficult. However it's really important to give this feedback if we want people to alter their behaviour. It will be easier, and may avoid misunderstandings, if you are as specific and clear as possible.

If your manager was the person behaving in an inappropriate manner then you may prefer to approach your manager's manager or HR directly. Below are some ideas that may help you

Use I statements

Begin with 'I' statements not 'you'.

- *I feel uncomfortable, rather than you make me feel uncomfortable*
- *I find that offensive, rather than you are being offensive*

Talk about the behaviour, not the person

Focus was done or said, not on what you think that means.

- use *'you didn't invite Sally to lunch at all last week'* rather than *'You are excluding Sally because you don't like her'*.

Be specific

It will not help someone to recognise what they doing if you generalise

So use

- *'Yesterday you repeatedly remarked that I wouldn't understand Twitter and Facebook'* rather than *'You are always putting me down because of my age.'*

Scripting

Scripting is a technique for preparing to tackle difficult situations by planning what you are going to say. It allows you to focus clearly on the problem and what you want to achieve. This can be especially useful when you need to give some difficult feedback.

You do not read your 'script' out, but it allows you to consider (calmly) the words, phrases and tone you want to use. How the conversation goes from that point depends on the other person as well as you! The 'script' covers four elements:

- **Explanation**

How do you see the problem? Focus on the facts: what was actually said or done, not why it might have happened.

- **Impact**

Describe the impact of the behaviour. This shows why it is important and your reason for raising the issue.

- **Needs/wants or action required**

What do you want the other person to do?

- **Consequences** (optional)

Rewards: what are the benefits if the problem is resolved?

Sanctions: what steps might be taken if it is not resolved?

You do not have to share this section with the other person straight away, but you do need to have given it some thought, so that you have some idea of how far you may be prepared to go.

Here is an example of Scripting

The situation:

Laura makes frequent jokes about men being stupid, unable to multi task, exaggerating minor illnesses etc. The team is generally quite chatty and friendly and no one else has ever questioned Laura's jokes, most people laugh or ignore them.

Jo feels increasingly uncomfortable. As a feminist she would complain straight away if a man made 'blonde' jokes or something similar that put women down. She decides to speak to Laura and uses scripting to prepare.

Explanation

Laura, yesterday you made a joke putting men down, this is something you do frequently; in fact I noticed you made two such comments last week, one on Monday and one yesterday.

Impact

I feel really uncomfortable as I feel its treating all men as if they are useless compared with women, when this is not the case and I feel it is really disrespectful.

Action

I would really appreciate it if you would stop making such remarks. I like working with you and I would feel more comfortable in the office.

Consequences

I may consider making a formal complaint if this behaviour continues.

Keeping notes

You should keep a note of the date and what was said and done. This will be useful evidence if the unacceptable behaviour continues and you wish to make a formal complaint.

Making a complaint

If an informal approach does not resolve matters, or you think the situation is too serious to be dealt with in this way, you can make a complaint.

Staff should use the Grievance procedure. For more detail, please read the Grievance policy and procedure. If your grievance is upheld, the person you have complained about **may** face disciplinary proceedings.

Volunteers should use the MS Society *Resolving Volunteer Issues and Concerns* (RVIC) policy and guidance. For more detail please read the policy. If your complaint is upheld the person you have complained about **may** face disciplinary or other proceedings.

In very serious cases, a criminal offence may have been committed and you may wish to make a complaint to the Police. HR, Volunteering, or your line manager can arrange for someone to support you if you wish.

You can talk over the situation and seek advice from HR/Volunteering at any point. Sometimes people are reluctant to make a formal complaint, despite the support offered to them in doing so. Your right not to make a complaint will be respected.

If your manager was the person behaving in an inappropriate manner then you may prefer to approach your manager's manager or HR directly. You may also wish to consult your union or staff representative.

Counselling from the MS Society's Employee Wellbeing Programme (EWP), informal or formal mediation can be offered to either or both parties where they are employees. This may be appropriate whether or not the complaint has been upheld.

Third party harassment

Harassment and bullying can also be carried out by customers, service users or contractors. This is called 'third party' harassment. If you experience harassment or bullying from a third party you should raise the issue with them informally if possible **and** report it to your manager.

What to do if you witness harassment or bullying

Witnessing bullying or harassment can be upsetting for the witness as well as your colleague. As a witness we would ask you to offer your support to your colleague. You may also want to raise your feelings about their behaviour with the person concerned.

If however, the colleague does not perceive the behaviour in the same way as you, or does not want to take the matter any further, you can raise your concerns with your manager or HR/Volunteering informally or formally.

Staff

If you raise the issue informally, a formal investigation will not take place, but the relevant managers will be alerted and a record will be made. This information will be kept to be used as part of HR's monitoring and statistical reporting to the People committee. If you make a formal complaint, an investigation will be carried out. For full details on the process, please read the [Grievance policy and procedure](#).

Volunteers

If you raise the issue informally, a formal investigation will not take place. If you make a formal complaint, an investigation will be carried out. For full details on the process, please read the Resolving Volunteer Issues and Concerns policy.

What to do if a complaint of harassment or bullying is made against you

If someone approaches you informally about your behaviour, do not dismiss the approach out of hand because you were only joking or think the person is being too sensitive. Remember that different people find different types of behaviour acceptable and what is generally found to be acceptable also changes over time.

Everyone has the right to their own views on what behaviour is acceptable and to have their feelings respected by others. We also all have to be prepared to make reasonable changes and adapt sometimes; there has to be some give and take amongst people working together.

It is natural to feel defensive in this situation, but it is important to try to listen to understand the issue.

You may have offended someone quite unintentionally. If this is the case, the matter can be successfully resolved by a positive discussion that leads to greater understanding for all involved. Most situations can be resolved in this way.

If your actions or behaviour and the offense caused is seen as more serious, an apology, with an assurance that you will be careful not to behave in that way in the future will most likely resolve the situation. Provided you do not repeat the behaviour, this will be the end of the matter.

If a complaint is made about your behaviour, this will be fully investigated before any action is taken. Please read the Grievance policy and procedure for more details. You may wish to seek support by discussing the matter with your line manager or a colleague, your Trade Union or staff representative or HR.

The investigation will be confidential and will ensure fair treatment of both parties. You will have the opportunity to put your side of the situation and can be accompanied to any meetings.

If the complaint is not upheld, there will be no further action. If the complaint against you is upheld, you **may** face disciplinary proceedings. Only if disciplinary action is taken and upheld, will any record be put on your personnel file.

Other actions might include reducing contact between the two of you by moving desks, varying working hours, increased home working etc.

Counselling from the MS Society's EWP, informal or formal mediation can be offered to either or both parties. This may be appropriate whether or not the complaint has been upheld.