

Prevention of Harassment and Violence Policy

Inn Churches does not tolerate any form of harassment or violence, and aims to cultivate a calm, welcoming culture where risks to personal safety are minimised, and everybody is treated with dignity and respect.

It is important however to recognize that actual or potential violence may be a problem in working with vulnerable service users. At times service users can display aggressive behaviour, sometimes towards other service users and occasionally towards staff or volunteers. This may take the form of violence or be verbal.

When a service user becomes aggressive it is important for staff and volunteers to remember that they often have the opportunity to calm the situation if they react sensitively to the aggression.

Defining harassment, violence and aggression

Although these guidelines focus on the extreme end of violent behaviour, this does not mean to imply that only physical assault is of concern. Threats and verbal abuse (verbal and non-verbal), for example, are also recognized for their intimidating and undermining impact and, where appropriate, these guidelines should apply to all forms of aggressive behaviour.

The conduct should be unwanted by the recipient and to their detriment, and can be repeated or persistent, or an isolated incident.

Bullying and harassment is an behaviour that makes someone feel intimidated or offended. It is illegal under the Equality Act 2010. Examples could include spreading malicious rumours, unfair treatment, picking on or regularly undermining someone, or denying someone's training or promotion opportunities. Bullying becomes harassment when it is related to one or more of age, sex, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, or sexual orientation.

Procedures for minimising and managing risks

Inn Churches will take reasonable steps to prevent harassment and violence occurring, and to foster a culture where risks are minimised and staff and volunteers supported.

Inn Churches will:

- ensure that staff members and volunteers are aware of the need to take reasonable care of their own safety
- ensure that staff members and volunteers are aware of procedures for reporting harassment and acts of violence
- ensure adequate staffing levels
- provide training and guidance (including that given in this policy) to staff members and volunteers
- adapt premises and provide safety equipment where necessary

- put in place clear systems for excluding people where aggressive behaviour is encountered
- ensure the charity's work is adequately insured in case a problem does arise

Dealing with Harassment

Responding to harassment

A staff member or volunteer who experiences harassment should ask the harasser to stop, or make it clear to them that their behaviour is unwelcome.

Where it is difficult for them to do this themselves face-to-face, they should consider putting it in writing. They are also encouraged to approach their line manager the CEO, another senior member of staff, or a Trustee for help in making this initial response.

If the harassment does not cease as a result of this action, staff members or volunteers should bring a formal complaint about the matter, seeking help to do this as above if necessary. The complaint should be submitted to the Chair of Trustees, and should detail the name of the harasser, what form the harassment took, dates and times, any witness, and any action already taken.

The Chair will designate a trustee or senior member of staff to investigate and respond to the complaint. Where the complaint is against any senior member of staff, it will be handled by a trustee.

The complaint will be investigated as quickly as possible. Anybody involved in the investigation must respect the need for confidentiality, and breaking confidentiality will be considered a disciplinary offence in itself.

If the investigation concludes that harassment did take place, the harasser will be given opportunity to explain their actions, in line with the Disciplinary policy.

Penalties for harassment will be consistent with those in the Disciplinary policy, and therefore may result in instant dismissal. Where a lesser penalty is warranted, additional action may be taken to ensure that the victim can continue to work without anxiety or discomfort, which may include changes to working practices to minimise contact, or moving the harasser to a different work area, if the working environment allows for that.

The investigation results will be communicated to both the harasser and the victim.

If a staff member or volunteer is not satisfied with how their complaint has been handled, they may ask the Chair to reconsider it. Any such request should be made within seven days of the outcome of the initial investigation being notified. The complaint will be reconsidered by the Chair, or if they were involved in the original investigation (other than appointing an investigator), another Trustee not involved in the first investigation. The outcome of the second investigation will be final.

A staff member or volunteer sanctioned for harassment may appeal against the penalty following the usual disciplinary process.

A staff member or volunteer who makes a genuine harassment complaint (whatever the outcome) will not be victimised or treated adversely for having made the complaint. However, if the complaint is determined to have been made in bad faith, disciplinary action will be taken.

General guidelines for managing violence and aggression

It is natural to be frightened of violence and this needs to be taken into account in the expectations of yourself or others when dealing with actual or potential violence or threatening behaviour. In responding, the safety of yourself, colleagues and service users must be the first consideration.

Guidelines can never cover every eventuality. Staff and volunteers must also draw on their experience, skills and common sense when faced with aggressive situations. All staff and volunteers should cooperate in taking a consistent approach to confronting service users about unacceptable behaviour and in banning or excluding service users. As far as possible, one staff member or volunteer should not be identified as the instigator of a ban – these should be presented as team decisions, and all staff and volunteers must actively support the decision, even if their opinion differs.

Procedures for managing a violent incident

When a violent incident occurs, or the potential for a violent incident is identified

One or two staff members or volunteers should calmly but firmly talk to the individual(s) concerned, trying to create opportunities for the service user(s) to back down without feeling humiliated. Where possible, they should be taken aside.

Other staff and volunteers should remain at a reasonable distance but pay attention in case the situation escalates. Staff and volunteers who are not directly involved should attempt to keep other guests calm and prevent them from becoming involved unless they are friends who can assist.

One staff member or volunteer should ensure that any vulnerable people are removed from the area and, if possible, potential weapons (such as plates, cutlery, chairs) should be removed. Space should be created to ensure that people are not crowded into a confined area. All present should be mindful of their own and others' 'escape route' should it be necessary to get out of the way fast. One staff member or volunteer (identified at the beginning of each shift or session) should be in a position to phone for police assistance should this become necessary.

If an incident escalates and the guest(s) cannot be calmed, staff and volunteers should calmly evacuate the area. Police should be summoned immediately. Personal safety must be put before the protection of property. In exceptional circumstances, if retreat is not possible, staff and volunteers should defend themselves appropriately.

In the unlikely event of an attack, only force sufficient to stop the attacker and prevent injury to any persons should be used. Reasonable restraint is acceptable.

Tips for diffusing tense situations

It is the responsibility of all staff and volunteers to alert colleagues at the first sign of aggression and to act cooperatively to defuse the situation. If possible, spot the early warning signs that tensions are developing and attempt to intervene so as to avoid any actual conflict.

If this is not possible and a tense situation develops, try to:

- speak calmly and respectfully to the service user
- allow the service user sufficient personal space: do not crowd them as this can inflame the situation

- try to remove from the situation any person who seems to be increasing the tension, whether that is another service user or a volunteer or staff member
- try not to take offence if insulting comments are made: a strong reaction from you to such comments is likely to make the situation worse
- avoid being overly authoritative, whilst remaining firm
- ensure that other staff, volunteers and service users are safe.

Above all, remember that calming and resolving the situation is more important than being right: even if a service user is clearly behaving in an unacceptable way, your primary concern is not the enforcement of the rules but the safety of everyone involved.

If the tension is diffused

Clearly this is the best possible outcome and staff and volunteers should ensure they follow the tips provided above and that their behaviour does not further inflame the situation.

If the immediate threat is abated but tensions continue

If the immediate issue is resolved and a 999 call unnecessary but staff or volunteers have safety concerns about the service user remaining onsite, the person leading the session, in consultation with the other staff and volunteers, may decide that the person needs to be asked to leave.

In the Winter Shelter, this will mean recommending to the **on-call coordinator** that the guest be placed in alternative accommodation immediately. The **on-call coordinator** or **project coordinator** may then decide to arrange for the guest to be relocated.

If the incident escalates

If any volunteer is concerned for the immediate safety of themselves or anybody else, they should immediately dial 999 and the person leading the session should immediately inform the Project Coordinator / CEO.

After a violent incident has occurred

If an incident does occur, it is likely to be unsettling for both volunteers and service users. Make sure to:

- promote first aid where necessary.
- provide reassurance and help everyone to calm down.
- record the incident details (with names / times) immediately – full statements will be taken later.
- arrange for any staff member or volunteer that has been scared or hurt to leave the shift.
- arrange longer term support where necessary.
- discuss the incident as soon as reasonable practical following the incident with the Project Coordinator / CEO to draw out lessons for avoiding a similar incident in the future.
- depending on the context, consider providing other service users with brief details of what happened and how it was dealt with, to prevent rumours and provide reassurance.