



Mustard Tree Community Church

Connect with God. Grow together. Change our world

Preventing Bullying and Harassment Policy

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The Mustard Tree Community Church
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A. Statement of commitment

The Church is required by God to foster relationships of the utmost integrity, truthfulness and trustworthiness. Harassment and bullying – however rare - will not be tolerated in the Mustard Tree Community Church (hereby referred to as 'the church') and its associated activities. All complaints of harassment and bullying will be taken seriously and thoroughly investigated.

B. Responsibility

The trustees and leaders are responsible for establishing and reviewing this policy for the church as a whole.

This policy applies to all employees, office holders, members and volunteers who have personal responsibility for up-holding the principles of equal opportunity. They are expected to comply with the provisions of the policy and help others to achieve the aims of this Policy.

Every member of the church is responsible for conducting themselves in a manner consistent with this Policy in all their church-related activities.

Guidelines for dealing with inappropriate behaviour are set out in the Appendix. Where inappropriate behaviour involves children, reference should be made to the Safeguarding Policy.

C. What is bullying and harassment?

Bullying and harassment includes 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 to the extent that 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.

Harassment, in general terms, is unwanted conduct affecting the dignity of men and women in the workplace. It may be related to age, sex, race, disability, religious belief (including theology or churchmanship), nationality, sexual orientation 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.

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

D. 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 suffering from it. It can lead to fear, isolation, demotivation and reduced output, poor concentration, symptoms of stress, a noticeable level of sickness absence or stubborn attendance when obviously unwell, 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.

The most serious incidents might result in:

- creating an unsafe Church working environment.
- ignoring signs of overwork and extreme stress.
- putting someone's health physically, emotionally or psychologically at risk by making them upset, frightened and/or ridiculed.

It is, though, 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. For church employees, an appraisal & supervision are the routes for raising poor performance. These functions should be carried out by the named manager and within church leadership, should involve a member of the trustees. All meetings should be documented and held by both parties.

This policy will be made widely available to those in the church.

The church may seek to minimise the incidence of bullying and harassment by arranging training for its trustees, leaders and volunteers.

E. Counselling and mediation

Mediation is often the best way of dealing with issues of bullying and harassment, and the church will make available resources for mediation which can be used with the consent of the complainant. The church can also make available counselling through external agencies if required.

F. Confidentiality

It is the church's policy that these matters are to be treated with absolute confidentiality and that no action will be taken without the willing consent of the person who feels he or she has been a target.

G. 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. In the case of a leader, this may be a complaint dealt with by the trustees. A member of the trustees or wider leadership team could be subject to an action for defamation if they have made false accusations against someone else.

H. Appendix

Recommended guidelines for dealing with inappropriate behaviour.

When any incident of inappropriate behaviour involving the leaders, employed staff, members and volunteers occurs in the church, 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. 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 Resolution

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 for advice. Where relevant they might wish to take advice on their legal rights.

Incidents of inappropriate behaviour that are not able to be resolved informally will be dealt with through the Grievance and Disciplinary procedures in the Employee Manual. These procedures will be used for both employees and church members/volunteers (sanctions for members/volunteers will differ at the final stage as rather than being formally dismissed, they will be asked to leave the church and refrain from attending church events).

Any incident involving a member of the leadership team shall be dealt with by the trustees within established procedures for complaints.

Any incident within the church that does not involve a complaint against a leader should be handled by the leadership team. The leadership team might wish to consult the trustees for further guidance if necessary. All employees, office holders, members and volunteers have personal responsibilities for up-holding the principles of equal opportunity and helping others to achieve the aims of this Policy.