

Bullying and Harassment Information Statement

1. Overview

The Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania (the Synod) is committed to providing safe, respectful and productive work environments.

Synod workplaces are places where there is recognition of the appropriate use of power. It is expected that power residing in any individual due to position, status, gender, and/or personal attributes will be exercised to benefit the health and wellbeing of individuals and the organisation as a whole.

The Synod acknowledges fully that behaviour constituting discrimination, bullying, harassment and sexual harassment is unlawful. The Synod adopts a zero tolerance approach.

All staff and volunteers associated with the Uniting Church have a responsibility to maintain workplaces that are free of bullying and harassment.

2. Definitions

Bullying is defined as repeated unreasonable behaviour to another person, including offensive or abusive language or conduct, behaviour perceived to belittle, threaten or intimidate another person. Workplace bullying is unreasonable behaviour directed toward a person or group of people that creates a risk to health and safety.

Harassment is behaviour that causes concern or distress to another person who perceives that the behaviour directed towards them is unwelcome, unjust, or unfair. Harassment may be a single incident or a series of incidents and includes behaviour which is discriminatory, offensive, abusive, belittling, humiliating threatening or intimidating.

Sexual harassment is any unwanted or unwelcome sexual behaviour where a reasonable person would have anticipated the possibility that the person harassed would feel offended, humiliated or intimidated.

3. Prevention

There are many ways to promote a safe workplace free from bullying and harassment. Some factors are outlined below. This is not a definitive list, rather some examples:

- People/staff must be informed about the values and codes of conduct relevant to the work context.
- Provide training so that people are made aware of what harmful behaviour looks like and the importance of maintaining a safe work environment free from bullying and harassment.
- Managers and leaders must guide and supervise individuals and/or teams responsibly. They must be available, be a role model, provide regular team meetings and demonstrate an interest in the wellbeing of others.
- People/staff must feel empowered to act if they are made aware of issues that threaten workplace safety.
- Staff must have position descriptions so that it is clear what is expected both for behaviour and achieving work tasks.
- People must have all the tools they need to do their jobs, reasonable workloads and a safe physical work environment.

Bullying and harassment is unlawful.

All possible measures to ensure psychological and emotional safety should be in place at all times.

4. Processes for handling complaints

Clarity about how to address complaints or allegations is critical.

Congregation and Presbytery workplaces should have clear guidelines that set out how a claim, complaint or conflict is handled. Who should be contacted, who will oversee the process and how will it be managed? This information should be available to all staff and volunteers. Induction or orientation processes are a critical time to communicate this as new starters may be vulnerable.

Processes related to bullying and harassment must afford natural justice to all parties.

Processes to address bullying issues often include three resolution steps:

1. **Self-resolution** - Encouragement, support for the people to raise concerns and work through the matter together in discussion and conversation.

2. **Supported resolution** - The provision of a person with experience to facilitate, assist and support the parties to address the issues towards resolution.

3. **Formal resolution** - Clear guidelines about the formal complaints process. Formal complaint processes often include:

- Clear and defined time frames for actions
- Clear information about the process, provided both verbally and in writing
- Investigations, interviews and sometimes witnesses
- An investigation outcome and associated consequences (this may include discipline processes)
- The provision of optional counselling support
- Confidentiality to protect reputation and distraction
- Mediation to repair relationships
- Opportunity to have support people and/or a representative

5. Relevant legislation

Age Discrimination Act 2004 (Cth)

Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)

Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)

Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth)

Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (Vic)

Work Health and Safety Act 2012 (Tas)

Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 (Vic)

Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)

6. Information and Advice

The Synod People & Culture team can provide advice, information and guidance.

Contact People&Culture@victas.uca.org.au