

## GUIDANCE ON INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR

All people should be treated with dignity at work, in church and in the community. Bullying and harassment should not be tolerated and it is never acceptable or justifiable to bully or harass anyone. However, for those being bullied or harassed, it is not always clear how to handle the situation and what can be done about it. Just because we are a Christian Church does not mean that we are immune from bullying and harassment; we are human and such behaviour does exist in the Church.

This paper is intended to provide guidance and basic information about how to deal with bullying and harassment and a procedure for handling complaints. It sets out the responsibilities of all who lead and are responsible for others.

### Definitions

The terms bullying and harassment are used almost interchangeably by the majority of people (and are in this paper), but others class bullying as one form of harassment.

#### Harassment

Harassment may be defined as unwanted conduct that affects the dignity of people in the workplace, the church community and the wider community. It may be related to age, sex, race, disability, religion, nationality or any personal characteristic of the individual, but also to unwarranted behaviour in our dealings with one another. The key is that certain actions or remarks are viewed by the recipient as demeaning and unacceptable.

#### Bullying

Bullying may be defined as any behaviour, occasional or persistent, by anyone, or any group, that intimidates, offends, oppresses or insults another or a group of others. It can be an abuse or misuse of power and which humiliates or behaviour which denigrates an individual or group. It can be overt or insidious and it can take place in private or public, at work or in a social situation.

Examples of bullying may include:

- Shouting or swearing at an individual
- Persistent, excessive, unfair or unjustified criticism
- Overtly or implicitly claiming righteousness to disguise power
- Isolating someone or deliberately ignoring or excluding them from activities
- Persistent undervaluing of a person's efforts
- Aggressive communications

- Intimidating or threatening behaviour
- Unjustified, excessive monitoring and/or supervision
- Use of emails, correspondence or letters to insult or in any way harass another person or group

This list is far from exhaustive.

The result of bullying behaviours is that the target feels anxious and humiliated and may lack self-confidence. The victim is likely to suffer stress, fear, anger, frustration, demotivation and a feeling of being unable to cope. Job performance is affected and relationships suffer. In the worst cases, bullying may create an unsafe working environment and the physical, mental and emotional health of the victim(s) may be adversely affected.

### Prevention

Each one of us has a responsibility to discourage harassment and bullying and to prevent it taking place by being aware of the issues and being alert to the possibility that harassment may be taking place. Employers, line managers, clergy and leaders should make clear to everyone that such behaviour will not be tolerated. They should deal with all incidents quickly, fairly, sensitively and in confidence.

### Dealing with harassment

All complaints of harassment should be dealt with promptly, fairly, sensitively and in confidence.

Most victims just want the harassing behaviour to stop. Some individuals may feel able to speak directly to the harasser and say that the behaviour is unacceptable and must stop. Others may require support and may ask someone else to speak to the harasser on their behalf.

All experiencing or witnessing bullying or harassment should feel free to approach those whom the Church has charged with authority, whether formally through contract, office or ordination, or informally within a local structure. And those with authority should foster an environment which does not discourage such approaches.

If this informal approach does not stop the harassing behaviour, the individual may use the appropriate grievance procedure (as set out by the parish, the diocese or the Acas procedure).

Ultimately, harassment and bullying may lead to the breakdown of relationship between the harasser and the employer, priest, line manager, leader. In any case where a claim of harassment is substantiated, disciplinary action may follow.

The ultimate sanction for employees is that disciplinary action could result in dismissal. For ordained ministers, the Clergy Discipline Measure may be

invoked which could result in loss of Licence, and for licensed lay ministers and Lay Readers, loss of Licence may also result.

While there may not be any legal or contractual redress against a lay member of the Church, those in authority should not use this as an excuse to ignore the issue and should be prepared to use the moral force of their authority to prevent bullying and harassment continuing.

Further information can be obtained from the ACAS website at [www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk) and from the Church House publication Dignity at Work, which is obtainable from Church House Publishing.

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