

Harassment and Bullying Policy



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Harassment is defined as unwanted conduct that violates a person's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment. Harassment can take many forms, arise from a variety of circumstances, and may be directed at an individual or a group.

It is the conduct itself and its impact on the individual, not the intention behind it that determines whether behaviour constitutes harassment. Everyone reacts differently, and what one person finds acceptable may be offensive or harmful to another. Harassment may also be unintentional on the part of the individual responsible.

Harassment and bullying based on any of the protected characteristics defined under the Equality Act 2010, including age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation, as well as any other form of personal characteristic or status, is a breach of the VetPartners Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy. Such behaviour can interfere with an individual's work performance, damage health, and undermine confidence and morale.

VetPartners does not tolerate harassment or bullying under any circumstances. Disciplinary action will be taken against any employee who breaches this policy.

Where the person responsible is not an employee of the business, all reasonably practicable steps will be taken to protect you from harassment during the course of your employment.

Responsibility of managers and all employees

- A)** Employees in supervisory or management roles must take immediate action, wherever possible, if they become aware of any harassment or bullying. They are also expected to offer appropriate support to any employee who raises a complaint.
- B)** All employees share a responsibility to always understand and comply with this policy. Any harassment or bullying must be reported to your line manager or a Director, this includes incidents involving employees, as well as third parties such as clients, suppliers, contractors, or other external contacts.
- C)** Harassment and bullying may also occur outside of working hours, including at work-related social functions, and these incidents should be reported in the same way.

Identifying harassment and bullying

Generally, harassment means conduct which is unwanted or offensive to the recipient. For example, sexual attention becomes sexual harassment if it persists once it has been made clear that the recipient regards it as offensive or unwelcome. One incident alone may constitute sexual harassment if it is sufficiently serious. Victimisation or making fun of an employee who has complained in good faith of bullying or harassment is in itself an act of harassment.

The following are examples of unacceptable conduct that will amount to a breach of this policy.

This list is not exhaustive:

Physical and non-verbal conduct: Unacceptable behaviours include, but are not limited to:

- Unnecessary touching, patting, pinching, or pushing,
- Compromising personal space,
- Assault or simulating sexual acts,
- Deliberately ignoring or excluding an individual,
- Displaying suggestive or offensive pictures, objects, or written materials,
- Leering, whistling, suggestive or offensive gestures.

Verbal conduct: Unacceptable behaviours include, but are not limited to:

- Persistent invitations to social activities after it has been made clear that such requests are unwelcome,
- Unwanted advances or personal attention,
- Offensive, suggestive, or inappropriate remarks,
- Threats, intimate or intrusive questions, innuendoes, lewd comments, obscene jokes, or the use of foul language,
- Inciting racial hatred, or engaging in racial or sexual abuse,
- Use of derogatory language,
- Inappropriate or offensive comments about an individual's dress, appearance, or physique.

What to do if you feel you are the subject of harassment

Informal procedure

If you believe you are experiencing behaviour that constitutes harassment or bullying, you are encouraged to make it clear to the individual concerned that their conduct is unwelcome or offensive. In some cases, this may be enough to stop the behaviour.

If the harassment continues, or if it is difficult or inappropriate for you to address the matter directly, for example, if the person is in a senior position or is not an employee of the Practice (such as a client, supplier, or contractor), you should report the issue verbally to your line manager or a Director as soon as possible.

If you do not wish to make a formal written complaint, the person handling your concern may be able to address the matter informally and confidentially by approaching the individual on your behalf.

Where appropriate, a mediation meeting between you and the individual involved, facilitated by a neutral mediator, may also be arranged, either at this stage or later in the process.

Formal procedure

If you wish to make a formal complaint, this should be made in writing to your line manager. The issue will then be dealt with in accordance with the Grievance Procedure.

Investigation Outcome and Disciplinary Action

Once the investigation has been completed, you will be informed of the outcome.

If the complaint is substantiated, appropriate disciplinary action will be taken against the individual responsible, in line with the Practice's disciplinary procedures.

It is important to note that serious incidents, even if they occur as a single event, may be considered **gross misconduct**. Which could result in dismissal without notice.