

Guidelines for the safety and wellbeing of Church Society staff, trustees and officers including guidelines for responding to abuse.



1 Statement of context

Christian people are required by God to have high regard for the health and wellbeing of others, expressed in their physical health and safety, and their mental and spiritual wellbeing. This is an important factor in relationships between Church Society staff, trustees, council, volunteers, members and others the Society serves. It is therefore an important aspect of our management of Church Society, and is kept under regular review.

This policy is designed to give attention to the general wellbeing of staff and volunteers, encouraging a healthy culture for work and service; and to help foster relationships of integrity, truthfulness and trustworthiness. It also seeks to prevent and address, so far as possible, those circumstances detrimental to physical, mental or spiritual wellbeing; and also provide ways to address situations where this has broken down. In that regard, abuse of this obligation by harassment or bullying will not be tolerated in Church Society as it undermines the love we should demonstrate for each other and our Christian witness to the world. Therefore, all complaints of abuse, harassment and bullying will be taken seriously and thoroughly investigated.

We recognise that many relationship and work-related problems can be dealt with by mutual communication and pastoral care for each other. Some problems may be addressed by the informal mediation of another person. This policy addresses more serious situations, which need more formal external support to resolve.

2 Statement of commitment

As a Church Society, we aim to:

- promote good practice in physical, mental and spiritual health & wellbeing; and with regard to health and safety, and safeguarding;
- identify those circumstances that may contribute to inappropriate levels of work-related stress and conduct risk assessments to eliminate or control the risks from such stress;
- provide confidential support for staff whose wellbeing is affected by either work or external factors;
- create a culture where healthy practices in relation to food and physical activity are encouraged;
- enable people with physical or mental disabilities to enter as fully as possible into the life and activities of the Church Society and the wider church.

3 Responsibility of the organisation

We have a responsibility to:

- promote an emphasis toward good physical, mental and spiritual health and wellbeing;
- provide a safe and secure working environment for staff, trustees, council, volunteers, members and others the Society serves;
- provide central support, resources and access to advisory services if necessary;
- to have regard for the Church of England Covenant for Clergy Care and Wellbeing;
- monitor the effectiveness of this policy through annual reporting to the Church Society Council.

4 Dealing with staff

i. All staff are expected to:

- Treat every other member of staff with dignity and respect as an individual;
- Uphold confidentiality (wherever safety is not at risk);
- Follow advice on health and safety;
- Comply with policies on safeguarding;
- Raise issues of concern with their line manager, or a member of the Church Society Council;
- Accept opportunities for occupational health review or counselling when recommended;
- Share ideas for promoting health and wellbeing in the workplace;
- Work together to create a culture where healthy lifestyles are supported in all activities of the Church Society.

ii. All line managers and those with supervisory responsibility for other employees are required to:

- Ensure a safe and secure working environment, with respect to health and safety;
- Monitor working hours to ensure staff are not overworking, and monitor holidays to ensure staff are taking their full entitlement;
- Ensure any potential staff wellbeing issues are communicated to a member of the Church Society Council as soon as possible in order to secure appropriate advice and support;
- Ensure effective measures are in place for monitoring all sickness absences for stress-related absence;
- Ensure absence patterns are monitored, and anomalies are reported to the Church Society Council.

5 Dealing with unacceptable behaviour, bullying and harassment

i. What is bullying and harassment?

Any behaviour that could potentially undermine someone's dignity and respect should be regarded as unacceptable. If it is not challenged the person who is doing the alleged bullying or harassing may not understand how the behaviour is perceived and it has the potential to escalate and lead to significant difficulties for all concerned.

In establishing the links between “unacceptable behaviour”, “bullying” and “harassment” this broad definition may be helpful:

Any behaviour involving a misuse of power, which an individual or group knows, or ought reasonably to know, could have the effect of offending, humiliating, intimidating or isolating an individual or group should be regarded as unacceptable in a church community or society, both to those who are paid or to members of the church or society.

‘Unacceptable behaviour’ changes its label to ‘bullying’ or ‘harassing behaviour’ when it causes actual harm or distress to the person to whom it is addressed, normally but not exclusively after a series of incidents over a period of time.

Lack of intent is not an excuse, but the degree of intent is relevant in terms of how the behaviour should be challenged and the issues subsequently resolved.

ii. How can bullying and harassment be recognised?

Bullying is more easily seen when it is continuous, frequent, repetitive and part of an overall pattern. However some abuse is serious enough to be recognised even if the behaviour occurred only once and is therefore not defined as bullying.

Bullying 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 a variety of symptoms including fear, isolation, demotivation, poor concentration and symptoms of stress. Another consequence can be ill health leading to absence from work or a stubborn attendance when obviously unwell, and psychological emotional and physical harm can be done.

Examples of bullying behaviour

This list of behaviours is not exhaustive but gives a clear indication of the sorts of actions that may constitute bullying or harassment:

- consistently attacking someone’s professional or personal or religious standing
- isolating someone or deliberately ignoring or excluding them from activities
- removing areas of responsibility without discussion or notice
- setting out to make someone appear incompetent
- deliberately withholding information or providing incorrect information in order to demean another
- over loading with work and or reducing deadlines without paying attention to any protest
- persistently picking on someone in front of others
- spreading malicious rumours to third parties
- public humiliation by constant innuendo, belittling and “putting down”
- frequent use of emails to an individual rather than face to face discussion to reprimand, insult or otherwise inform someone of their apparent failing, and/or copying this in appropriately to third parties
- personal insults and name-calling
- making false accusations
- aggressive gestures, verbal threats and intimidation
- talking/shouting directly into someone’s face
- direct physical intimidation

The most serious incidents might result in:

- creating an unsafe working or church 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

iii Distinguishing bullying from reasonable behaviour

It is 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 if a recipient is unused to being challenged or asked to account for their actions.

iv What is harassment?

Harassment, in general terms, is the unwanted conduct affecting the dignity of men and women. It may be related to disability, race, gender, age, religious belief (including theology or churchmanship), nationality or any personal characteristic of the individual and may be persistent or an isolated incident. What is important is that the actions or comments are viewed by the recipient as demeaning and unacceptable.

v When should action be taken?

We 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. This should be done in accordance with the Complaints Policy.¹ It is important to understand why they feel as they do and look for a solution to the problem and/or an improvement in the relationship. If we are to model a loving Christian community then the way that we deal with such situations and incidents will demonstrate our belief in repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation.

6 Standards of behaviour

Those with pastoral or leadership responsibilities will recognise the importance of being good role models in the way that they interact with those for whom they have pastoral care and/or leadership. A culture of support and empowerment where there is consultation and real discussion of problems and their solutions is one which should discourage bullying and harassment. Training in this area is important, and may be reviewed in staff appraisal.

Every officer, trustee or member of the society will recognise the importance of good relationships in their church life and discipleship, and that poor behaviour can set back the mission of the church. They will undertake to challenge poor behaviour, seek help when this does not stop and participate in any investigation or mediation to end the problem.

Unreasonable behaviour towards staff, trustees, council or volunteers serving the Church Society from those outside it, whether in person, on the phone or social media, is not to be deemed acceptable. Each case needs to

¹ Available at <https://churchsociety.org/>
Church Society Code of Practice July 2020
To be reviewed by end of August 2020

be treated individually, with appropriate pastoral care and wisdom. For the safety and wellbeing of those concerned, the following guide is recommended:

Level 1: Personal unacceptable behaviour towards staff

- Refer offender to Complaints Procedure
- Report to Line Manager

Level 2: Repeated unacceptable behaviour towards staff

- Line Manager to respond
- Instigate appropriate break in communication
- Report to Council

Level 3: Unacceptable behaviour regarding Church Society reputation

- Refer to Director for response
- Repeated behaviour should be referred to Chair of Council for response
- If necessary, implementation of Complaints Procedure

7 Communication and training

The Church Society Council is responsible for encouraging and monitoring the implementation of the policy. The Director will ensure that this policy is included in the information for new employees or trustees, that it is on the Church Society website, and that suitable resources are made available to encourage best practice in this regard.

The Church Society Council will ensure suitable training is made available as appropriate for staff and trustees.

8 Dealing with complaints

i. Confidentiality

With respect to any complaints raised through the Complaints Policy Procedure, these matters are to be treated with absolute confidentiality and no action will be taken without the willing consent of the person who feels he or she has been a target.

ii. Fair procedures

When both the complainant and the subject of the complaint are ordained clergy or licensed lay ministers, complaints of bullying or harassment may with the complainant's consent be brought under the Grievance Procedure for Licensed Ministers. It has been developed by the church to deal with grievances of various kinds between ministers. When the subject of the complaint is a clergy person it may be more appropriate for the complainant, or an archdeacon with their consent, to make a complaint under the Clergy Disciplinary Measure 2003.

When the subject of the complaint is a layperson, and the complainant is either ordained or lay, complaints of bullying and harassment may, with the complainant's consent, be dealt with in one of a number of ways according to the circumstances – in each case having regard to both 'sides' of the complaint:

- a personal meeting with the Church Society Director and Chair;
- a meeting with an independent group of Church Society Council members;
- the use of an independent Mediation Service;
- referral to a Counselling Service.

iii False accusations

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 clergy person this may be a complaint under the Clergy Disciplinary Measure 2003. A member of either the clergy or laity could be subject to an action for defamation if they have made false accusations against someone else.

This policy should be taken alongside other relevant Church Society policies including the Safeguarding Policy, the Code of Practice for trustees and other officers, and the Complaints Policy. All these policies are available at <https://churchsociety.org/society/page/policies>

Policies are agreed by the elected Church Society Council and are reviewed annually.