

Procedure: Workplace Bullying, Violence Identification and Prevention

1. Purpose

To provide a workplace that is free from bullying and proactive in assessing potential threats and acts of violence upon workers or visitors.

2. Actions Required

- Encourage and necessitate appropriate workplace behaviour
- Identify areas where workers may be exposed to threats or acts of violence
- Implement appropriate control measures to eliminate or reduce exposure to acts of violence
- Provide appropriate support systems to workers.

3. Scope

This procedure applies to all workers and worksites. A worksite is also defined as a place where a worker is providing a service or performing an activity on behalf of the GSCC at a private residence.

4. Definitions

BEHAVIOUR - includes actions of an individual or a group, and may involve using a system of work as a means of victimising, humiliating, undermining or threatening.

COMPLAINT HANDLER-The GSCC worker responsible for the investigation and resolution of any reported or witnessed inappropriate behaviours.

EAP – Employee Assistance Program

GSCC- Greater Shepparton City Council

GSCC RO - GSCC Responsible Officer, a Greater Shepparton City Council employee, who in their area of responsibility has a managerial or supervisory role over employees, contractors or volunteers.

HR – Human Resource Team

RISK TO HEALTH - includes risk to the mental or physical health of the employee.

UNREASONABLE BEHAVIOUR - means behaviour that a reasonable person, having regard to all circumstances, would expect to victimise, humiliate, undermine or threaten.

5. Responsibility And Authority

Directors

- Set an appropriate standard and behaviour when dealing with others in the workplace
- Assist in the promotion and application of a workplace free of bullying and violence
- Respond to bullying, harassment and acts of violence against workers or visitors in an appropriate time frame, taking into account sensitivities and privacy issues that may be present
- Ensure workers who lodge a complaint or have witnessed an incident are not victimised.

Managers, Team Leaders, Supervisors and Contractors

- Set an appropriate standard and behaviour when dealing with others in the workplace
- Identify positions within area of responsibility where workers may be exposed to threats or acts of violence
- Implement control measures to limit workers exposure to threats or acts of violence

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- Assist in the promotion, application and processes involved in obtaining a workplace free of bullying and violence
- Respond to bullying, harassment and acts of violence against workers or visitors in an appropriate time frame, taking into account sensitivities and privacy issues that may be present
- Ensure workers who lodge a complaint or have witnessed an incident are not victimised
- Inform workers on available support networks

Workers

- Abide by GSCC Code of Conduct Policy
- Report any incidents of workplace bullying or violence
- Do not participate in, or threaten, acts of violence
- Behave in accordance with the principles of Equal Opportunity and Anti-Discrimination Acts.

6. Procedure

Under Section 21 of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* employers must ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, risks to health and safety from violence or threats of violence in the workplace are eliminated or reduced.

Violence at work can happen in a variety of workplaces. It may cause psychological and physical pain and suffering, and may result in permanent disability or even death.

It is important to recognise that violence is a workplace hazard, and RO's must take reasonably practicable steps to protect workers and visitors in the workplace from violent incidents which may harm them.

Identifying Exposure to Threats or Acts of Violence

GSCC RO's are to identify worker exposure to threats and acts of violence by:

- Conducting risk assessments to identify areas where workers may be exposed to threats or acts of violence
- Identifying workers who work alone, deal in person with customer complaints or who handle cash
- Provide information to workers to increase awareness of violence as a hazard
- Report all incidents of bullying, harassment or violence.

Control Measures

Controls to mitigate violence at work may include:

- Eliminating the opportunity for violent or threatening behaviour
- Isolating or minimising the potential for violence
- Providing personal protection such as duress alarms
- Training in handling confrontational behaviour and diffusing aggression
- More staff at peak periods to reduce stress
- Training for employees new to areas on potential workplace violence
- A system for alerting co-workers, Security organisations or police.

Workers should have clear directions on:

- Changes made to work environment that limit opportunities for violent and threatening behaviour by others

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- Conflict resolution methods
- Procedures for calling for assistance
- Procedures and training for dealing with incidents
- Procedures for protection of persons not involved in a disturbance
- Cash handling procedures.

Recovery and Review

Procedures, work instructions or systems in place to mitigate violence or consequences of an incident in the workplace must be appropriately reviewed periodically to ensure:

- Procedures are being followed
- They are working and effective
- Still meets the initial requirements
- The work place is safe.

If workers reactions to incidents are not actively managed, the impact to the organisation and the individual can be damaging.

Employees exposed to occupational violence or threats must be informed of the support available from one or more of the following:

- Doctor
- Employee Assistance Program(EAP)
- Human Resources Branch
- GSCC Contact Officers.

7. Bullying

Workplace bullying is defined as repeated, unreasonable behaviour directed towards a worker or group of workers that creates a risk to their health, safety or wellbeing and is directly related to the workplace.

Bullying differs from harassment and assault in that the latter can result from a single incident or small number of incidents, whereas bullying tends to be an accumulation of incidents over a long period of time. A single incident of unreasonable behaviour or harassment may have the potential to escalate into bullying and therefore should not be ignored.

Any reports of workplace bullying must be treated seriously and investigated promptly, confidentially and impartially.

Types of behaviour where repeated or occurring as a pattern of behaviour would be considered bullying include:

- Verbal abuse or threats including yelling, screaming or offensive language
- Spreading malicious rumours
- Direct misconduct
- Indirect misconduct
- Cyber bullying including leaving offensive messages on email or phone
- Abusing a person loudly usually when others are present
- Copying emails that are critical about someone to others who do not need to know
- Belittling remarks
- Excluding or isolating employees from workplace activities

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- Assigning impossible tasks, meaningless tasks unrelated to the job, or giving someone the majority of unpleasant tasks
- Deliberately changing work rosters to inconvenience particular staff members
- Withholding information essential to do a task properly
- Undermining responsibility
- Making threats or comments about job security without foundation
- Psychological harassment
- Intimidation
- Deliberately withholding information that is vital for effective work performance
- Persistent and unjustified criticisms
- Humiliating a person through gestures, sarcasm, criticism and insults, often in front of customers, management or other employees.

If a complaint or allegation of harassment or bullying is received or witnessed, the complaint, allegation or sighting is to be acted on immediately.

The GSCC RO must ensure:

- Workers who make complaints or witnesses these acts are not victimized
- All situations where inappropriate behaviour is exhibited or alleged to have occurred are responded to with sensitivity and confidence
- Workers are advised to contact EAP, HR or GSCC Contact Officer for advice and support
- HR is advised if matters cannot be resolved within the work group.



Bullying can harm a person's health and wellbeing. It can affect work place productivity and efficiency and is not an acceptable part of our work culture.

What Isn't Bullying?

Reasonable management actions carried out in a fair way are not bullying.

For example:

- Setting performance goals, standards and deadlines
- Allocating tasks to a worker
- Rostering and allocating reasonable work hours
- Transferring a worker
- Deciding not to select a worker for promotion
- Informing a worker about unsatisfactory work performance
- Informing a worker about inappropriate behaviour
- Implementing organisational changes
- Performance management processes
- Constructive feedback
- Downsizing

8. Reporting

Where unacceptable behaviour occurs, employees have a right to report the situation and are encouraged to do so. Potential complainants and witnesses should be assured that they are entitled to protection from any victimisation taken against them as a result of their complaint. Victimisation or reprisal by workers will result in disciplinary action being taken.

The formal process for reporting workplace bullying is outlined as follows:

- An employee may make a complaint of harassment either verbally or in writing to:
 - Their immediate Supervisor or Manager

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- Their Director
- Manager People Development
- Contact Officer
- OHS department
- Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

Wherever possible the complaint should be resolved, to the satisfaction of all parties within the work group in a positive, constructive and responsible manner.

The manager can seek assistance from Human Resources to:

- Conduct an investigation if required
- Follow the process for Issue Resolution Procedure 2.16.1
- Provide workers with support (EAP if required) while maintaining confidentiality.

Complaint Resolution Agreement

Many complaints can be settled by agreement between the workers involved. Confidential records will be kept within Organisational Development.

Insufficient Evidence to Act

Where there is insufficient evidence to act on the alleged incident no disciplinary action will be taken.

It may be decided to:

- Monitor the situation
- Consider staff training on the particular policy or standard involved

Disciplinary Action

If the GSCC RO decides that there has been a breach of Legislation or Council's procedures it may be recommended:

- The worker responsible for the breach is disciplined in accordance with Council's disciplinary procedures
- Legal action be taken.

9. References

- Occupational *Health and Safety Act 2004*
- *Equal Opportunity Act 1995*
- WorkSafe "Preventing and Responding to Bullying at work" 2009
- GSCC Workplace Bullying & Violence identification and prevention - Procedure 46.PRO4.21
- GSCC Bullying and Harassment Policy Statement
- GSCC Respectful Workplaces Policy
- *Worksafe – A guide for employers "work-related violence October 2020*
- Disciplinary Procedure
- Grievance Procedure
- Issue Resolution Procedure

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10. Related OHS Procedures and Documents

Supporting Documents Refer Trim Reference:

- ❖ ELUMINA Incident reporting [M19/7897 - How to Lodge an OHS Report - View](#)
- ❖ OHS Policy Statement [M10/108568 - Occupational Safety Policy Statement Signed - CEO Peter Harriott - View](#)
- ❖ Incident and Near Miss Reporting [M10/105068 - Incident and Near Miss Reporting Procedure - 46.PRO3.7 - View](#)

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