

Dignity at Work Policy

It is our aim that all complaints of harassment, bullying or victimisation will be taken seriously and thoroughly investigated with care and sensitivity for all parties involved and appropriate action taken.

All individuals have the right to be treated with dignity and respect whether at work or acting as a volunteer and should be able to operate without fear of harassment or bullying.

Harassment, bullying and victimisation are forms of discrimination, which are not only unlawful, but can affect the health, ministry and work performance of individuals.

Wherever an allegation of bullying and harassment involves a child or vulnerable adult the case will be dealt with by the Safeguarding Officer through the Safeguarding Policy. In cases where there may be wider safeguarding implications or concerns the Diocesan Safeguarding Team may be consulted.

The Dignity at Work Policy applies to those engaged in all forms of work or ministry whether Clergy, Churchwardens, Trustees and all those who faithfully serve the church including volunteers and members of the congregation.

Behaviour that could potentially undermine an individual's dignity and respect is regarded as unacceptable. Any behaviour involving misuse of power that could have the potential effect of offending, humiliating, intimidating or isolating an individual or group, should be regarded as unacceptable. This unacceptable behaviour is considered bullying or harassment when it causes actual harm or distress to an individual, normally but not exclusively, after a series of incidents over a period.

What is Harassment?

The legal definition of harassment is set out in the [Equality Act \(2010\)](#). Harassment is unwanted conduct affecting the dignity of an individual where the actions or comments are viewed as demeaning and unacceptable to the recipient.

Different people find different things unacceptable and everyone has the right to decide what is acceptable and to have their feelings respected by others. Behaviour that any reasonable person would realise would be likely to offend will be harassment without the recipient having to make it clear in advance that behaviour of that type is not acceptable, i.e. inappropriate touching. In some cases, it may not be clear what behaviour is unwelcome, e.g. "banter" flirting. In these cases, first-time conduct which unintentionally causes offence will not be harassment, but it will become harassment if the conduct continues after the recipient has made it clear that such behaviour is unacceptable to them.

Harassment, including sexual harassment, may amount to a criminal offence under the [Protection from Harassment Act 1997](#).

Racial harassment, or racism, is an incident or series of incidents intended or likely to intimidate, offend or harm an individual or group because of their ethnic origin, colour, race, religion or nationality. This could include derogatory or degrading comments, verbal insults or threats, exclusion from normal workplace conversations or activities.

What is Bullying?

Bullying is a general form of harassment that is not based on race, sex or any of the equality characteristics. It is described by ACAS as being characterised by offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour or abuse or misuse of power through means to undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient.

Bullying is most easily identified when it is continuous, frequent, repetitive. It is recognised by the negative impact it has on the recipient. It is often unpredictable and can amount to severe psychological intimidation. It is insidious and undermines the ability and confidence of the person suffering from it.

Examples of bullying behaviour are removing areas of responsibility without discussion or notice, setting out to make someone appear incompetent, persistently picking on someone in front of others, overloading with work, making false accusations, isolating someone or deliberately ignoring or excluding them from activities.

However, on the other hand, it is important to distinguish between bullying and behaviour that is reasonable where shortcomings in performance are being addressed and more incisive behaviour is interpreted as bullying.

What is Victimisation?

ACAS describes victimisation as when someone is treated less favourably because of being involved with a discrimination or harassment complaint. This may be because the individual has made a discrimination or harassment complaint, they are supporting someone else's complaint, acting as a witness in a complaint, etc.

What is Spiritual Abuse?

Spiritual abuse may occur on its own or alongside other forms of abuse, such as physical, sexual or domestic abuse. Spiritual abuse shares some of the hallmarks of bullying and harassment, including intimidation, manipulation and inducing fear. What makes it distinct are the elements associated with religious belief including coercion through religious position.

The key aspect of spiritual abuse is that its religious context in which the abuse occurs and ways in which people are controlled through misuse and abuse of scripture, divine position, spiritual threats and fear of spiritual consequences. All these features can be used to control or coerce.

Those in leadership need to be aware that what is intended as strong leadership can sometimes tip over into bullying behaviour.

Impact of bullying and harassment

Bullying and harassment harms the recipients. Those who are bullied or harassed by a more senior colleague are likely to avoid seeking help or guidance from them to avoid future incidents, which can compromise their work. They can become demotivated, suffer loss of confidence, anxiety and self-doubt.

Confidentiality

All matters associated with bullying and harassment will be treated with absolute confidentiality and no action will be taken without the consent of the person who feels they are the victim, unless taking no action places that person or others at risk. If criminal activity is alleged or suspected, we are compelled by law to inform the relevant authorities.

Support

It is important that support is offered informally at the earliest opportunity to someone who may be experiencing bullying and harassment. An initial conversation at this stage could prevent a worse situation developing and avoid the need to enter into more formal procedures.

Procedure

Wherever a report of bullying and harassment involves a child or vulnerable adult, the case will be dealt with by the Safeguarding Officer. Please contact Hazel safeguarding@stmaryswesthorsley.co.uk 07786 391 301.

Informal Stage

It may be possible to resolve matters informally. The perpetrator may not know that their behaviour is unwelcome or upsetting. An informal discussion may help them to understand the effects of their behaviour and to agree to change it. The person being bullied or harassed may feel able to approach the person themselves or with the help of someone else, such as their Team Leader or a Churchwarden. A note of the date and what was said and done should be kept as evidence if the unacceptable behaviour continues.

Mediation and Restorative Justice

It is recommended that the use of mediation and restorative justice is considered at an early stage before entering formal procedures. Wherever possible this route should be used as it is more likely to result in a successful resolution of the issues.

Mediation is about resolving disagreements and disputes. A neutral third party works with those in dispute to help them to reach an agreement.

Restorative Justice aims to resolve conflict and repair harm. A third party encourages those who have caused harm to acknowledge the impact of what they have done and give them an opportunity to make reparation. For those who have suffered harm, it offers the opportunity to have this acknowledged and amends made. The Churchwardens or Phil Herrington are available for this process.

Formal Stage

If the informal stage does not resolve matters, or the situation is too serious to be dealt with informally, the person being bullied or harassed can make a formal complaint by using the formal procedure. Contact Phil Herrington or Churchwardens.

THIS POLICY WAS APPROVED BY ST MARY'S PCC ON. 20th May 2025

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