

# Dignity at Work Policy for Citizens Advice Chiltern volunteers



## Who is this policy for?

This policy is for Citizens Advice Chiltern volunteers (including trustees). It is separate from the policy for paid staff to reflect the different legal position of volunteers. This policy is separate and in addition to the [Trustee Code of Conduct](#) for trustees.

## Commitment

Citizens Advice Chiltern is committed to providing a culture where all staff and volunteers value each other and are able to work together to their full potential in an inclusive environment free from harassment, bullying and other unacceptable forms of behaviour.

We will actively promote respect and dignity for all its volunteers, creating an environment where unacceptable behaviour in the workplace, whether from staff or external contacts, is actively dealt with.

All complaints will be taken seriously, confidentiality will be respected and victimisation of those that raise complaints will not be tolerated.

## What is dignity at work and unacceptable behaviour?

Dignity at work is about individuals feeling respected, valued, included and able to contribute fully in a positive environment free from bullying and harassment.

Unacceptable behaviour is any behaviour which an individual or group knows, or ought reasonably to know, could have the potential effect of offending, humiliating, intimidating or isolating an individual or group. If unacceptable behaviour is not challenged, it is likely to cause harm or distress to the recipient(s) and escalate into victimisation, bullying or harassment.

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## **What is victimisation, bullying and harassment?**

Harassment is unwanted conduct related to a personal characteristic which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual. Harassment may be based on age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, or any other personal characteristic. Staff or volunteers may complain of behaviour they find offensive even if it is not directed at them, and they need not possess the personal characteristic themselves. Harassment may be persistent or an isolated incident.

Bullying is unwanted repeated and persistent negative behaviour, not necessarily based on a particular personal characteristic, which makes the recipient feel upset, threatened, humiliated, undermined or vulnerable. It could be related to an abuse of power or the use of unfair sanctions. It could also be intimidation or behaviour that is offensive or malicious.

Victimisation is treating someone less favourably or harassing them because they have, in good faith, made a complaint or assisted someone else in making a complaint of bullying or harassment.

## **What are the roles and responsibilities of people using this policy?**

You have a responsibility to:

- be aware of how your own behaviour may affect others and changing it, if necessary
- value and promote equality, diversity and inclusion
- welcome and value others' opinions even if you don't agree
- support staff and fellow volunteers in achieving their tasks
- treat others fairly, with dignity and respect
- encourage a high standard of behaviour in staff and fellow volunteers, and making it clear to others when you find their behaviour unacceptable

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- report incidents of bullying or harassment to a line manager or other senior manager (depending on the situation). For trustees this should be reported to Chief Officer or Chair of trustees (depending on the situation)
- cooperate with investigations into complaints made, maintaining confidentiality

Your Supervisor, Manager, Chief Officer or Chair of trustees has a responsibility to:

- manage effectively in a fair and consistent way
- lead by example by behaving positively and being sensitive to how others might perceive their behaviour
- ensure staff and volunteers they manage have read this policy, follow it and fully understand the standards of behaviour expected of them
- ensure communication is two-way and timely, and be available to volunteers to discuss any problems or concerns and provide appropriate support
- intervene to stop bullying and harassment and report incidents promptly
- deal with issues seriously, speedily, sensitively and as confidentially as possible, ensuring all parties are fully supported

## **Legal position of volunteers**

Volunteers do not have the same protections as paid workers. They are not covered by the employment provisions of the Equality Act, and similarly cannot take organisations to tribunal over unfair or constructive dismissal.

## **What could the impact of victimisation, bullying or harassment be?**

Individuals who are bullied or harassed and also fellow volunteers or staff who witness such incidents may experience:

- low self-confidence/ self-esteem
- anxiety, stress and depression, which ultimately can lead to suicide

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- relationship problems
- anger
- aggression
- increased alcohol / tobacco consumption
- demotivation and reduced work performance
- ill health

The impact of bullying and harassment on organisations can include:

- low morale among staff and volunteers
- increased absenteeism
- recruitment and retention problems
- problems with working relationships
- reduced organisational performance
- costly legal action by employees
- damaged image and reputation

### **How do I know if victimisation, bullying or harassment is happening?**

The key to deciding whether victimisation, bullying or harassment has taken place is not the intention, but whether the behaviour is unacceptable by reasonable normal standards and/or is disadvantageous or unwelcome to the recipient(s). However, intention is relevant to how the behaviour should be challenged and how the issues should be resolved.

Individuals may not be aware that their behaviour is unwelcome or upsetting. In which case, an informal discussion may help them to understand the effects of their behaviour and agree to change it. It is important to remember that everyone has the right to decide what behaviour they find acceptable, and to have this decision respected by others.

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### What is the difference between being managed and being bullied?

Managing	Bullying
Is constructive (even when being critical)	Is destructive
Is based on fact and the needs of the organisation	Is based on perception and assumption
Constructively criticises actions or behaviour	Criticises the person
Is calm, dignified and professional	Takes an angry or aggressive tone
Is consistent	Is inconsistent
Provides opportunity for improvement within a structured process	Provides no opportunity for improvement since person feels threatened
Cares about individuals and their feelings	Takes no account of the person and their feelings
Results in a person knowing what has to be improved and how they can begin to do it	Results in humiliation and loss of confidence
Allows opportunity for reflection and dialogue	Is dictatorial and dismissive

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## What other support is available to me?

You can get support and advice to help you decide on the most appropriate method for dealing with an issue, whether you are the person challenging behaviour or the person being challenged, from:

- Staff members - e.g. Supervisor, Training Supervisor, Advice Service Manager or Chief Officer
- Other volunteer colleagues, (including Chair of trustees for trustees)
- Unite - volunteers can be members of Unite, although volunteers have fewer legal safeguards than paid staff
- **Network Groups** (<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/cablink/get-involved/networking-groups/network-groups/>) these include the Disability Network Group, National Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Group, BAME Network Group, and the Trans and Non-Binary Network Group
- External support groups - e.g. **National Bullying Helpline** (<https://www.nationalbullyinghelpline.co.uk/>)

## How do I resolve an issue informally?

Volunteers are encouraged to resolve misunderstandings and problems informally wherever possible, depending on the circumstances. This allows for issues to be dealt with quickly and helps minimise damage to working relationships, whilst allowing you to retain much more control over the process for resolving the issue and the eventual outcome. If you feel you have been victimised, bullied or harassed or are unhappy with someone's behaviour towards you, or have witnessed this happening to someone else, you could:

- attempt to address the perceived behaviour yourself where you feel comfortable following the following four step process:
  - Describe the behaviour that is causing problems

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- Describe the impact/effects of behaviour - for example, 'I feel upset', 'I feel hurt'
- Say what you need - for example, 'I want to be respected', 'I want to be included', 'I do not want to be shouted at'
- Say what you want to happen - for example, 'When we are in meetings, I would like you to listen and not talk over me', 'From now on, I would like you to speak to me in a calm way'
- enlist the help of someone else, such as a fellow volunteer, staff member, or Unite representative to support you in making an approach to the individual or to make an initial approach on your behalf. Remember that in general, Unite can only provide moral rather than legal support.

It is quite possible to resolve problems and misunderstandings using one of these options.

An informal discussion may help individuals to understand the effects of their behaviour and agree to change it. If needed, support can be provided by your Supervisor, Training Supervisor, Advice Service Manager (or for trustees, the Chief Officer or Chair of trustees) to individuals to assist a change in behaviour which may include awareness raising/training, coaching or monitoring. If this approach resolves the matter, this should be clearly agreed and confirmed. Both parties may wish to keep a record of what has taken place, and managers should keep a record of dates, details of the matter and the action taken.

### **What should I do if the issue has not been solved informally?**

It is important not to ignore problems and hope they go away and if an informal approach does not resolve the matter, or the recipient or supervisor (or other relevant person) decides that the nature of the complaint is too serious to be dealt with informally, a formal complaint may be made, using the volunteer complaint policy.

Throughout the process of resolving a complaint, both complainant and respondent will have access to necessary support outlined in this policy.

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## **How do I support my volunteers through a dignity at work issue?**

These issues are often overlooked around volunteering, but there is no reason why volunteers can't face the same problems as staff. As a Supervisor, Manager, Chief Officer, or Chair of trustees, you should help and support a volunteer who feels they have experienced or witnessed victimisation, bullying, harassment or unacceptable behaviour.

You can help someone who feels they have been bullied or harassed, or feels unhappy about someone's behaviour towards them, make sense of what is going on by validating what they are experiencing.

You can help them to explore their experiences and feelings about the unacceptable behaviour, so they can begin to deal with them positively and as potentially the first person the individual may tell their story to, it is vital that you listen to what they have to say remembering it is important to listen more than you speak.

By doing this you should be able to help the individual explore and discuss all available options for addressing the issues raised, both formal and informal, making use of relevant policy documents and where possible ensure action is taken quickly before matters escalate

This policy sets out some appropriate courses of action which include talking or writing to the person accused of bullying, harassment or inappropriate behaviour, facilitating informal discussions and formal interventions. If you or the individual decide that the nature of the complaint is too serious to be dealt with informally, a formal complaint may be made, using the organisation's volunteer complaints policy. You would then take action in line with the policy..

It is absolutely vital that anyone experiencing, or accused of, negative or unacceptable behaviour get the support they need whilst the situation is being addressed. This policy lists the different types of support available and how they can be accessed and you should be familiar with these when speaking to volunteers.

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## **What should I do if I am accused of bullying or harassment?**

Firstly reflect on and address your behaviour. At the time you may not have felt your actions were malicious, but put yourself in the place of the person who raised the complaint. How would what you have done made them feel? If, whatever your intentions, you believe you have acted in a way that negatively impacted on someone else then seek to resolve things informally with an apology and a commitment to avoid repeating your behaviour. Be aware however that if you have caused the other person harm it may be felt by them and/or Citizens Advice that an informal resolution is not sufficient.

If formal action is being taken against you, the process and timescales of the managing volunteer performance policy should be followed, and you have the right to challenge breaches of the policy. If you disagree with the result of the process it is worth again considering that you might not have understood the impact of your actions.

## **Where can I get more information?**

Everything you need to know should be in this policy, but if you do still have questions you should contact your Supervisor, Training Supervisor, Advice Services Manager, or for trustees you should contact your Chief Officer or Chair of trustees.

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## **Appendix: What are examples of victimisation, bullying or harassment?**

The next page includes examples of behaviour that constitutes harassment, bullying and victimisation. This list is not exhaustive and staff or volunteers may complain of any of the behaviour even if it is not directed at them if it has the purpose or effect of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. They need not possess the personal characteristic themselves. The behaviour does not need to be in person - e.g. bullying and harassment can occur over social media.

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**Examples of bullying** (which do not appear to be on the grounds of any particular characteristic)

- belittling, patronising or unfairly criticising someone alone or in front of others
- talking about someone behind their back
- rudeness, shouting or swearing
- name calling, gossip, malicious lies, use of sarcasm
- refusal of reasonable work requests
- undermining behaviour in front of others
- excessive monitoring
- unfair or destructive criticism
- exclusion from meetings/information
- persistently and unjustifiably ignoring views and suggestions
- decisions questioned/overruled unreasonably
- unreasonable work requests
- social exclusion
- isolating, ignoring or refusing to work with someone
- coercion
- deliberately setting someone up to fail
- deliberately giving someone too much or too little work
- isolating, ignoring or refusing to work with someone
- threats or physical violence

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Examples of harassment - on the grounds of:	
Gender (sexual harassment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• the display of pin ups and other sexually explicit material</li><li>• sexist or rude jokes, innuendo, cartoons, pictures or emails</li><li>• making assumptions or judgements about a colleague based on gender</li><li>• lewd gestures or remarks</li><li>• leering or suggestive looks</li><li>• requests for dates etc when it is clear they are unwelcome</li><li>• Inappropriate touching, groping or invasion of personal space</li><li>• indecent exposure or sexual assault</li></ul>
Gender identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• transphobic jokes, cartoons, pictures or emails</li><li>• deliberately continuing to refer to a person who is undergoing or has undergone gender reassignment by their previous name or birth gender</li><li>• disclosing to a colleague or third party that someone is transgender against their wishes</li><li>• making transphobic insults, remarks or threats</li></ul>

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Ethnicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin (racial harassment)</li><li>• racist jokes, cartoons or pictures</li><li>• ridiculing someone's accent, colour, diet, etc.</li><li>• racist name calling or graffiti</li><li>• making assumptions or judgements about a colleague based on race, nationality or ethnicity</li><li>• making racist insults or threats</li><li>• inciting others to racially harass someone</li><li>• racially motivated assault</li></ul>
Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• the intentional use of offensive or outdated words and/or the continued use of such words after being informed that they are offensive or outdated</li><li>• jokes, cartoons or pictures that ridicule disabled people</li><li>• making fun of someone's disability</li><li>• deliberately making things difficult for a disabled person</li><li>• making assumptions about a colleague based on their disability</li><li>• patronising or ignoring a disabled person</li></ul>

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Sexual orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• homophobic comments, jokes, cartoons or pictures</li> <li>• refusing to work with someone or share facilities on the grounds of their actual or perceived sexual orientation</li> <li>• making assumptions based on a person's sexual orientation</li> <li>• gossip or speculation about someone's sexual orientation</li> <li>• asking intrusive questions about someone's personal or sex life</li> <li>• outing an individual as lesbian, gay or bisexual without their permission</li> <li>• making homophobic insults and threats</li> <li>• using religious belief to justify anti-gay bullying and harassment</li> </ul>
Religion or belief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• inappropriate comments, jokes, cartoons or pictures about particular religions or beliefs</li> <li>• ridiculing someone's beliefs, dress or religious customs</li> <li>• forcing one's religion or beliefs on others</li> <li>• refusing to work with someone on the grounds of religion or beliefs</li> <li>• threats</li> </ul>
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the use of offensive words or making fun of someone's age</li> <li>• making assumptions about someone because of their age or perceived age</li> <li>• patronising or ignoring a person because of their age or perceived age</li> </ul>

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**Examples of victimisation** (actions taken against someone who has, or is suspected of making a complaint or assisting someone who has complained on the basis of bullying or harassment)

- ignoring someone
- spreading rumours
- unfairly criticising someone's work
- unfairly increasing workload, or conversely not putting the volunteer on a rota
- deliberately trying to get someone in trouble

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