

Purpose

At Accordience, we are committed to maintaining a positive and inclusive work environment where everyone is treated with dignity and respect. We believe that all employees should feel valued, supported, and free from any form of bullying or harassment. This policy explains what bullying and harassment are, how we can prevent them, and how we handle concerns if they arise.

We know that harassment or bullying can harm individuals, teams and the overall culture of the company. It can result in low morale, poor performance and have a negative impact on wellbeing. As part of our commitment to creating a respectful workplace, we will not tolerate any form of bullying or harassment, whether it happens in the office, at work-related social and client events, or online.

What is Bullying and Harassment?

Bullying is repeated, intentional behaviour that targets an individual or group, often to cause distress or harm. It creates a negative environment and can include verbal, physical, or social actions designed to undermine someone's confidence or wellbeing.

Some examples of bullying:

- Repeated verbal insults or name-calling.
- Social exclusion or isolating someone from work activities.
- Making offensive comments, diminishing colleagues through language or behaviour, or degrading remarks.
- Creating an atmosphere of fear or intimidation.

Harassment involves any unwanted physical, verbal or non-verbal behaviour that has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creates a hostile, degrading, offensive or intimidating environment. A single incident can amount to harassment. Harassment does not need to be intentional, but if it offends or humiliates someone, it may be considered harassment.

Harassment may involve conduct of a sexual nature (sexual harassment), or it may be related to a protected characteristic. Sexual harassment is dealt with under our Sexual Harassment Policy.

Protected Characteristics

The following characteristics are protected under the Equality Act 2010, and harassment related to any of these characteristics is considered unlawful:

- **Age**
- **Disability**
- **Gender reassignment**
- **Marriage and civil partnership**
- **Pregnancy and maternity**
- **Race (including colour, nationality, and ethnic or national origin)**
- **Religion or belief**
- **Sex**
- **Sexual orientation**

Examples of harassment:

- Unwelcome jokes, comments, or advances related to someone's gender or sexual orientation.
- Making offensive remarks or spreading discriminatory jokes about someone's race or religion.
- Physical behaviour, such as unwanted touching or intimidation based on someone's appearance or disability.
- Unwanted sexual advances, suggestive comments, or inappropriate jokes.

It's important to note:

- Harassment can occur even if the individual who is experiencing it is not the intended target of the behaviour. For example, someone may make an offensive joke about a specific race, and although the person making the joke may not direct it toward a particular individual, it can still create a hostile environment for others who are offended by it.
- Harassment can also happen if someone is wrongly perceived to have a protected characteristic and as a result is subjected to unfair treatment.

Victimisation

Victimisation occurs when someone is treated unfairly or harassed because they've made a protected act. A protected act may include a complaint of bullying or harassment, giving evidence or information in connection with proceedings under the Equality Act 2010 or supporting someone else who has raised a concern. At Accordience, we will not tolerate victimisation. Any act of victimisation will be treated seriously and may lead to disciplinary action.

Examples of victimisation:

- Being overlooked for a promotion because you raised a bullying complaint.
- Being excluded or ostracised by colleagues after supporting a colleague in reporting harassment.

Your Responsibilities

At Accordience, we all have a role to play in ensuring bullying and harassment do not take place. It's important that we treat each other with kindness and respect at all times. This means being mindful of how our words and actions affect others.

Managers have an additional responsibility to set an example and take quick action if they observe any bullying or harassment. Everyone must take this policy seriously and speak up if they feel they or someone else is being treated unfairly.

What Should You Do If You Experience Bullying or Harassment?

If you ever feel that you are being harassed or bullied, we want you to feel comfortable bringing it to our attention. Here's what you can do:

- **Speak up:** if you feel safe and comfortable doing so, let the person know that their behaviour is making you uncomfortable. Sometimes, they may not realise how their actions are affecting you.
- **Talk to someone:** if you don't want to speak directly to the person involved, or if you feel the issue isn't resolved, talk to your manager or a member of the People Team.

What Happens When You Report Bullying or Harassment?

If you make a complaint, we will treat it seriously and confidentially. Here's how we'll respond:

Informal Resolution

- **Initial conversation:** if appropriate, the manager or a member of the People Team may speak directly to the person accused of bullying or harassment. Alternatively, they may facilitate a conversation between the individual making the complaint and the person involved to allow both parties to express their concerns and clarify any misunderstandings.
- **Mediation:** if direct conversation isn't effective or appropriate, we might arrange for a neutral third party to mediate a discussion between the individuals. This can help address the issues in a fair and balanced manner and work toward a resolution.
- **Support and guidance:** in some cases, we may provide support to the person involved in the alleged bullying or harassment, such as offering guidance on how to improve their behaviour or raise awareness of the impact their actions may have.

Formal Resolution

If informal resolution doesn't work, or if you prefer a more formal approach, we'll conduct a more formal process. In situations where the allegations are particularly serious, the company may need to proceed with an investigation, even if the employee chooses not to pursue it themselves. This formal process may involve:

- **Grievance procedure:** you will be invited to submit a formal grievance in writing, outlining your complaint in detail.
- **Investigation:** an impartial investigator will be appointed to review the grievance. This may include interviews with the person accused, any witnesses, and a review of relevant evidence.
- **Fair process:** the process will be fair and impartial, ensuring that everyone involved has an opportunity to present their side of the story. All information will be treated confidentially.

Action

If the allegations of bullying or harassment are upheld, appropriate action will be taken. This could include holding a disciplinary hearing that could result in a range of sanctions up to and including dismissal, depending on the severity of the behaviour. If the allegations are not upheld, we will inform you of the outcome and may discuss any further actions that may be required.

Prevention and Support

At Accordience, we are committed to creating an environment that prevents bullying and harassment before it starts. We offer:

- **Guidance:** we provide support and resources to help create a respectful workplace, including advice on recognising bullying or harassment and responding appropriately to concerns.
- **Support services:** we give access to our Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP), which provide counselling services, or access to wellbeing resources to help if you've been affected.

Conclusion

At Accordience, we strive to create a workplace where everyone feels valued and respected. Bullying and harassment undermine that goal, and we are committed to ensuring that everyone at the company works in an environment free from such behaviour. If you ever feel you've been bullied or harassed, please don't hesitate to reach out. We're here to support you.