

Introduction to the Guidelines Undesirable Behaviour

The Network of university confidential councillors (NUVP) has produced guidelines based on the literature and their own experiences. These guidelines contain recommendations and tips about how employees and line managers who are confronted with undesirable behaviour can deal with this. The status of the guidelines can be described as a package of good practices. Universities can make these available to their personnel via the website.

The guidelines concern bullying, sexual intimidation, aggression and (workplace) disputes. Per subject, the guideline has been elaborated for the person who experiences one of these forms of undesirable behaviour, followed by a guideline for the line manager who is confronted with a situation in which this type of undesirable behaviour occurs (e.g. between employees).

Note for the reader:

Where the word he is used, he, she or them should be read.

Contents

Guidelines for dealing with bullying	2
Guidelines for dealing with sexual intimidation	3
Guidelines for dealing with (workplace) disputes	5
Guidelines for dealing with aggression	6

Guidelines for dealing with bullying

Definition

If you repeatedly have the feeling that you are excluded and/or belittled, annoying comments are made about you or unpleasant jokes, and you receive unnecessary and continual criticism, if working is made impossible for you, and/or people gossip about you.

When should you take action?

- if this affects you;
- if you are the target;
- if you see it happening to others;
- if you feel unsafe;
- if it influences the work atmosphere;
- and your performance suffers because of it.

What can you do yourself?

- state that it affects you;
- speak to the person who bullies you;
- and tell the person his behaviour must stop.

And if you dare not do that?

- first talk to somebody who you can confide in;
- approach your line manager;
- if the line manager does nothing with the report, then involve the confidential adviser;
- if your line manager is the bully, then involve the confidential adviser.

What should you not do?

- think that it is your fault;
- remain silent;
- start behaving in the same way.

Who can you involve and when?

- involve your line manager;
- involve the confidential adviser for advice and coaching;
- if necessary, involve third parties such as the company doctor, personnel care, company social worker.

Finally

Record what happens in writing: the words used, when it happens, how often it happens and how it affects you. Do not be afraid and do not believe what the other person says. Do not let the problem get the better of you. Do not think that reporting sick is a solution.

Guidelines for dealing with sexual intimidation

Definition

Sexual intimidation is where a person exhibits unwanted sexually tinted behaviour towards another. This behaviour can be verbal (comments, insinuations) and/or non-verbal (looking, certain gestures) and/or physical (touching).

When should you take action?

- if you are bothered by sexually tinted comments or physical contact;
- if you experience the non-verbal behaviour of the other person as sexually intimidating;
- if you are bothered by intimate or sexual behaviour between colleagues;
- if the atmosphere at work becomes marred;
- if you do not feel safe at work;
- if your work or your assessment of how people relate to you is influenced by your refusal to respond to advances.

What can you do yourself?

- speak to the perpetrator (for example: "I feel uneasy if you make comments about ...")
- define the behaviour that hinders you as concretely as possible;
- describe exactly which comments or actions it concerns;
- make clear how you would like to be treated instead;
- seek support from a colleague and ask an outsider for his opinion.

What can you expect if you speak to the person whose behaviour is affecting you?

As sexual intimidation often concerns subjective experiences, then you can expect very different responses from the "perpetrator". You should therefore be prepared for this.

For example:

- somebody can deny that he meant it as sexual intimidation;
- somebody can trivialise your opinion as "childish" or "prudish";
- somebody can play the victim ("you're ruining my career with your accusations.");
- somebody can become aggressive and accuse you of a false complaint;

or

- the person can take you seriously and say that in future they will take what you said into account. He was not aware of the effect of his behaviour.

What can you do if the other person responds negatively?

- stick to your message;
- do not enter into a discussion (do not give way to anger);
- keep repeating your message.

What should you definitely not do?

- think that it is your fault;
- think that you are prudish or petty;
- think that the problem will solve itself in due course.

What can you do if this happens to a colleague?

- take your colleague seriously;
- defend your colleague in intimidating situations;
- do not wait until your colleague takes action;
- ask whether he finds the behaviour acceptable or bothersome;
- with the approval of your colleague, inform the line manager;
- encourage the colleague to inform the line manager.

Who can you involve and when?

- involve your line manager if you expect a power struggle;
- involve your line manager if the perpetrator is your senior;
- involve the line manager of your boss if your boss is the perpetrator;
- involve the confidential adviser for advice and coaching;
- involve, if necessary, the company doctor, the welfare department and/or personnel care;
- inform the police if it concerns criminal acts such as stalking, sexual assault or rape.

Finally

Record what happens in writing: the words used, when it happens, how often it happens and how it affects you. Do not be afraid and do not believe what the other person says. Do not let the problem get the better of you. Keep emails or text messages as evidence.

Make sure you to set up a separate mailbox to receive undesirable mails (in the case of harassment/stalking). In this way, you can save the mails without having to read them yourself.

Guidelines for dealing with (workplace) disputes

Definition

There is a workplace dispute when, within the boundaries of an employing organisation, an individual or group feels frustrated or thwarted by another individual or group. This can concern the content of the work, work relationships and working conditions or employment conditions.

When should you take action?

- if a difference of opinion turns into a dispute;
- if the dispute influences your work or the working atmosphere;
- if your work performance is suboptimal as a result of the dispute;
- if you develop physical or psychological complaints as a result of a dispute;
- if reporting sick seems to be the only way out.

What can you do yourself?

- in the case of doubt, discuss your situation with somebody who you can confide in;
- be selective in the choice of person who you discuss the dispute with;
- assess whether you can arrange a meeting to talk about the dispute;
- report the problem to your line manager, the senior line manager or the personnel officer and ask for advice, support, supervision or mediation;
- speak in terms of your own perspective and give feedback on the behaviour of the other in a constructive manner;
- agree upon a time out in the case of an acute or vehement dispute;
- always have the responsible line manager confirm a timeout in writing;
- ensure that the agreements and/or solutions agreed upon are recorded in writing;
- agree after a period of time to evaluate whether the problem has indeed been solved.

What should you not do?

- inflame the dispute by talking about it with everybody;
- avoid normal contact with the dispute partner;
- report sick;
- resign from your job without carefully thinking this through.

Who can you involve and when?

- involve third parties if external expert guidance is needed or if you need a second opinion;
- involve the confidential adviser for advice and coaching;
- report that there is a dispute and ask advice from the personnel consultant, the welfare department or the company doctor if your work is affected;
- bear in mind that if mediation comes into play, then both parties must agree with the choice of mediator so that the guidance has a chance of success.

Finally

The following points of attention are important for preventing disputes:

- communicate in a clear and open manner;
- implement structural and open consultation at all levels: work meetings, progress interviews, performance and appraisal interviews.

Guidelines for dealing with aggression

Definition

Aggression is where a person is psychologically or physically harassed, threatened or attacked by colleagues or clients.

Aggression can be expressed in various forms:

- verbal (swearing, insulting, transmitting hostile messages, threats);
- psychological (harassment, pressurising, intimidating, threatening and irritating);
- physical (adopting a threatening posture, kicking, hitting, biting, grabbing).

We distinguish two types of aggression: aggression as an expression of anger or rage, and instrumental aggression. In the case of aggression due to anger or rage there is verbally or physically explosive behaviour. In the case of instrumental aggression there is strategic behaviour to manipulate others, to exert power to gain control over situations and to create an atmosphere of uncertainty as a result of which the normal course of events is influenced. Aggression is then instrument for getting things done.

What can you do yourself in the case of aggression as an expression of anger or rage?

- your non-verbal posture is important, remain calm and neutral and adopt an interested attitude;
- let the person express their rage, demonstrate that you are listening, but do not enter into a discussion;
- wait for the person to calm down a bit and then take control of the conversation;
- summarise the problem to demonstrate that you have understood it well and discuss possible solutions;
- keep to the rules of the organisation and share these in a friendly but consistent manner.

What else can you do?

- report this incident to your line manager and discuss it in the work meeting;
- contact the internal security service;
- in the case of physical aggression: warn colleagues or contact the alarm centre;
- immediately report the incident to the police;
- if after the case has been solved, you have the feeling that you want to talk further, then contact the confidential adviser.

What should you not do in the case of a fit of anger from another?

- enter into a discussion;
- point to or touch the person.

What can you do to tackle instrumental aggression?

- do not walk away, but do not enter into the fray either;
- do not let the other see that you are scared by the aggression;
- a good response is to express your own opinions assertively without wishing to win the fight or judge the behaviour of the other;
- stick to your opinion and keep returning to your own message. Your strength lies in repetition;
- a person usually calms down if you simply listen;
- address the perpetrator by his first name;
- maintain eye contact with him;
- speak calmly and in a firm voice;
- speak to the person from the **perspective of your experience** (course in in Dutch);
- if his body language becomes aggressive or threatening, then respond in the opposite manner by non-verbally assuming a non-aggressive posture as well.

What should you not do in the case of instrumental aggression?

- do not let the situation take its course;

- do not give in, experience teaches that giving in leads to further aggression;
- do not allow your emotions to control you at that moment;
- ask for time to think and follow up on the situation later.

Who can you involve and when?

- always report incidents to your line manager;
- discuss the incident during a work consultation or with your colleagues;
- in the case of physical violence, report the incident to the security service and if necessary to the police;
- do not accept the incident being trivialised or dismissed;
- contact the line manager of your boss if your boss is the aggressor;
- contact the line manager of your boss if your boss does not take the situation seriously;
- discuss the situation with the confidential adviser for advice and coaching;
- if needs be, involve a third party such as the company doctor, welfare department or a mediator.

Finally

Do not accept aggressive behaviour! Your employer is obliged to protect you from aggression and its consequences. Record what happens in writing: the words used, when it happens, how often it happens and how it affects you. Keep emails which document the behaviour.

Do not allow the problem to overwhelm you, remain calm and state your own opinions assertively without entering into the fray and without wanting to win.

Remember: (verbal) violence is a sign of the powerlessness of the aggressor. He or she has a problem and not you.