

## Appendix G – I have been accused of bullying and harassment, what can I do?

**Bullying and harassment are matters that must be taken seriously.** An accusation does not signify a judgement that you are guilty, and there will need to be a discussion with you to establish the true nature of the situation. There might be a problem that has arisen because you have not realised the effect of your actions and you may not have intended the effects complained of.

You should be very careful not to behave towards the person making the allegation in any way that might cause further difficulties between you.

Whilst not all complaints are justified and some may arise from misunderstanding, simply to be defensive and deny there is a problem, or to insist that the problem lies with the person complaining, is unrealistic and is more likely to aggravate the situation. The **perception of the person complaining** of bullying or harassment is therefore an important factor in determining whether or not harassment has taken place and must be considered. Attempting to see the situation from the other person's point of view and to understand how they may have been affected may be sufficient to resolve the situation.

**Get support:** You are encouraged to contact your line manager / supervising minister if you are accused of harassment. The person you contact will aim to facilitate discussion to resolve the problem at the source if possible.

This diocese has appointed **Authorised Listeners**, who have been specially trained to be available to any member of the clergy, employee, or laity to listen and discuss the individual's situation. They support those involved in cases of bullying and harassment, and you are strongly advised to use this support. Authorised Listeners are volunteers who are fully trained, guarantee appropriate confidentiality, and will meet with you in private to talk through your position. They will provide clear information, help and guidance on procedures for dealing with claims of bullying and harassment and help you to clarify the impact your behaviour may be having so that you can decide what to do about it.

In many cases, the problem will be resolved informally through discussion using the options within the informal procedure including direct contact, a facilitated discussion or mediation to cease the unwanted behaviour before formal procedures are invoked. As part of this procedure you will be asked to reflect on your behaviour and the possibility that you might be at fault, whether consciously or not.

If after taking forward action under the informal procedure, your behaviour continues or escalates, the complainant/ alleged victim can refer their complaint to the relevant formal procedure. However, in circumstances where the behaviour is perceived as too serious to be dealt with informally, the relevant formal procedure would be considered. These are fairly and properly followed. Any investigation will be conducted objectively and confidentially. Details relating to the circumstances that gave rise to the complaint, the evidence of witnesses and the nature of the professional relationship between the person complaining and yourself will all be taken into account.

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. As a result of informal or formal action, you may be offered help to recognise, understand and modify your behaviour; you are strongly advised to accept this help. Under certain circumstances, a refusal to accept help could be a disciplinary issue.

## Resources available to support understanding of the issues involved as well as ways of handling a bullying and harassment case

### Related national policies for those in ministry

- **Dignity at Work** – working together to reduce incidents of bullying and harassment; a policy issued by the Ministry Division of the Archbishops' Council 2008 (under review). <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/dignity%20at%20work%20booklet.pdf>
- **Promoting a Safer Church**; House of Bishop's policy statement (2017) – safeguarding policy statement for children, young people, and adults. <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-05/PromotingSaferChurchWeb.pdf>
- **Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy** <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/policy-and-thinking/guidelines-professional-conduct-clergy/guidelines-professional-conduct>
- **Grievance Procedure Code of Practice** issued by The Archbishops' Council 2009. For anyone dealing with a grievance raised by any person holding office on common tenure must have regard to this Code of Practice. <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/grievanceprocedure%20cop.pdf>
- **Grievance Procedure for Licensed Ministers**; issued by the Ministry Division of the Archbishops' Council 2005. For all clergy and licensed or accredited lay ministers exercising ministry within the Church of England. [https://www.oxford.anglican.org/archive/diocesan\\_clergy\\_handbook\\_\(section\\_10\)-doc-1.pdf](https://www.oxford.anglican.org/archive/diocesan_clergy_handbook_(section_10)-doc-1.pdf)
- **Clergy Discipline Measure 2003** – as amended by the Clergy Discipline (Amendment) Measure 2013 and the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016. [https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/cdm-2003-as-amended-by-scdm-jan-2017-as-published\\_0.pdf](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/cdm-2003-as-amended-by-scdm-jan-2017-as-published_0.pdf)

### Related policies for ODBF/ODBE employees

- **Grievance procedure, Disciplinary procedure and Whistleblowing policy** can be located under section 8 – professional conduct policies and the **Capability procedure** under section 9 of the relevant staff handbook [ODBE](#) / [ODBF](#).
- For those employed by a PCC or volunteer refer to your entities related policies. Alternatively, refer to the **Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS)** Code of Practice on [Discipline and Grievances at Work – The ACAS Guide](#).

### Support

- The **Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)** with Health Assured offers a range of confidential support services to all clergy and ODBF/ODBE employees within the diocese, designed to help you deal with personal and professional problems that could be affecting their mental health and wellbeing.
  - The free 24-hour confidential helpline: 0800 028 0199. Health assured website can be accessed [here](#).

- Alternatively, you can download 'My Healthy Advantage' which will prompt you for the employer code. A member of the HR team will be able to provide you with the login details and/or the employer code.
- The **Parish Toolkit** provides PCC's within the diocese with advice and guidance on the employment lifecycle available [here](#).
- **Safeguarding** in the Diocese of Oxford website [here](#):
- Safe Spaces – Victim Support helpline
- The society of Mary and Martha at Sheldon, (caring for people in ministry): <https://www.sheldon.uk.com/>

## Advice

The following external websites have useful information:

- ACAS (the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service): <https://www.acas.org.uk/>
- Bully Online: <https://www.bullyonline.org/index.php>
- National bullying helpline: <https://www.nationalbullyinghelpline.co.uk/>
- Bullied & abused Lives in Ministry: <https://www.balmnet.co.uk/>
- Unite the Union: <https://unitetheunion.org/>