



SoLO
Life
Opportunities

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Charity No. 1102297
England Company No.
5025939

POLICY AND PROCEDURE

Anti-Bullying (Dignity at Work)

Category: staff and volunteers

Introduction

SoLO services are firmly set on a foundation of values:

Safety, Trust, Accessibility and Resilience with the overarching value of quality.

SoLO wishes to ensure that these values are golden threads throughout every person's experience within the organisation and are evidenced through the behaviours of staff and volunteers.

Every staff member and volunteer should expect to enjoy a positive experience within their work placement and relationships with colleagues should reinforce this with support, mentoring, encouragement and constructive feedback being the norm. This policy is to ensure that, when things go wrong and this doesn't happen, we are able to address any negative behaviour quickly, efficiently and in such a way that provides a learning platform for all affected.

Policy Statement

SoLO Life Opportunities is committed to a working and learning environment that is free from any form of harassment. Harassment adversely affects working and social conditions for staff, and visitors to the organisation and is unacceptable. Any incident of harassment will be regarded very seriously and may be grounds for disciplinary action. Persistent or gross harassment and, in particular, sexual or racial harassment will be treated as grounds for disciplinary action including dismissal or expulsion from the organisation.

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What is Harassment?

Harassment causes distress and anxiety. It interferes with people's ability to work and study and may be so serious and unrelenting that the person who is being harassed may feel it necessary to change job or course. It is uninvited, may be personally offensive and is always unwelcome; it can be detrimental to all aspects of people's social and working lives.

SoLO will therefore take harassment to include any behaviour that is offensive, intimidating or hostile; which interferes with an individual's working or social environment; or which induces stress, anxiety, fear or sickness on the part of the harassed person. The defining features are that the behaviour is offensive or intimidating to the recipient and would be so regarded by any reasonable person.

It is important to remember that differences of attitude, background or culture and the misinterpretation of social signals can mean that what is perceived as harassment by one person may not seem so to another. However, it is expected that, regardless of culture, attitude or background, that staff treat each other with respect, in line with our values and, where an unacceptable practice is identified within the work setting, that the agreed behaviour is adopted.

Being under the influence of alcohol or drugs will not be admitted as an excuse for harassment.

Harassment may take many forms and involve more than one individual both as the harasser and the victim. It can range from extreme forms such as violence and bullying, to less obvious actions like ignoring someone at work. It can happen at all levels of the organisation. It may occur where the harasser has a position of authority (eg where a teacher, supervisor or administrator is able to affect another person's job, career or grade) and relies upon the fact that the recipient(s) are reluctant to complain for fear of ridicule or reprisals. Any act of harassment will be regarded by the organisation as more serious if it involves the abuse of the position of authority or trust.

Occasionally, staff and volunteers will be subjected to verbal or physical abuse from parents, carers and external workers. We recognise that sometimes parents are in a heightened anxiety/stress due to their caring responsibility and that this may result in what could be interpreted as abusive behaviour towards staff and volunteers. SoLO operates a zero tolerance approach to this and will support staff to remain professional at all times in their dealings with others.

Some general examples of harassment may include:

- physical contact ranging from touching to serious assault
- verbal and written harassment through jokes, offensive language, gossip and slander, sectarian songs, letters, etc

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- visual display of posters, graffiti, obscene gestures, flags, bunting and emblems
- isolation or non co-operation at work, exclusion from social activities
- coercion ranging from pressure for sexual favours to pressure to participate in political/religious groups
- intrusion by pestering, spying or following someone
- bullying

Two important examples, amongst others, are sexual harassment and racial harassment both of which are illegal.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment always involves unwanted attention which emphasises sexual status over status as an individual, client or colleague. It can occur in a variety of circumstances but always has a distinctive feature: the inappropriate introduction of sexual comments or activities into teaching, learning, administrative working or social situations.

Racial Harassment

Racial harassment is any hostile or offensive act or expression by a person of one racial or ethnic origin against a person of another, or incitement to commit such an act. Those who may be particularly affected are students and staff who are in a small minority within SoLO and, for fear of ridicule or reprisals, find it difficult to complain.

Any difficulty in defining what constitutes sexual and racial harassment should not deter staff or clients from complaining about behaviour which causes them distress. Nor should anyone be deterred from making a complaint because of embarrassment or fear of intimidation or publicity. The organisation will respect the particular sensitivity of sexual and racial harassment complaints and their consequences as well as the need for the utmost confidentiality.

Everyone can contribute toward preventing harassment through an active awareness of the issues involved and also by ensuring that standards of conduct for themselves and for friends and colleagues do not cause offence.

Harassment Advice

Staff, volunteers or members who feel that they are the subject of harassment should speak to the Project Leader, Project Manager or CEO. They are also able to speak to any of the volunteer trustees who will listen to their concerns, provide support and suggest the appropriate way to deal with the harassment.

Procedures for Dealing with Harassment

If an individual feels that they are being subjected to sexual or racial harassment in any form by a volunteer, service user or a member of staff; they should not feel that it is their fault or that they have to tolerate it. The primary concern is that anyone who is subjected to harassment should receive support and assistance and, where appropriate, remedy. It is also recognised that confidentiality is of the utmost importance.

There are a number of possible courses of action which they can take to deal with harassment:

1. They are encouraged to talk about the problem with the Project Leader, Project Manager, CEO or one of the trustees. All will take an impartial view on the matter and will listen, without prejudice to their concerns and advise them on a course of action, take the matter up on their behalf or refer them for specialist advice. They may suggest a way of resolving the problem which they had not thought of. The organisation will actively encourage staff to contact someone even if an incident occurs only once.

Any discussion will be confidential and further action involving the individual who is subject to alleged harassment will not be taken without their express permission; in particular the person about whom they are complaining will not be given their name as a complainant without their express permission.

2. If at all possible they should make it clear to the person causing the offence that such behaviour on that person's part is unacceptable to them and that it interferes with their work, study or social life. They may find it easier to do this by letter (they should keep a copy). Alternatively they may wish to get support from a friend or colleague to help them explain their feelings to the person harassing them. If they feel unable to confront the person concerned this does not constitute consent to the harassment. If they have a learning disability, they will be offered support from either the Project Leader, the Project Manager or the CEO.

3. It is important that they begin to make a note of the details of any relevant incidents which distress them, or seek support to someone who can help them make notes - particularly if they feel unable to speak to the person concerned or, if having spoken, the behaviour persists. They should include a note of the way in which the incidents cause them to change the pattern of their work or social life.

4. If the harassment continues they must inform the Project Leader, Project Manager or CEO as soon as possible. This will enable them to discuss the nature of their complaint in confidence in order to arrive at an acceptable solution on an informal basis.

5. If the harassment is serious or has not been resolved by the above means then they or someone acting on their behalf has the right to make a formal

written complaint to the Trustees. They may call upon the Project Leader, Project Manager or CEO to support them in making this complaint. In some cases it may be appropriate for staff to use the grievance procedures. Either route may lead to efforts to arrive at an acceptable solution on an informal basis or to the initiation of the appropriate disciplinary procedures.

6. When a staff member or volunteer is subjected to verbal abuse from a parent, carer or external worker either in person, by telephone or email, they will remain calm, explain that the tone of the conversation is not acceptable and refer the person to their line manager. If the verbal abuse is during a telephone conversation, they will politely ask the person to refrain or they will end the call. If the abuse does not stop, the conversation will be ended. If the verbal abuse is face to face, on project, staff will use their training in de-escalation and, where necessary, call another member of staff to support them in the interaction. In all cases of abuse from a parent, carer or external worker, an incident report form must be completed and the line manager will follow it up with the perpetrator and inform them of SoLO's approach to abuse of this nature. The whole incident will be considered and any learning will be applied. Where there is evidence of repeated incidents of verbal abuse SoLO will reserve the right to withdraw the service. Where staff and volunteers are subjected to physical abuse at the hands of either a parent, carer or external worker, this will be immediately referred to the police. Staff and volunteers who have been subjected to this will be supported by their line managers and, if they require time out from their role to recover from the incident, this will be actioned.

Cases of sexual, racial or physical assault

1. If they have been attacked, they are advised to seek help immediately. They may decide to report the attack to the police. Any one of the Project Leaders, Project Managers or CEO will willingly give them support and help them decide what to do. If this may result in further action involving them, this will not be taken without their express permission. If they decide to go to the police they will not have to go alone, unless they so wish.
2. If they have been sexually assaulted or raped they are advised to seek advice and medical help as soon as possible.
3. For their own protection and the protection of others it is important that any attack should be reported to the CEO. In either case, when reporting the attack they will not have to go alone, unless they so wish.
4. Even if an attack happened some time ago they are encouraged to report it and/or seek advice from either the Project Leader, Project Manager or CEO.
5. Where the disclosure implies that a crime has been committed, there is a responsibility on the staff member receiving this disclosure to report to the CEO who, in turn, will report to the police regardless of permission given.

Vexatious Complaints

Complaints of harassment are treated seriously by SoLO. It should therefore be noted that anyone making mischievous or malicious complaints may have disciplinary action taken against them, up to and including dismissal or expulsion.

What to do if they are accused of harassment

Harassment is an issue which must be taken seriously by colleagues, clients and the management. An accusation of harassment does not signify a judgement that they are guilty and there will need to be a discussion with them in order to establish the true nature of the situation. It is possible that there might be a behaviour-at-work problem which has arisen because they have not realised the effect of their actions and they may not have intended the effects complained of. The perception of the person complaining of harassment is, however, an important factor in determining whether or not harassment has taken place.

They may contact their Project Leader, Project Manager or CEO if they are accused of harassment. The aim of the person they contact will be to facilitate discussion with a view to resolving the problem at source if possible. They have the right throughout any discussions or formal actions, to be accompanied by a colleague of their choice.

In many cases the problem will be solved informally through discussion. They will be asked to reflect on their behaviour and the possibility that they might be at fault, whether consciously or not. This does not imply, however, that they are responsible for the harassment. A simple discussion between them and the person with a complaint may set matters right.

Details relating to the circumstances that gave rise to the complaint, the existence of witnesses and the nature of the professional relationship between the person complaining and the alleged harasser will all be taken into account. If the complaint is taken to a formal stage, the organisation will ensure that any formal procedures are fairly and properly followed.

Throughout any informal or formal procedures the principal objective is that of identifying the underlying issues and eliminating the cause of offence as quickly as possible and with minimal recrimination.

Linked with policies:

- Grievance
- Disciplinary
- Complaints
- Whistle blowing (challenging bad practice)