

BULLYING AND HARRASSMENT POLICY

INTRODUCTION

Age Concern Petersfield & District understands that everyone has a right to be treated with dignity and respect. Bullying and harassment of any kind are in no one's interests and will not be tolerated. It should be made clear that this policy applies to visitors, volunteers, service users, staff and trustees during their working hours.

DEFINITION OF BULLYING AND/OR HARASSMENT

Examples and definitions of what may be considered bullying and harassment are provided below. Those making a complaint usually define what they mean by bullying or harassment - something has happened to them that is unwelcome, unwarranted and causes a detrimental effect.

There are many definitions of bullying and harassment. 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 any person 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.

Behaviour that is considered bullying by one person may be considered firm management by another. Most people will agree on extreme cases of bullying and harassment but it is sometimes the 'grey' areas that cause most problems. The following are examples of what constitutes unacceptable behaviour in the organisation, however this is a guideline and not an exhaustive listing:-

- 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
- 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, email (so called 'flame-mail') – sometimes known as cyber bullying, phone, and automatic supervision methods - such as computer recording of downtime from work, or recording of telephone conversations - if these are not universally applied to all workers.

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.

If an employee complains they are being bullied or harassed, then they have a grievance which must be dealt with, according to the organisation's Grievance Procedure, regardless of whether or not their complaint accords with a standard definition.

If a contractor, visitor, volunteer or service user complains they are being bullied or harassed then they have a grievance which must be dealt with, according to the formal complaints procedure.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

The organisation will at all times seek to investigate complaints of bullying or harassment objectively and promptly within the time scales indicated with the Grievance and/or Disciplinary Procedures. The organisation will take the complaint seriously.

In the case of a complaint of bullying or harassment there must be fairness to both the complainant and the person accused.

In some cases it may be possible to rectify matters informally. Sometimes people are not aware that their behaviour is unwelcome and an informal discussion can lead to greater understanding and an agreement that the behaviour will cease. It may be that the individual will choose to do this themselves, or they may need support from their line manager or a member of the board of Trustees. Counselling can be particularly useful where investigation shows no cause for disciplinary action, or where doubt is cast on the validity of the complaint. Counselling may resolve the issue or help support the person accused as well as the complainant. This is an area that may be required and would need further discussion on an individual case basis.

Where an informal resolution is not possible, the matter may become a disciplinary issue which then needs to be dealt with formally at the appropriate level of the organisation's disciplinary procedure.

In cases which appear to involve serious misconduct, and there is reason to separate the parties, a short period of suspension of the alleged bully/harasser may need to be considered while the case is being investigated.

There may be cases where somebody makes an unfounded allegation of bullying and/or harassment for malicious reasons. These cases would also be investigated and dealt with fairly and objectively under the disciplinary procedure.

Where bullying or harassment amounts to gross misconduct, dismissal without notice will be considered by the organisation to be appropriate.

In the event of any employee having any concerns in relation to Bullying and Harassment contact should be made directly with the Office Manager who will inform the Board of Trustees. In the event of there being an issue with the Office Manager contact should be made with the Chair of the Board of Trustees.

POLICY STATEMENT

All Policies and Procedures held by Age Concern Petersfield & District are regularly reviewed and may be amended from time to time to reflect any changes in Legislation, regulatory guidance or internal policy decisions, as well as for any other reasons determined by the Board of Trustees. The latest versions will always be reflected on our website.