



Bournemouth Council for Voluntary Service

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Bullying & Harassment at Work

Policy Statement

1. The Trustees and management of Bournemouth Council for Voluntary Service (BCVS) are committed to providing a working environment in which everyone is treated with dignity and respect. Bullying and harassment of any kind are in no-one's interest and will not be tolerated in the workplace. Incidents of bullying or harassment will be dealt with under the BCVS Disciplinary Procedure.
2. What are bullying and harassment?

Examples and definitions of what may be considered bullying and harassment are provided below for guidance. If employees complain they are being bullied or harassed, then they have a grievance which must be dealt with regardless of whether or not their complaint accords with a standard definition.

Bullying may be characterised as offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through means intended to undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient.

Harassment, in general terms, is unwanted conduct affecting the dignity of men and women in the workplace. It may be related to age, sex, race, disability, religion, nationality or any personal characteristic of the individual, and may be persistent or an isolated incident. The key is that the actions or comments are viewed as demeaning and unacceptable to the recipient.

The Equality Act 2010 protects employees from harassment which is "unwanted conduct related to a relevant protected characteristic, which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual".

The relevant protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. In addition,

the complainant need not possess the relevant characteristic themselves and can be because of their association with a person who has a protected characteristic, or because they are wrongly perceived to have one, or are treated as if they do.

The following are examples of unacceptable behaviour but is not exhaustive:-

- spreading malicious rumours, or insulting someone (particularly on the grounds of age, race, sex, disability, sexual orientation and religion or belief)
- copying memos that are critical about someone to others who do not need to know
- ridiculing or demeaning someone – picking on them or setting them up to fail
- exclusion or victimisation
- unfair treatment
- overbearing supervision or other misuse of power or position
- unwelcome sexual advances – touching, standing too close, display of offensive materials, asking for sexual favours, making decisions on the basis of sexual advances being accepted or rejected
- making threats or comments about job security without foundation
- deliberately undermining a competent worker by overloading and constant criticism
- preventing individuals progressing by intentionally blocking promotion or training opportunities.

Bullying and harassment are not necessarily face to face, they may be by written communications, electronic mail, phone.

3. Recognising bullying and harassment.

Bullying and harassment can often be hard to recognise – they may not be obvious to others, and may be insidious. The recipient may think 'perhaps this is normal behaviour in this organisation'. They may be anxious that others will consider them weak, or not up to the job, if they find the actions of others intimidating. They may be accused of 'overreacting', and worry that they won't be believed if they do report incidents.

People being bullied or harassed may sometimes appear to overreact to something that seems relatively trivial but which may be the 'last straw' following a series of incidents. There is often fear of retribution if they do make a complaint. Colleagues may be reluctant to come forward as witnesses, as they too may fear the consequences for themselves. They may be so relieved not to be the subject of the bully themselves that they collude with the bully as a way of avoiding attention.

4. Preventing bullying and harassment.

All employees will receive a copy of this policy during their induction.

It is often very difficult for the victim of harassment or bullying to feel able to speak out about what is occurring. All employees have a responsibility to inform their supervisor or manager should they suspect that a colleague is being harassed or bullied.

5. Dealing with allegations of bullying and harassment.

Employees should try to maintain records as bullying and harassment often reveal themselves through patterns of behaviour and frequency of incidents:

- Keep a diary of all incidents – records of dates, times, any witnesses, your feelings, etc.
- Keep copies of anything that is relevant, for instance annual reports, letters, memos, notes of any meetings that relate to your ability to do your job
- Keep records and inform BCVS of any medical help you seek.

All allegations of bullying or harassment will be taken seriously by the person to whom the complaint is made. Employees making allegations will not be ridiculed in any way or made to feel that their concern is unwarranted.

Any intimidation of complainants or witnesses to incidents will be treated as serious disciplinary offences in their own right.

Reports will be dealt with in confidence as far as it is practicable to do so. Where a serious allegation is made the person to whom it is reported is likely to have an organisational responsibility to disclose the information to some others in order that the case can be dealt with. Information will only be disclosed so far as is necessary for the investigation of the incident and for the purposes of any subsequent proceedings.

Allegations of bullying and harassment will be treated as a grievance and investigated. If appropriate the disciplinary procedure may also be invoked.

Informal Response:

There may be occasions where a perpetrator genuinely does not realize that their behaviour is causing distress to another person. On these occasions it may be appropriate for the problem to be informally resolved either between the people concerned or with the involvement of a supervisor as per the grievance procedure. Where the incident is not successfully resolved at this stage the complainant should consider using the formal stages of the grievance procedure and the timescales in that will be applied.

Formal Response:

A complainant may feel that the matter is too serious to be dealt with informally and may put their complaint in writing as per the formal stages of the grievance procedure in the first instance.

Investigation of the complaint may identify disciplinary matters. Where it becomes apparent that the behaviour of one or more people may amount to disciplinary offences then the disciplinary procedure will be used to deal with them and the timescales and sanctions in that policy will apply.

Where you and the alleged perpetrator(s) work in proximity to each other, we will consider whether it is appropriate to:

- Move or transfer one or both of you
- Send one or both of you home on full pay for a specified time

6. Incidents or bullying and harassment where the perpetrator is not an employee.

BCVS takes all forms of bullying and harassment against its staff very seriously. Where the alleged perpetrator is not an employee the matter should be reported to a supervisor and the grievance procedure may be appropriate should the outcome be unsatisfactory to the complainant.

At the conclusion of the investigation appropriate action will be taken. This may range from informal discussions with the perpetrator to support in reporting incidents to the police. Where the alleged perpetrator is a member of a client group involvement with that group or particular member may be suspended during the course of the investigation and may be terminated on its conclusion.

7. Staff working away from the premises of BCVS.

This policy applies to staff working for BCVS regardless of the location in which that work is being carried out.

8. Malicious allegations of bullying or harassment.

Malicious allegations of bullying or harassment can cause considerable distress and disruption. Where, after thorough investigation, a member of staff is found to have made such an allegation their behaviour will be dealt with under the disciplinary policy.

References & Copyright note.

The material is adapted from the ACAS publication 'Bullying and harassment at work -' which is subject to Crown Copyright. This document can be viewed in full by following the relevant link at www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=797. Information regarding the use of ACAS materials subject to Crown Copyright is also available on the ACAS web site www.acas.org.uk

Date: 1/5/14

Signed: Chair of BCVS Board

Chief Executive BCVS



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