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1. Guidelines
for
SUPERVISORS
in the event
of
AGGRESSION
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*These are guidelines for supervisors on how to act in the event of aggression in the workplace.
The guidelines have been created under the responsibility of the Netwerk Universitaire Vertrouwenspersonen Nederland (network of university confidential advisors of the Netherlands).
Use of this text by third parties for purposes outside of those of the Netwerk UVP is not permitted.
Contact address: J.J.Brucceling@tudelft.nl*

Definition

Aggression is considered present in instances where a person is psychologically or physically harassed, threatened, or attacked.

Aggression can manifest itself in different ways:

- verbally (swearing, insults, sending hostile messages, threats);
- psychologically (harassment, putting pressure on someone, intimidation, threats, and being bothersome);
- physically (threatening posture, kicking, hitting, biting, grabbing).

We distinguish between two forms of aggression: aggression as an expression of anger or rage and instrumental aggression. In circumstances of rage-based aggression, there is volatile verbal or physical behaviour. Instrumental aggression involves strategic behaviour to manipulate others, exercise power to turn a situation to your favour, and to create an atmosphere of uncertainty which has an impact on the normal course of affairs. In these situations, aggression is the instrument used to accomplish things.

Supervisor's task

The *Arbowet* (occupational health and safety act) contains requirements for ensuring safety, protecting health, and encouraging the well-being of staff members. In short, the supervisor must ensure a safe and enjoyable work environment.

Since sexual harassment is considered a risk to the work environment caused by human behaviours, this means that the task of the supervisor extends beyond just the protection of an individual staff member where appropriate. The supervisor must take active and preventive measures to protect staff members from aggression.

If you as a supervisor notice aggression:

- Talk to the offender about their behaviour.
- Make concrete agreements about improving that behaviour, establish these in writing, and have the party sign to acknowledge having seen them.
- Schedule a time frame and evaluate the agreements.
- Inform the offender of the consequences of their behaviour and confirm these in writing.

- Use the job performance interview to evaluate these again.

¹ In this text “they” means “he or she” and “their” means “his or her.”

- Consult the confidential advisor for recommendations on how to address the situation.
- If necessary, contact the occupational health officer, occupational social services, or staff care services.
- Record the matter in the personnel file.
- If necessary, consult with Human Resources and/or the legal department and take disciplinary measures.

If a staff member comes to you with a complaint:

- Acknowledge that the person making the complaint has taken a big step and take them seriously.
- ask them what they wish to achieve with the complaint.
- Investigate the facts and proceed according to the steps under “if someone reports aggression to you”.

Someone reports aggression that involves colleagues to you:

- Do not take sides.
- Focus on behaviour.
- Collect information quickly.
- Take note of the differences in the accounts or perceptions of the parties.
- Base yourself on the facts instead of emotions.
- Listen to both sides of the story.
- Condemn the behaviour without making a judgement and indicate how you want interactions on the floor to be, then proceed according to the steps under “if you notice aggression”.

What preventive measures should you take?

- Be aware that you have to set an example and act accordingly.
- Inform your work unit of policies regarding undesirable behaviour.
- Include questions about perceptions of the work environment as permanent parts of job performance interviews.
- Be alert in the work environment and regularly check how staff members experience it.
- Keep a close eye on (long-term) absenteeism.
- Ask about prevention of aggression at RI&E.

2. Guidelines
for
SUPERVISORS
in the event of
(WORK) CONFLICTS

These are guidelines for supervisors on how to act in the event of work conflict workplace.

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Contact address: J.J.Bruggeling@tudelft.nl

Definition

A work conflict is considered present if, within the confines of a work organisation, an individual or group feels frustrated or hampered by another individual or group. This may involve work content, work relationships, work conditions, or employment conditions.

Supervisor's task

The supervisor must ensure a safe and enjoyable work environment. The supervisor has a dual responsibility in these situations: to discuss conflicts between staff members and to encourage the parties to arrive at a solution (themselves), but also not to ignore conflicts that involve their own management (style). The latter requires having the courage to admit that there is a conflict and that you are playing a role in it yourself. It may be necessary to request advice or support, e.g. from a supervisor higher in the chain or a staff consultant.

In order to prevent conflicts, the following points are important:

- Management style has a significant impact on whether or not conflicts arise. Employees who feel that they are supported and trusted by their supervisor are better equipped to handle conflicts of interest and differing viewpoints.
- Appreciation and recognition stimulate self-confidence and motivation. On the other hand, lack of trust may breed workplace conflict. For this reason, it is also important to take worrisome results from staff surveys, signs from staff members, well-being reviews, and staff satisfaction reviews very seriously and to take measures in a timely fashion.

What preventive measures can you take?

- Communicate clearly and openly.
- Identify positive and negative performance aspects and record them.
- Be clear about material aspects and employment conditions; voice your expectations, but do not create false expectations either.
- Be clear about responsibilities and record them.
- Pay attention to the staff member's perspective of the future via scheduling for work, training programmes, and guidance.
- Promptly inform staff members about developments within the organisation.

Intervention options in the event of work conflict

If there is threat of (mutual) conflict among your staff members: engage them in discussion, establish the expectation that they resolve it, and make clear arrangements for progress.

Record everything and where necessary, ask the Human Resources department for support.

If you personally have a conflict with one of your staff members: note this as a (potential) conflict and make arrangements together on how you plan to resolve the situation. Bear in mind that you are in a more powerful position and the staff member may feel threatened by this. Who can you look to (together) for support? The staff consultant or the occupational social services worker can give you advice on the steps to take.

In the event of heated, serious conflict: always be sure to contact the staff consultant or your own supervisor and where necessary, schedule a “time-out” to avoid unpleasant escalations and set aside time to cool off. In doing so, make sure you create clear arrangements regarding the continued approach to the conflict (when will there be another discussion, with whom, etc.).

Calling in a mediator is an option if both parties agree to it. An internal or external mediator is available at various work locations.

Conflict involving calling in sick

If possible, the supervisor will specify that calling in sick is not a solution during a work conflict and a time-out will be suggested.

If a staff member still calls in sick as a result of a work conflict, it is desirable that the occupational health officer be involved for an evaluation, preferably within 48 hours. Sometimes, the situation gets substantially out of hand and calling in sick is coupled with many emotions and physical symptoms such as exhaustion, headache, and sleeping poorly. These are in fact logical responses to a conflict situation and it does not necessarily mean that the party involved is “sick” or unable to work.

The occupational health officer will also discern whether there are actual medical issues at hand that will hinder the staff member in performing their work and will record this evaluation in writing.

Conflict during re-integration

If a conflict arises during the course of re-integration it is important to detect this promptly and address it. The *Sociaal Medisch Overleg* (SMO - sociomedical assembly) will then be the appointed consulting body in finding a solution. In these situations it is also important to keep illness and conflict separate and to have someone else mediate the conflict.

In accordance with the *Wet Verbetering Poortwachter* (better gatekeeping act), everything must be properly documented.

If there is threat of conflict regarding the question of whether sufficient re-integration efforts are being made or about fulfilling the concept of appropriate work, both the employer and employee are permitted to ask the UWV (Dutch unemployment agency) for their expert opinion in these situations.

The role of the occupational health officer

If a staff member still calls in sick as a result of a work conflict, it is desirable that the occupational health officer be involved.

The occupational health officer will leave the resolution of the conflict to the employer and the employee, but may play an advisory role in the matter.

They will also discern whether there are actual medical issues at hand that will hinder the staff member in performing their work and will record this evaluation in writing.

Additional information

- When assessing a conflict, work on the basis of the facts and not emotions.
- If necessary, involve the assistance of an intermediary at an early stage; this can restore the balance of power between the parties.
- Ensure that both parties agree with the choice of mediator.

3. Guidelines

for

SUPERVISORS

in the event of

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

These are guidelines for supervisors on how to act in the event of sexual harassment in the workplace.

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Contact address: J.J.Bruggeling@tudelft.nl

Definition

Sexual harassment is considered present when a person experiences specific behaviour or attention from someone else as undesirable and sexual in nature.

This attention may be verbal (comments, insinuations), non-verbal (staring, certain gestures), and/or physical (touching).

Supervisor's task

The *Arbowet* (occupational health and safety act) contains requirements for ensuring safety, protecting health, and encouraging the well-being of staff members. In short, the supervisor must ensure a safe and enjoyable work environment.

Since sexual harassment is considered a risk to the work environment based on human behaviours, this means that the task of the supervisor extends beyond just the protection of an individual staff member where appropriate. The superior must take active and preventive measures to protect employees from sexual harassment or to address inappropriate sexual behaviour.

If you as a supervisor notice sexual harassment:

- Talk to the offender about their² behaviour.
- Make concrete agreements about improving that behaviour, establish these in writing, and have the party sign to acknowledge having seen them.
- Schedule a time frame and evaluate the agreements.
- Inform the offender of the consequences of their behaviour and confirm these in writing.
- Use the job performance interview to evaluate these again.
- Consult the confidential advisor for recommendations on how to address the situation.
- If necessary, contact the occupational health officer, occupational social services, or staff care services.
- Record the matter in the personnel file.
- If necessary, consult with Human Resources and/or the legal department and take disciplinary measures.

If a staff member comes to you with a complaint:

- Acknowledge that the person making the complaint has taken a big step and take them seriously.

² In this text "they" means "he or she" and "their" means "his or her."

- Ask them what they hope to gain with the complaint.
- Ask about the facts and do not get involved with the emotions.
- Request that the informant provide a (written) report of the situations that occur including language use, time, location, and concrete descriptions, then proceed using the steps listed under “if someone reports sexual harassment to you”.

If someone reports sexual harassment by or towards a colleague to you:

- Do not take sides.
- Focus on behaviour.
- Collect information quickly.
- Look for the differences in the accounts or perceptions of the parties.
- Base yourself on the facts instead of emotions.
- Listen to both sides of the story.
- Condemn the behaviour without making a judgement and indicate how you want interactions on the floor to be, then proceed according to the steps under “if you notice sexual harassment”.

What preventive measures should you take?

- Be aware that you have to set an example and act accordingly.
- Inform your work unit of policies regarding undesirable behaviour.
- Include questions about perceptions of the work environment as permanent parts of job performance interviews.
- Be alert in the work environment and regularly look into the experiences of staff members.
- Keep a close eye on (long-term) absenteeism.
- Ask about prevention of sexual harassment at RI&E.

4. Guidelines

for

SUPERVISORS

in the

event of

BULLYING

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These are guidelines for supervisors on how to act in the event of bullying in the workplace.

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Contact address: J.J.Bruggeling@tudelft.nl

Definition

Bullying is considered to be present if someone repeatedly gets the sense that they are being excluded or belittled, that rude comments or passive-aggressive jokes are being made, that there is gossiping or unnecessary criticism, and/or that they are becoming isolated.

Supervisor's task

The supervisor must ensure a safe and enjoyable work environment. (Arbowet 1998).

Standard practice

If you as a supervisor notice bullying:

- Speak to the bully or bullies about their behaviour.
- Make concrete agreements about improving that behaviour and record these
- Schedule a time frame and evaluate the agreements.
- Inform the bully or bullies of the consequences of their behaviour and confirm these in writing.
- Use the job performance interview to discuss bullying as well.
- Consult the confidential advisor for recommendations on how to address the situation.
- Contact third parties if you feel it is useful (occupational health officer, occupational social services, staff care services).
- Create a file.
- Consult with the HR and legal departments and take measures if the behaviour does not improve: consider the following disciplinary measures: (hier link leggen naar disciplinaire maatregelen tudelft!) warning, written reprimand, suspension, dismissal.

Someone reports bullying

If it involves a colleague or third parties:

- Do not take sides.
- Focus on behaviour.
- Collect information quickly.
- Take note of the differences in the accounts or perceptions of the parties.

- Listen to both sides of the story.
- See the information under 1 as well.

What preventive measures should you take?

- Include questions about perceptions of the work environment as permanent parts of job performance interviews.
- Regularly ask staff members about their perception of the work environment.
- For example, regularly ask staff members during team consultations about their perceptions of the work environment and their opinions on colleague friendliness and safety in the workplace.
- Inform your work unit of policies regarding undesirable behaviour.
- Be aware that you are in a position where you have to set an example and act accordingly.

Additional information

- Discourage bullying behaviour without passing judgement or criminalising it
- Base yourself on the facts instead of emotions.

Guidelines for staff members, colleagues, and informants:

5. How to act in the event of aggression
6. How to act in the event of (work) conflicts
7. How to act in the event of sexual harassment
8. How to act in the event of bullying

5. GUIDELINES:

HOW TO ACT

in the event

of

AGGRESSION

N

Definition

Aggression is considered present in instances where a person is psychologically or physically harassed, threatened, or attacked.

Aggression can manifest itself in different ways:

- Verbally (swearing, insults, sending hostile messages, threats)
- Psychologically (harassment, putting pressure on someone, intimidation, threats, and being bothersome)
- Physically (threatening posture, kicking, hitting, biting, grabbing)

We distinguish between two forms of aggression: aggression as an expression of anger or rage and instrumental aggression. In circumstances of rage-based aggression, there is volatile verbal or physical behaviour. Instrumental aggression involves strategic behaviour to manipulate others, exercise power to turn a situation to your favour, and to create an atmosphere of uncertainty which impacts the normal course of affairs. In these situations, aggression is the instrument used to accomplish things.

What can you do in the event of aggression as an expression of rage?

Your non-verbal cues are important: remain calm and take a neutral yet interested approach:

- Let the person vent in a controlled way: show that you are listening, but do not turn it

into a discussion.

- Wait until the person has calmed down a bit and then take control of the discussion.
- Summarise the problem to show that you understood it well and discuss the possible solutions.
- Stick to the rules in the organisation and share these with them in a friendly but consistent way.

What else can you do?

- Report the incident to your supervisor and discuss it in the work meeting.
- Contact the company security service.
- In the event of physical aggression, alert your colleagues.
- File a police report immediately.
- If you still feel you want to discuss the matter after it has been resolved, contact the confidential advisor.

What should you avoid doing when someone has a rage outburst?

- Engage them in discussion.
- Point at or touch them.

What should you do to cut instrumental aggression off at the pass?

- Do not walk away, but do not engage in a fight either.
- Do not show the person that you are being affected by their aggressive behaviour.

A good response is to express your own observations in an assertive way, but without trying to start a fight or judging the person's behaviour:

- Stick to your opinion and continue repeating your message. Your strength here is in repetition.
- People will typically calm down if you just listen.
- Address the offender by their first name.
- Make eye contact.
- Speak calmly, but with a firm tone.
- Address them with an ["I" Message](#).
- If their body language is aggressive or threatening, respond in the opposite way, by non-verbally taking a non-aggressive stance.

What should you avoid doing in the event of instrumental aggression?

- Do not let the situation run its course.
- Do not give in: experience has shown that giving in leads to further aggression.
- Do not let your emotions take control at that time.
- Ask for some time to think and return to the situation later.

Who to involve and when?

- Always report incidents to your supervisor.
- Discuss the incident in a work meeting or with your colleagues.
- Report the incident to the security service if there is physical violence and file a report with the police if necessary.

- If the incident is downplayed or dismissed, do not accept that behaviour.
- If your boss is the aggressor, contact their supervisor.
- Contact the supervisor in the next highest position if your boss does not take the incident seriously.
- Discuss the situation with the confidential advisor for advice and coaching.
- If necessary, involve third parties such as the occupational health officer, occupational health services, or a mediator.

In closing

- Do not accept aggressive behaviour! Your employer is required to protect you from aggression and its effects.
- Write down what happens: the words being used, the times at which it happens and how often, and how it affects you. Save e-mails demonstrating such behaviour.
- Do not let the problem take over: remain calm and express your own observations in an assertive way without engaging in or triggering a confrontation.
- Remember: (verbal) abuse is a sign of the aggressor's weakness. They have the problem, not you.

6. Guidelines

HOW TO ACT

in the event of

(WORK) CONFLICTS

Guideline NUVP-1RICHTLIJN

These are guidelines for staff members on how to act in the event of a conflict at work.

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Contact address: J.J.Bruggeling@tudelft.nl

Definition

A work conflict is considered present if, within the confines of a work organisation, an individual or group feels frustrated or hampered by another individual or group. This may involve work content, work relationships, work conditions, or employment conditions.

When you should take action:

- if a difference of opinion turns into a conflict;
- if a conflict is impacting your work or work environment;
- if your performance is subpar as a result of the conflict;
- if you are suffering from psychological or physical symptoms as a result of a conflict;
- if you are calling in sick because there does not seem to be another solution.

What can you do?

- When in doubt, discuss the situation with someone who you can trust.
- Be selective about who you discuss the conflict with.
- Determine whether you can all sit down and bring it up for discussion.
- Report the problem to your supervisor, another supervisor in a higher position, or the staff consultant and ask for advice, support, assistance, or mediation.
- Arrange a time-out in case of a heated, serious conflict.
- Always have a time-out confirmed in writing by the supervisor responsible.
- Make sure that arrangements and/or solutions made are recorded.
- After some time, schedule a meeting to discuss whether things have actually been resolved.

What should you avoid doing?

- Fuelling the conflict by discussing it with everyone.
- Avoiding normal interactions with the conflict partner.
- Calling in sick,
- Quitting your job without thinking it through.

Who do you get involved and when?

- If expert assistance is required from an outside party or you need a second opinion, involve third parties.
- Consult the confidential advisor for advice and coaching.

- Report the conflict and ask for advice from the staff consultant, occupational social services, or the occupational health officer if your work is being impacted.
- Take into account that if mediation is required, both parties must agree to the choice of mediator in order for the assistance to have any chance of succeeding.

Additional information

In order to prevent conflicts, the following points are important:

- Communicate openly and clearly.
- Hold consistent and open discussions at all levels: work meetings, progress interviews, job performance interviews, etc.

7. GUIDELINES

HOW TO ACT

in the event of

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

These are guidelines on how to act for those who report sexual harassment in the workplace

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Contact address: J.J.Bruggeling@tudelft.nl

Definition

Sexual harassment is considered present when a person experiences specific behaviour or attention from someone else as undesirable and sexual in nature. This attention may be verbal (comments, insinuations), non-verbal (staring, certain gestures), and/or physical (touching).

When should you take action?

- if you are being bothered with sexually charged comments or physical contact;
- if you are experiencing non-verbal behaviour from someone as sexually aggressive;
- if you are being bothered by intimate or sexist behaviour from colleagues in private;
- if your work environment is being ruined;
- if you do not feel safe in the workplace;
- if your work, your judgement, or the way you are being interacted with is being influenced because you are declining someone's advances.

What can you do?

- Talk to the offender (e.g. "I feel uncomfortable about the comments you make about...").
- Specify the behaviour that bothers you as concretely as possible.
- Describe exactly which comments or behaviours are involved.
- Indicate how you *want* to be treated.
- Seek out support from a colleague and have someone outside of the situation listen to your thoughts.

What can you expect?

Since sexual harassment often concerns subjective experiences, you can expect a wide range of responses from the "offender." Be prepared for this.

An example:

- A person may deny that they³ meant it as sexual harassment.
- A person may brush off your opinion and call you "childish" or a "prude".
- A person may play the victim ("you'll ruin my career with your allegations...").
- A person may become aggressive or accuse you of a false complaint.
OR
- A person may take you seriously and say they will take that into account in the future. They were unaware of the effect their behaviour had.

³ In this text “they” means “he or she” and “their” means “his or her.”

What can you do if the response is negative?

- Stick to your message.
- Do not turn it into discussion (do not be swayed by anger).
- Continue to repeat your message.

What should you definitely not do?

- Think that it is your fault.
- Think that you are prudish or thin-skinned.
- Think that it will clear up on its own.

What can you do if this is happening to one of your colleagues?

- Take your colleague seriously.
- Stand up for your colleague in intimidating situations.
- Do not wait and see if your colleague does something about it.
- Ask them if they find the behaviour acceptable or a nuisance.
- With your colleague’s consent, inform your supervisor.

Who to involve and when?

- Involve your supervisor if you are expecting a power struggle.
- Involve your supervisor if the offender is above you in the hierarchy.
- Involve your boss’ supervisor if your boss is the offender.
- Consult the confidential advisor if you need advice and coaching.
- If necessary, involve the occupational health officer, occupational social services, and/or staff care services.
- File a report with the police if it involves criminal acts like stalking, assault, or rape.

In closing

- Write down what happens: the words being used, the times that it happens and how often, and what effect it has on you.
- Do not be afraid and do not believe what the other person says.
- Do not let the problem control you.
- Save e-mails and text messages as proof.
- Have undesirable e-mails sent to a separate inbox (in case of nuisance/stalking), so that you can save them, but do not have to read them.

8. GUIDELINES

HOW TO ACT

in the

event of

BULLYING

G

These are guidelines on how to act for those who report bullying in the workplace

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Contact address: J.J.Bruggeling@tudelft.nl

Definition

Repeatedly getting the feeling that you are being excluded and/or belittled through comments directed at you, passive-aggressive jokes, unnecessary criticism, and/or gossip.

When you should take action:

- If it is bothering you.
- If you are the target.
- If you see it happening to others.
- If you feel unsafe.
- If it is impacting your work environment.
- If your performance is suffering.

What can you do on your own?

- Indicate that it is bothering you.
- Talk to the person who is bullying you.
- Express that the other person should stop their⁴ behaviour.

What if this is too big a step for you?

- First, talk to someone you can trust.
- Talk to your supervisor.
- If the supervisor ignores the report, involve the confidential advisor.
- If your supervisor is the bully, involve the confidential advisor.

What should you avoid doing?

- Think that it is your fault.
- Remain silent on the subject.
- Start exhibiting the same behaviour.

Who can you involve and when?

- your supervisor;
- the confidential advisor, for advice and coaching;

⁴ Wherever “their” is used, “he or she” is meant.

- if necessary, third parties such as the occupational health officer, staff care services, or occupational health services.

In closing

- Write down what happens: the words being used, the times that it happens and how often, and how it affects you.
- Do not be afraid and do not believe what the other person says.
- Do not let the problem control you.
- Do not think that calling in sick is a solution.