

Dignity and Respect in Ministry and at Work: A summary of our policy



DIOCESSE of OXFORD

A Christ-like Church for the sake of God's world

Dignity and Respect in Ministry and at Work

The Diocese of Oxford is committed to sustaining healthy working relationships in ministry and employment; to embedding a culture of mutual respect where discrimination, harassment and bullying are not tolerated; and to facilitating healing where abuse of power has affronted an individual's dignity. Our Dignity and Respect in Ministry and at Work policy explains in detail the standards expected and the procedures to be followed for those who feel they've been subjected to discrimination, harassment or bullying. This guide provides a useful summary of the policy and the processes to resolve these issues. You can find the full policy on our website:

oxford.anglican.org/dignity

Who does the policy apply to?

This Policy applies to **everyone in the diocese**, including: all clergy holding the bishop's licence or with permission to officiate; licensed lay ministers; employees of deaneries, benefices, parishes (e.g. youth, pastoral, administrative roles); diocesan employees (ODBE, ODBF, and the Bishop's Office); diocesan volunteers; visitors and third parties (including contractors and trustees); and all office-holders at parish, benefice, deanery or diocesan level (e.g. churchwardens, treasurers, PCC and synod members).

While recognising the cathedral, PCCs, and church CIOs (Charitable Incorporated Organisations) are independent, we strongly encourage them to align with this policy and procedure where practicable. **Nobody should be made to feel unwelcome or alone.**

Responding to problems

Do not let situations escalate. It is easier to remedy a concern if you address it promptly and appropriately. Behaviour can change, relationships can be rebuilt and trust can be restored.

Here are the steps you can take to make a positive difference:

ACKNOWLEDGE Recognise unacceptable behaviour, both for yourself and for others affected by it. This involves understanding that the behaviour is wrong and taking it seriously. See our [Dignity and Respect webpage](#) for examples of:

- [common bullying, harassment and sexual harassment](#);
- [harassment under the Equality Act 2010](#);
- [power dynamics in the church](#)
- [acceptable/unacceptable behaviour; healthy, fair management approaches](#).

ADDRESS Addressing unacceptable behaviour involves communicating the concern(s) to a trusted individual through the appropriate channels to explore your options and determine the best course of action. This means taking steps to manage or resolve the problem.

If you are concerned that the practice or behaviour could constitute a safeguarding concern you must contact a member of the diocesan Safeguarding team (call 01865 208 295 or email safeguardingreferrals@oxford.anglican.org) and/or a Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO).

For other issues, you can raise your concern(s) in several different ways:

- Contact one of our trained [volunteer authorised listeners](#), who will listen and guide you through the resolution process, offering support, clear information, and advice on your next steps.
- Speak to a trusted colleague or, if applicable, contact the [Employee Assistance Programme](#) (EAP).
- Raise your concern(s) during one-to-one meetings with your line manager or supervising minister, who should listen attentively and seriously. They may guide you to pursue either the informal or formal procedure, as appropriate (see diagram on page 9).
- Submit a written complaint via email: complaints@oxford.anglican.org or mail it to: Complaints Officer, Oxford Diocesan Board of Finance, Church House Oxford, Langford Locks, Kidlington, OX5 1GF.

For detailed information on the informal and formal procedures, please refer to [Appendix E](#), sections 2 and 3. Whenever appropriate and feasible, we strive to resolve concerns informally.

GET SUPPORT: Recognising that perceptions vary, we focus on challenging the behaviour, not the individuals. Embracing our values of being contemplative, compassionate and courageous, we support all affected parties, offering emotional support, resources and guidance to ensure everyone feels safe and heard throughout the process.

The [Employee Assistance Programme](#) (EAP) can provide all employees, clergy and their immediate family members information and support on a range of issues, particularly focusing on your wellbeing through their 24-hour confidential helpline (available every day of the year).

If you feel you have been the target of bullying, harassment or sexual harassment, please refer to [Appendix F](#) for guidance on actions to take and available resources.

If you have been accused of such behaviour, [Appendix G](#) provides advice on appropriate steps and support services.

Authorised Listeners

Our trained volunteer Authorised Listeners are available to hear any concerns you have about discrimination, harassment or bullying. They have taken on the responsibility to:

- Be available to any member of the clergy, laity or employees to listen and discuss the individual's situation;
- Provide clear information and guidance about the options available, the next steps to take and how best to take them;
- Signpost the individual to the relevant resources and offer support throughout the process;
- Remain unbiased, impartial and maintain confidentiality.

oxford.anglican.org/listeners










Mutual responsibilities

Each individual can reasonably expect to:

- Be treated with dignity and respect;
- Be treated fairly and without discrimination;
- Be able to disagree and present alternative views;
- Be able to challenge and be assertive;
- Be consulted on decisions that affect their work;
- Have their contribution recognised.

Discrimination

Discrimination means treating a person unfairly or less favourably because of who they are or because they possess **protected characteristics** named in The Equality Act 2010:

<p>Age</p> 	<p>Disability</p> 	<p>Gender Reassignment</p> 
<p>Marriage and Civil Partnership</p> 	<p>Pregnancy and Maternity</p> 	<p>Race</p> 
<p>Religion or Belief</p> 	<p>Sex</p> 	<p>Sexual Orientation</p> 

Unacceptable behaviour

Any behaviour that could undermine someone's dignity and reveals a lack of respect is unacceptable. If it is not challenged, it is likely to escalate.

"Any behaviour, always involving misuse of power, 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 should be regarded as unacceptable in the workplace, which includes the context of a parish.

'Unacceptable behaviour' changes its label to 'bullying' or 'harassing behaviour' when it causes actual harm or distress to the target/s, normally, but not exclusively, after a series of incidents over a prolonged period of time.

Lack of intent does not diminish, excuse or negate the impact on the target, or the distress caused. The degree of intent is only relevant in terms of how the behaviour should be challenged and the issue subsequently resolved."¹

Harassment

Harassment is "unwanted conduct related to a relevant protected 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".² Unwanted behaviour could include physical gestures, abuse, jokes, spoken or written words or offensive emails and expressions. It may be one incident or continuous behaviour.

Some people think that sexual remarks, for example, "jokes" and touching is just a bit of fun at work, that racial stereotypes, anti-gay banter, or name-calling related to age or disability are only objected to by those with no sense of humour. But where this attention is unwanted it can cause a great deal of distress, through embarrassment, intimidation, isolation and exclusion – and is likely to constitute harassment. Everyone should feel safe and comfortable in their daily lives.

¹ Fergus Roseburgh for The Children's Society, March 2007

² The Equality Act 2010

Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment involves unwanted conduct of a sexual nature and does not require sexual motivation; its defining impact lies in violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. Furthermore, it encompasses situations where an individual is treated unfavourably for submitting to or refusing such conduct, whether in connection to their sex or gender reassignment. Identifying harassment becomes clearer when it manifests as persistent, frequent, and part of an overarching pattern.

Bullying

Bullying is not always obvious to those who witness it. When bullying is covert and passive it can be difficult to complain – each incident on its own appears trivial. Constant repetition or, conversely, the unpredictability of behaviour can transform seemingly trivial incidents into bullying. Therefore, bullying is most easily identified when it is continuous, frequent, repetitive and part of an overall pattern.

Power and relationships

What is spiritual abuse?

Spiritual abuse is a form of emotional and psychological abuse that is characterised by a systematic pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour in a religious context.

Managing people

Behaviour considered bullying or harassment by one person may be considered firm management or forthrightness by another. Any feedback given by those who manage employees or volunteers should be specific and accurate, describing the action(s), not the person, avoiding judgemental labels (thoughtless, selfish, inconsiderate, incompetent, etc.) and generalisations or exaggerations ("You never..." "You always...").

Reporting discrimination, harassment and bullying

You should report any behaviour which you believe constitutes discrimination, harassment or bullying of yourself or others. This includes behaviour that has caused offence, humiliation, embarrassment or distress.

If you witness an incident that you believe to be discrimination, harassment or bullying of another member of staff or clergy, report it in confidence to an Authorised Listener or your line manager or supervising minister. All such reports will be taken seriously and in strict confidence as far as it is possible to do so. If the practice or behaviour could constitute a safeguarding concern you must contact the diocesan Safeguarding team in the first instance and/or a Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO).

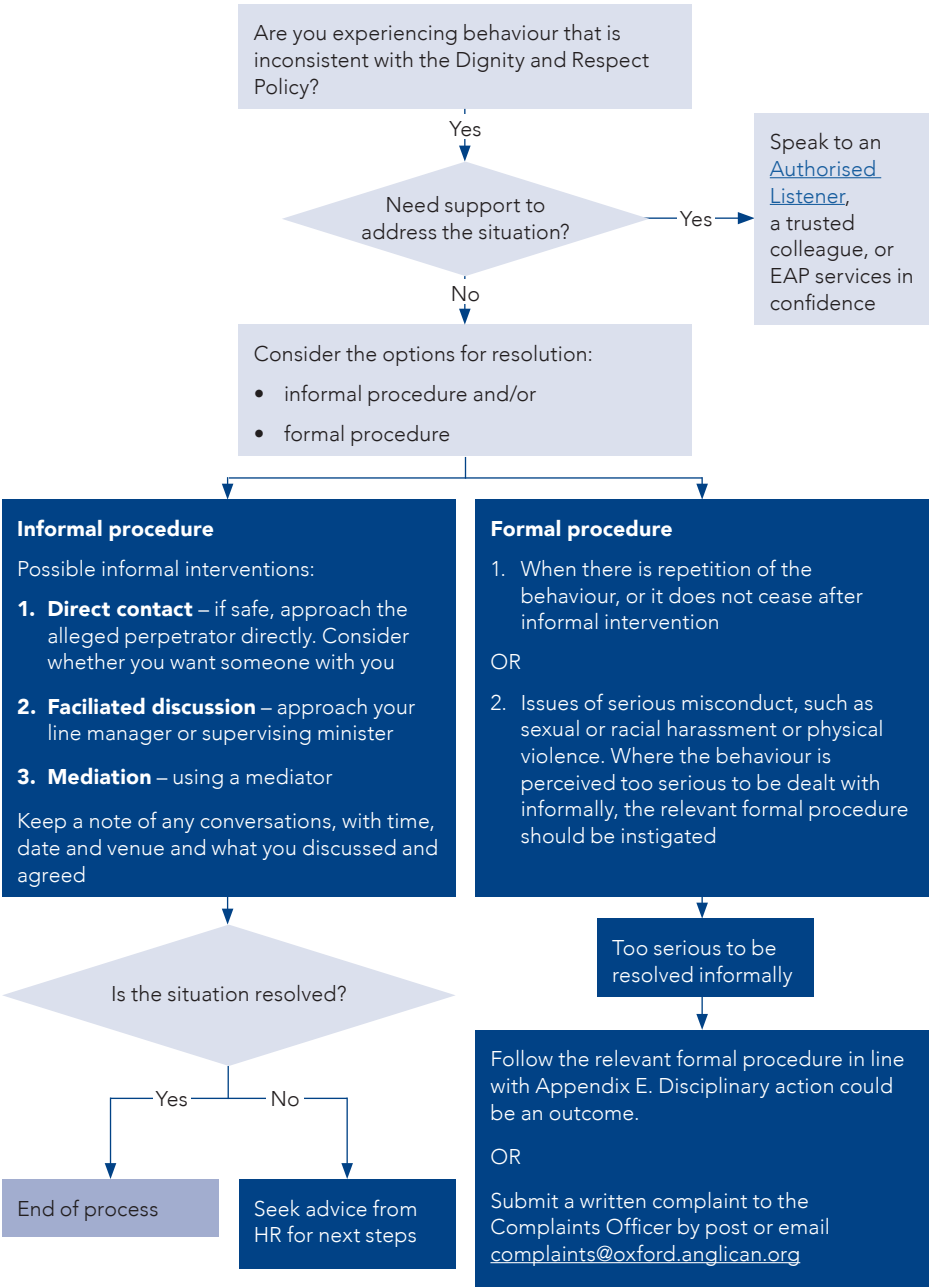
Further information

The Dignity and Respect in Ministry and at Work policy is on our website. If you want to know more about any of the issues raised above, you should be able to navigate the policy quickly now that you have read this summary.

oxford.anglican.org/dignity

This Policy forms part of our commitment to fostering healthy relationships in ministry and employment, known as Working Positively Together (see oxford.anglican.org/working).

Procedures for dealing with allegations and concerns



oxford.anglican.org/dignity



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