Respectful Workplaces Guidelines

Overview

At APSEA, we have the shared responsibility to act in good faith and be actively engaged in contributing collaboratively to resolve concerns, maintain effective relationships, and contribute to a positive, and inclusive work environment.

Early resolution of concerns is a primary objective of the Respectful Workplace Policy and Procedures. Every reasonable effort should be made to resolve incidents of incivility, disrespect, or conflict directly with the individual responsible for the behaviour. All parties, at a minimum, are required to be open about concerns and listen to each other's points of view.

If you are experiencing a concern in your work or learning environment, your first step in determining the best way to address and resolve it is to assess the concern collaboratively. This document is a guideline outlining three recommended steps to assessing concerns, with a focus on repairing relationships and building a community of trust.

You must consider many factors, including the needs and wishes of those involved, the nature and impact of the behaviour, the desired outcome, and the individual capacity to manage the concern. Because of these variables, the approach taken may vary from case to case, even when the behaviour identified is the same.

Employee assessment of a concern involves:

- **Step 1** - Identifying the behaviour experienced.
  - o What kind of behaviour is it?
- **Step 2** - Assessing the behaviour.
  - o Consider the risk, intensity level, and impact.
- **Step 3** - Determining the resolution approach and option that best fits the situation.

Our perspective of, and response to, the behaviour of others is unique and closely related to our personal beliefs, cultures, identities, and lived experiences. A behaviour that is problematic for some may not be for others. Regardless, some behaviours are offensive and harmful in nature and require specific responses to protect employees.

All concerns raised under the Respectful Workplace Policy and Respectful Workplace Procedures are important, but not all resolution approaches will be appropriate or available for each type of concern.

Keep in mind there are always resource persons (i.e., one's supervisor, Human Resources, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Consultant, Accessibility Services, etc.) available to coach or guide you if you need support.

Step 1 - What Kind of Behaviour is It?

For the purposes of these guidelines and to support assessment of situations and appropriate responses, we have grouped behaviour into three categories:

- Incivility and disrespect
- Conflict
- Offensive behaviour

Sometimes situations occur that involve several types of behaviour and these situations may evolve from incivility to destructive conflict and/or to offensive behaviour if left unchecked. It is important to resolve situations **at the lowest level whenever possible** to avoid this escalation.

Incivility and Disrespect

This is defined as behaviour(s) that are rude, discourteous, or insensitive, where there may be no clear intention to harm. Uncivil behaviours may create an environment in which offensive behaviour may occur, particularly when it forms a pattern of behaviour.

Examples include, but are not limited to:
- using inappropriate sarcasm.
- teasing or making jokes at others' expense.
- addressing others in a condescending or belittling way.
- dismissive or negative gesturing when someone else is sharing.
- gossiping, negative comments about others, and spreading rumours.
- intentionally ignoring others.
- constantly interrupting, side-conversations, or disrupting meetings.

Be careful in making assumptions about other people's behaviour and intent based on your own values, beliefs, and customs. Specific actions that are considered impolite or rude can vary by place, time, and context. Differences including, but not limited to, social role, gender, religion, language, and cultural identity may all affect the perception of a given behaviour. Consequently, a behaviour that is considered perfectly acceptable by some people, and in some cultures, may be considered rude by others.

Conflict

Conflict can occur when we perceive that our values, needs, and/or identities are being challenged, threatened, and/or undermined. Conflict can occur at any time between individuals, or between groups.

Examples may look like:
- a disagreement with someone based on the way they make decisions.
- refusing to explore different options to resolve a problem, digging in on one 'right' solution.
- conflicting goals, values, and/or needs.
- mix of personalities and issues clashing.
- different perceptions of an event are causing friction and disagreement.

We might each experience and express conflict differently based on our perceptions and beliefs about conflict, our emotional reactions to it, and/or our behaviours. The actions we take to express our feelings, discuss our perceptions, or have our needs met depend on our life experiences and/or beliefs.

Offensive Behaviour

This is defined as behaviours that are bullying, discriminatory, and/or harassing and may contribute to a poisoned working environment. Offensive behaviours may require significant additional support and access to specific resolution options as, in some cases, they not only go against human rights legislation but also are characterized by complex factors including power and/or oppression.

Examples may look like:
- refusing to work with or support someone based on protected characteristics such as age, race, colour, religion, sex, sexual orientation, etc.
- name-calling – in-person or online.
- physically preventing a person from moving.
- use of racially pejorative terms to describe another person.
- making comments to a person about their body, sexuality.
- excluding, isolating, or marginalizing a person from normal work activities.
- threatening, intimidating, or striking a person.

Step 2 - Consider the Intensity, Risk, and Impact

Once you have identified the behaviour category, it is time to consider the intensity level and impact of that behaviour.

The examples below illustrate the three main behaviour categories and how intensity and risk factors vary depending on the situation. Human behaviour, one's lived experiences, and feelings are not linear. It is very possible for behaviours and situations to change and evolve because of certain variables, intensity, needs, and risk.

When assessing a behaviour, always keep in mind that it may not fit in a neat box. The intersectionality of intensity level, risk, and complexity factors will have an impact on each individual situation. If you get stuck, or would like to confirm your assessment, reach out to APSEA's resource persons (i.e., one's supervisor, Human Resources, DEI Consultant, Supervisor of Accessibility Services, etc.).

Example 1 – Incivility and Disrespect

Employee A has experienced a micro-aggression from Employee B regarding their identity. This has led them to feel uncomfortable in their workspace. They would like to bring up this issue as it is affecting their work.

Employee A has determined that they are experiencing incivility/disrespect. This has resulted in disruptions to their work. Due to these factors, they decide to approach Employee B themselves, and have an open discussion about the experience.

Example 2 – Conflict

Employee A has experienced a micro-aggression from Employee B regarding their identity. The following week, they experience another micro-aggression, again regarding their identity. This has led them to feel uncomfortable in their workspace. They would like to bring up this issue as it is affecting their work and their workplace, but they are unsure of how to begin.

Employee A has determined that they are experiencing incivility/disrespect, and personally they also are experiencing discomfort, negative thinking, and tensions are rising. Due to these factors, they decide to approach their supervisor for support in having an open discussion with Employee B.

Example 3 – Offensive Behaviour

Employee A has experienced micro-aggressive behaviours regarding their identity. This has made them feel uncomfortable in the workplace. Despite having previous conversations with Employee B, no behaviours have changed, and no accountability has been taken.

Employee A now feels they are experiencing discrimination and is feeling unsafe being around Employee B. They have decided to bring this to the attention of their manager, who requests mediation support from the DEI Consultant.

Step 3 – Determine the Resolution Approach

After you have assessed the behaviour (including level, intensity, and risk), you can consider which approach is most appropriate. As always, keep in mind that the assessment guides you in determining what approach and option are appropriate given a situation. A single critical component, such as an individual's ability or skills to resolve or manage a concern, or their social identity, may strongly influence the direction taken.

Independent Approach

When an employee who has a concern about a behaviour of another person chooses to raise it directly with that person. In this approach, the employee takes the lead in reaching resolution and, if necessary, can reach out to resources for guidance and/or support to do so.

This approach typically involves a one-on-one discussion, or a conversation calling someone in/out to resolve a conflict. Incivility, disrespect, and low-level risk conflict are ideally resolved this way.

Facilitated Approach

This approach is typically used by an employee requiring support from their Supervisor/ Manager, or when a Supervisor/Manager observes concerning behaviour within the work environment.

In this approach, the Supervisor/Manager manages the concerning behaviour directly in the work setting, with all affected parties. This approach typically involves one-on-one dialogue, consulting on appropriate action, resolution, or support resources. This may include a facilitated conversation between employees.

The behaviours managed in the work setting typically involve incivility, disrespect, and low-level risk conflict.

Supported Approach

When there has been no success with the other approaches and/or someone wishes to resolve a concern and needs third party support to do so. APSEA may also elect to use this approach, as it could be determined that a concern requires a fact-finding option.

Typically, the supported approach is used to resolve behaviours that require a neutral third party to facilitate, are more serious, and/or have a higher level of risk, such as high-level conflict and offensive behaviour.

Employees who elect to use the supported approach are encouraged to reach out to APSEA's Employee Family Assistance Program (EFAP) and may elect to have Union Representation/ support(s) as applicable.

Supported approach options provide access to:
- Guidance to help overcome communication barriers and engage in constructive conversation.
- Support to help clarify the concern and the potential options available to work toward a resolution.
- Impartial facilitated support(s) as required.

Impartial Facilitated Supports

At times, a situation may require facilitated support. There are several kinds of support available to APSEA employees which are outlined below.

Consultation

Human Resources or DEI Consultant can provide a place for employees to share their concerns and experience in a caring and confidential setting. The employee can make an informed decision about the options available to them.

Conflict Coaching

Conflict coaching is a short-term, one-on-one process intended to assist an employee in gaining a deeper understanding of conflict, as well as increase skills and confidence in managing it. Conflict coaching can help an employee identify and reach specific conflict management goals.

Needs Assessment

This process is much like the consultation process described above. Once a resource such as Human Resources or the DEI Consultant has been contacted for support, they will meet with individuals in the group to gain a better understanding of the issues and concerns they are facing. The resource will then develop clear recommendations to guide APSEA in effectively responding to the conflict and challenges raised.

Mediation

A way of resolving conflicts where a third party, serving as mediator, assists the people involved in reaching an agreement as to how they will relate to or engage with each other in the future, and how they can avoid further conflict.

The process is carefully structured to help to clarify the nature of the problem from the perspective of the parties involved. It also allows them to share specific interests and develop a mutually acceptable range of options for dealing with the situation. It is the people involved, not the mediator, who determine the nature of the agreement.

Information Gathering/Fact Finding

This option is often used when the concern has been assessed as serious, unlawful, a violation of the Human Rights Act, constituting a risk to the health or physical or psychological safety of any person, part of an extensive issue, or a repeated course of behaviour, many concerns still involve some degree of fact-finding.

Fact-finding involves being accountable in this process means cooperating fully, providing an honest recounting of facts and information, and keeping knowledge of the issue and involvement in the process confidential. The outcome is determined by APSEA and there is a possibility of disciplinary actions or sanctions. This approach is more administrative in nature and may result in investigative options.

Investigative Options

Investigative options may be used as appropriate to the situation and/or severity of the allegation.

Many of the supported approach options above are grounded in opportunities to exchange perspectives and discuss identities, interests, needs, and experiences with the intention of finding a collaborative and shared resolution to concerns between community members.

Accountability for participants in these approaches means prioritizing relationships; engaging in collaborative problem-solving; promoting an understanding of others; being aware of our impact in taking action to remedy harm; and keeping knowledge of the issue and involvement in the process confidential.

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