

Parish of Keynsham

Prevention of Bullying and Harassment Policy

Statement of commitment

The Church is required by God to foster relationships of the utmost integrity, truthfulness and trustworthiness. Harassment and bullying, any form of abuse – however rare - will not be tolerated in the Parish.

All complaints of harassment and bullying will be taken seriously and thoroughly investigated.

Responsibility

This policy applies to all clergy, employees, office holders, volunteers and parishioners who have personal responsibility for conducting themselves in a manner consistent with this Policy in all their church-related activities and up-holding the principles of dignity, respect and equal opportunities. They are expected to comply with the provisions of the policy and help others to achieve the aims of this policy.

What is bullying and harassment?

Any behaviour that could potentially undermine someone's dignity and respect should be regarded as unacceptable.

Bullying and harassment includes any behaviour which an individual or group knows, or ought reasonably to know, could have the potential effect of humiliating, intimidating or isolating an individual or group to the extent that it causes actual harm or distress to the target(s). It can take many forms, including face-to-face conversation or written communication including e-mail, texting or telephone conversations.

Bullying is offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour that serves to undermine, humiliate or disparage the recipient. It is most easily identified when it is continuous, frequent, repetitive and part of an overall pattern. However, some abuse is serious enough to be recognised even if the behaviour occurs only once and is therefore not defined as bullying.

Harassment, in general terms, is unwanted conduct affecting the dignity of men and women in the workplace and Parish. It may be related to age, sex, sexual orientation, race, disability, religious belief (including theology or churchmanship), nationality or any personal characteristic of the individual, and may be persistent or an isolated incident. The important point is that the actions or comments are viewed as demeaning and unacceptable to the recipient.

Lack of intent does not diminish, excuse or negate the impact on the target, or the distress caused.

On the whole it is safest to take the view that if a person complains that they are being bullied or harassed, then they have a grievance, which should be dealt with regardless of whether or not their complaint accords with a standard definition.

How can bullying and harassment be recognised?

Bullying and harassment may manifest itself in a variety of different ways. It is usually persistent, and often unpredictable, and can amount to severe psychological intimidation. It is insidious and undermines the ability and confidence of the person at the receiving end of the bullying and harassment. It can lead to fear, isolation, demotivation and reduced output, poor concentration, symptoms of stress, a noticeable level of sickness absence, psychological, emotional and physical harm.

Examples

This list of behaviours is not exhaustive but gives a clear indication of the sorts of actions that constitute bullying or harassment:

- removing areas of responsibility without discussion or notice
- isolating someone or deliberately ignoring or excluding them from activities
- consistently attacking someone's professional or personal standing
- setting out to make someone appear incompetent
- persistently picking on someone in front of others
- deliberate sabotage of work or actions
- deliberately withholding information or providing incorrect information.
- overloading with work/reducing deadlines without paying attention to any protest
- displays of offensive material
- use of e-mails to reprimand, insult or otherwise inform someone of their apparent failing, either to the individual or to third parties
- repeatedly shouting or swearing in public or in private
- spreading malicious rumours to third parties
- public humiliation by constant innuendo, belittling and 'putting down'
- personal insults and name-calling
- aggressive gestures, verbal threats and intimidation
- persistent threats about security
- making false accusations
- aggressive bodily posture or physical contact
- talking/shouting directly into someone's face
- direct physical intimidation, violence or assault

On the other hand, it is important to distinguish between bullying, and behaviour that is reasonable in a particular context. For example, there may be occasions where shortcomings in performance are being addressed and more incisive behaviour is interpreted as bullying simply because the recipient is unused to being challenged or asked to account for their actions.

What are the effects?

If left unchecked bullying and harassment can make people feel anxious and humiliated, they may also feel angry and frustrated at being unable to cope. Others may become ill, frightened, stressed and/or experience a loss of self-confidence and self-esteem.

False accusation

False accusations are a serious matter. The behaviour of anyone who is found to have made an unfounded, deliberately malicious complaint or allegation will be regarded with the utmost seriousness and where possible formal action taken. A member of either the clergy or laity could be subject to an action for defamation if they have made false accusations against someone else. Although false accusations are a serious matter, this should not deter the raising of genuine concerns.

Recommended Guidelines for Dealing with inappropriate behaviour

When any incident of inappropriate behaviour involving clergy, employees, office holders, volunteers or parishioners occurs in the parish, the following steps are recommended if the incident is to be resolved within church structures. These steps are without prejudice to the legal rights and responsibilities of the individuals involved:

1. Making a note of the incident

In the event of an incident of inappropriate behaviour the people involved are strongly advised to write down exactly what happened, when, where and in the presence of whom. Such a record should include any words used and witness statements if possible and should be made as soon as possible after the alleged incident occurred.

2. Initial informal response

The first step in response to an incident is for the person affected to consider requesting the alleged perpetrator(s) either orally or in writing not to repeat that behaviour. It is possible that sometimes the individual is unaware of the effect they are having. The person affected might go to the perpetrator alone or with a friend or follow up with a friend if a one-to-one approach does not work. It is hoped that many incidents will be resolved with understanding and respect in this way.

3. Formal Response

If such a response does not lead to a satisfactory outcome; or if the person affected does not wish to confront the alleged perpetrator; or if the person affected thinks that a more significant response is required, then further action is necessary. At this stage, the person affected might wish to consult a friend or colleague, or a member of the clergy, or the Area Dean, Archdeacon or the PCC Lay Chair for advice. Where relevant they might wish to take advice on their legal rights.

If a member of the clergy is the alleged perpetrator and it has not been possible to resolve the matter locally, then it is appropriate to approach the Archdeacon of Bath.

If a member of staff is the alleged perpetrator then the matter should be dealt with through the Parish grievance and disciplinary procedure.

Any incident within the parish that does not involve a complaint against a member of the clergy or staff should be handled within the parish by the clergy team, assisted by the PCC Lay chair and other such PCC members as appropriate (e.g. churchwardens of the church involved). On occasions it may be appropriate to seek mediation from a neutral person outside the Parish. Where bullying and/or harassment is found to have occurred the Parish will do all that they can to support the individual and eliminate this type of behaviour.

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