
BULLYING & HARASSMENT PREVENTION POLICY

OUR VISION, OUR VALUES, OUR MISSION, and OUR ETHOS are guided by many principles:

- The essence of our movement, as we interpret it, is that it is all embracing and inclusive of everyone regardless of race, religion or ability.
- The core values of our services have always been underpinned by honesty, openness, fairness, the dignity and humanity of each person, free from harassment, anti-sectarian and anti-racist.
- We believe in the intrinsic value of every person and we aim to further the dignity of all associated with our movement.
- We want each individual to avail of opportunities for self-expression in the pursuit of traditional music, song, dance and language
- We promote inclusivity, equal opportunity for all regardless of gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, age, disability, religious belief or lack thereof, race, ethnicity or nationality.

COMHALTAS is committed to the creation of a positive working environment for all stakeholders - employees, volunteers and members.

This policy applies to all employees, volunteers and members of Comhaltas. It applies during normal working hours, at work related or sponsored functions, and while travelling on work related business. There will be no recriminations for anyone who in good faith alleges bullying.

(References to “workplace” in this policy are also applicable to all voluntary work/activity as well as to Comhaltas employees)

COMHALTAS will ensure that procedures exist to allow complaints of bullying to be dealt with and resolved internally in Comhaltas without limiting any person’s entitlement to pursue resolution of their complaint with the relevant statutory authority.

DEFINITIONS

- Bullying is unwelcome or unreasonable behaviour that demeans, intimidates or humiliates people either as individuals or as a group.
- Bullying behaviour is often persistent and part of a pattern
- It is usually carried out by an individual but can also be an aspect of group behaviour.
- Bullying is **repeated** inappropriate behaviour that undermines a person’s right to dignity at work.
- Bullying can be verbal bullying, physical bullying or cyber bullying which is carried out on the internet or mobile phones, through social networking sites, email and texts. It can take many different forms such as:
 - Social exclusion and isolation
 - Damaging someone’s reputation by gossip or rumours

- Intimidation
- Aggressive or obscene language
- Repeated requests with impossible tasks or targets

Verbal bullying

- Abusive and offensive language
- Insults
- Teasing
- Spreading rumor and innuendo
- Unreasonable criticism
- Trivializing of work and achievements

Verbal bullying can be face-to-face, written or often over the phone. It includes name-calling, put-downs, slugging, threats and sexual harassment.

Physical bullying

Physical bullying can include being punched, tripped, kicked and having things stolen or damaged. Sexual abuse is also a form of physical bullying.

Social bullying

Social bullying is often one of the hardest types of bullying to identify and deal with.

Social bullying includes being left out, ignored or having rumours spread about you.

Psychological bullying

- Unfairly blaming for mistakes
- Setting people up for failure
- Deliberate exclusion
- Excessive supervision
- Practical jokes
- Belittling or disregarding opinions or suggestions
- Criticizing in public

Psychological bullying can be hard to identify. It is often less direct and can feel like it is in your head. It can include intimidation, dirty looks, stalking, manipulation or unpredictable reactions.

Cyber bullying

- This type of bullying happens online. It can include offensive and abusive messages. It also includes hacking into accounts or spreading rumours online.
- Cyber bullying can be challenging to deal with. It can become viral and difficult. You may not know what to do. It is more serious because of its constant presence, the possibility for others to spread it further and the (near) impossibility of having the content withdrawn fully.
- If you are a victim of cyber bullying you need to talk with family members or with a trusted friend and not keep silent in the belief that it will go away.

Mobbing

Mobbing is a particular type of bullying behaviour carried out by a group rather than by an individual. Mobbing is the bullying or social isolation of a person through collective unjustified accusations, humiliation, general harassment or emotional abuse. Although it is group behaviour, specific incidents such as an insult or a practical joke may be carried out by an individual as part of mobbing behaviour.

Why bullying happens

People who bully often have low self-esteem.

They use bullying as a way of exerting power to make themselves feel better.

The person bullies as a way to deal with their own problems. It is not because of something you have done.

Finding support when you are bullied

Being bullied can leave you feeling vulnerable and alone.

It can be helpful to talk to someone about what is happening. Speaking to someone can help you feel less alone.

NOTE: In 2005 the [Expert Advisory Group on Workplace Bullying \(pdf\)](#) reported that bullying is an increasing problem in the workplace. A survey on bullying was carried out as recommended by the Group and [Bullying in the Workplace, Survey Reports 2007 \(pdf\)](#) was published. In many European countries the term '[mobbing](#)' is used instead of bullying to describe this type of hostile behaviour in the workplace.

What is harassment and sexual harassment?

Harassment

Harassment based on any of these 9 grounds-**gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller community**- is a form of discrimination in relation to conditions of employment. Some examples could include making jokes or derogatory comments. The Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015 define harassment as “unwanted conduct” which is related to any of the 9 discriminatory grounds above.

Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is any form of “unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature”. Some examples include unwanted physical contact or unwelcome propositions.

What is 'unwanted conduct'?

In both cases, it is defined as conduct which “has the purpose or effect of violating a person’s dignity and creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for the person” and it is prohibited under the Acts.

The “unwanted conduct” includes:

- Spoken words
- Gestures – including offensive gestures or facial expressions
- Production and display of written words, pictures and other material (unwelcome emails or other offensive material).

Harassment and sexual harassment can be by:

- A fellow worker
- Your boss
- Someone in a superior position
- A client
- A customer
- Any other business contact

Harassment can take place at work or on a training course, on a work trip, at a work social event or any other occasion connected with your job.

It may be targeted at one employee or a group of employees and it may consist of a single incident or repeated inappropriate behaviour.

CONTEXT

Context is important in understanding bullying, particularly verbal communication. There is a difference between friendly insults exchanged by long-time work colleagues and comments that are meant to be, or are taken as, demeaning. While care should be exercised, particularly if a person is reporting alleged bullying as a witness or bystander, it is better to be genuinely mistaken than to let actual bullying go unreported.

CONSEQUENCES OF BULLYING

Bullying is unacceptable behaviour because it breaches principles of equality and fairness, and it frequently represents an abuse of power and authority. It also has potential consequences for everyone involved.

For those being bullied:

People who have been bullied often suffer from a range of stress-related illness. They can lose confidence and withdraw from contact with people outside the workplace as well as at work. Their work performance can suffer, and they are at increased risk of workplace injury.

For the employer:

Besides potential legal liabilities, the employer can also suffer because bullying can lead to:

- Deterioration in the quality of work
- Increased absenteeism
- Lack of communication and teamwork
- Lack of confidence in the employer leading to lack of commitment to the job

For others at the workplace:

People who witness bullying behaviors can also have their attitudes and work performance affected. They can suffer from feelings of guilt that they did nothing to stop the bullying, and they can become intimidated and perform less efficiently fearing that they may be the next to be bullied.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Managers and supervisors

- Ensure that all employees/volunteers are aware of the anti-bullying & harassment policy and procedures
- Ensure that any incident of bullying or harassment is dealt with regardless of whether a complaint of bullying has been received or not.
- Provide leadership and role-modeling in appropriate professional behaviour
- Respond promptly, sensitively and confidentially to all situations where bullying behaviour is observed or alleged to have occurred

Employees/volunteers/the bystander

- Be familiar with and behave according to this policy
- If you are a witness/bystander to bullying or harassment, report incidents to someone as appropriate
- Where appropriate, speak to the alleged bully(ies) to object to the behaviour

IF YOU THINK YOU HAVE BEEN BULLIED

- Any employee/volunteer who feels he or she has been victimized by bullying or harassment is encouraged to report the matter to his or her supervisor, or other appropriate person
- if considered appropriate, an investigation will be undertaken and disciplinary measures will be taken as necessary

HOW TO MAKE A COMPLAINT

Informal approach:

If you want to make a complaint about bullying or harassment, you should begin by making it clear to the person concerned that you find their behaviour unacceptable and offensive. If you find this uncomfortable or too difficult to do, you should seek support (or for an initial approach to be made on your behalf) by a friend or colleague or a designated person at work. Very often, an informal approach like this will resolve the issue.

Responsibility also lies with the relevant Comhaltas unit – branch, Co. Board, Provincial Council or Ardchomhairle - to assist in finding a resolution.

Comhaltas Bunreacht notes

Each branch shall have the right “To expel any of its members for conduct which is deemed to be contrary to the Aims and Objectives of An Comhaltas and likely to bring An Comhaltas into disrepute, provided always that an opportunity be afforded to the member(s) in question to answer the allegations and that member(s) be duly notified in writing of the findings of such investigation. The aggrieved member(s) shall have a right to appeal in the first instance to the County Board and subsequently to the Provincial Council. The decision of the Provincial Council shall be final unless it decides to submit the matter to the Central Executive Council. Where no County Board is in operation the appeal in the first instance shall be directed to the Provincial Council”

Formal complaint:

Sometimes, an informal approach is not enough to resolve the issue. In situations where the bullying or harassment continues, you may need to consider making a formal complaint to the relevant authorities or the Workplace Relations Commission

If you are making a complaint to the Rights Commissioner Service, the Employment Appeals Tribunal or the Equality Tribunal you must use the new online complaint form (available by selecting ‘Make a complaint in relation to employment rights’ on www.workplacelrelations.ie

The [Workplace Relations Commission](http://www.workplacelrelations.ie) investigates and can mediate disputes in relation to the implementation of the employment equality legislation.

Complaints under the Employment Equality Acts must be brought **within 6 months** of the last act of harassment. This time limit can be increased to 12 months if “reasonable cause” for the delay can be shown. If a person is unable to pursue a claim effectively because of an intellectual or physiological disability a parent, guardian or other person acting on behalf of the complainant can bring a complaint.

You can also read or download a free [guide to taking an employment equality case](#) from the Community Law and Mediation (CLM) website. CLM also offers [free legal information, advice and mediation services](#)

Further information

See also COTHROMAÍOCHT/RESPECT*EQUALITY*OPPORTUNITY published by Comhaltas in 2021 and available on www.comhaltas.ie

Bullying in the Workplace:

Bullying at work, when it is related to one of the discriminatory grounds, is covered by the Employment Equality Acts. Harassment and bullying at work which is not linked to a discriminatory ground is a health and safety issue. The Health and Safety Authority provides information and advice on [bullying at work](#).

There is also a [Code of Practice for Employers and Employees on the Prevention and Resolution of Bullying at Work \(pdf\)](#). It aims to ensure that workplace bullying is not tolerated and that employers have procedures for dealing with bullying at work. You can get more information about [Bullying in the workplace](#).

The [Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission](#) has a general remit to promote equality and can give advice and, in some cases, legal assistance if you want to bring a claim of harassment under the Employment Equality Acts.

Other resources include:

[Code of Practice on Sexual Harassment and Harassment at Work](#)

[Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005-2021](#)

Bullying in the Voluntary Sector:

Two references below regarding Bullying and Harassment in the volunteer sector.

In both cases, the emphasis is placed on informal procedures when addressing such matters in the volunteer sector

[Volunteer Resource Centre](#)

Please note in particular the Code of Conduct (section 3) and reference to the Grievance & Disciplinary Procedures (section 4.6)

[Appendix 3: Grievance procedure \(wordpress.com\)](#)

Note in particular section 2 (definitions), section 3 (Behaviour) and section 5 (Resolution).

Also useful information from Health & Safety Authority:

Health and Safety Authority, The Metropolitan Building, James Joyce Street, Dublin 1, Ireland

*Tel : (01) 614 7000 **Locall:** 1890 28 93 89 , **Fax:** (01) 614 7020 **Homepage:** <http://www.hsa.ie> **Email:** wcu@hsa.ie*

NOTE:

Bullying & Harassment issues relating to jurisdictions outside of the Irish Republic require reference to recommended procedures in each jurisdiction.

This BULLYING & HARASSMENT PREVENTION POLICY may be used as a reference point in terms of definition, identity and recommended best practice in all Comhaltas units worldwide.