

# Good behaviour preferred

– inappropriate behaviour unacceptable



# A guide to identifying, preventing and acting on inappropriate behaviour at the workplace



## Everyone shares the responsibility

**The Finnish labour organisations have decided to take up the question of preventing harassment and bullying at the workplace and to provide the means to resolve problem situations. The European framework agreement on harassment and violence at work provided the background to this cooperative initiative.**

Inappropriate treatment should not be accepted at the workplace. Inappropriate treatment is defined as harassment, bullying and other inappropriate behaviour at the workplace. Each member of the working community is responsible for his or her own behaviour and everyone also shares the responsibility for promoting good manners at work.

Any member of the working community may be guilty of harassment, either personally or in a group. The target may be either a worker or a manager. Inappropriate treatment can occur at any workplace and it can manifest itself in different ways and in different degrees of seriousness.

The law requires the employer to take action as soon as possible on being informed of inappropriate behaviour. If the problem remains unsolved, the health of the target is jeopardised, the work com-

munity may be burdened and the wellbeing of the workplace may suffer. Inappropriate treatment may also decrease productivity and cause unnecessary costs through, for instance, increased sick leave.

## How do you recognise inappropriate treatment?

Inappropriate treatment may be difficult to recognise, since individuals may experience a situation or occurrence in different ways. Inappropriate treatment is usually referred to as harassment at the workplace. In order to prevent problem situations and to create common rules for solving problems, the concept of inappropriate treatment must be recognisable. This may require outside help.

Inappropriate treatment may manifest itself as

- harassment
- neglect
- disrespect or ignoring someone
- isolating someone
- denigrating someone's features, character or private life.
- threats
- exceeding one's authority or humiliating someone
- unilaterally changing agreed terms
- discrimination or favouritism.

Inappropriate treatment may be connected to a person or a job. It is often systematic and continuous, but single, minor cases can also be defined as inappropriate treatment. Inappropriate treatment may be verbal or non-verbal and may manifest itself in the form of gestures or facial expressions.

Inappropriate treatment does not include

- matters that lie within the scope of the employer's authority
- normal, work-related decision-making or the processing of different interpretations
- dealing with job- or work-related problems between co-workers
- maintaining appropriate discipline
- referring a worker to the occupational health service.

Inappropriate treatment may also constitute harassment. The Occupational Safety and Health Act defines harassment as inappropriate treatment that may constitute a hazard or risk to the safety or health of an individual. The Act on Equality between Women and Men defines and prohibits sexual harassment and harassment based on gender. The Non-Discrimination Act prohibits discrimi-

nation on the basis of age, ethnic or national origin, nationality, language, religion, belief, opinion, health, disability, sexual orientation or other personal characteristics.

Harassment may be the intentional or actual offending of another person or it may be behaviour that creates a threatening, humiliating or apprehensive atmosphere at the workplace.

### **Inappropriate treatment can be prevented**

#### **The conditions and atmosphere at work are important**

It is important to have an atmosphere of openness and trust at the workplace in order to prevent inappropriate treatment. Prevention requires that the working environment is well-ordered and that the working conditions do not contribute to harassment.

Each member of the working community shares the responsibility for the welfare of the workplace. Good social skills are an important part of modern professional skills.

The workplace needs common rules concerning the ways to create and maintain a good working atmosphere. The rules promote positive and open interaction and prevent conflicts. Apart from rules, the workplace also needs set routines and instructions for dealing with conflicts. Many organisations already implement this kind of routines and instructions.



The instructions should clearly state that the organisation does not tolerate inappropriate treatment and that problems will be dealt with.

The instructions may for instance include

- what is and what is not allowed at the workplace
- what is and what is not appropriate behaviour at the workplace
- what to do if a person feels he or she has been treated inappropriately
- who to turn to in case of a problem.

#### **Rules are worked out together**

The needs of each organisation define the type of rules and instructions that are needed, their form and content. This way they will work. The rules may also be included in the occupational health and safety program, the equality program or a wider personnel management program.

The workplace rules and instructions should be defined together with the employees, within the works safety or cooperative committee. If no such committee has been established, the rules and instructions shall be otherwise defined in cooperation with the employees. Rules and instructions are more likely to be effective when management and personnel have arrived at them together.

#### **Everyone to be informed and to have access**

Rules and instructions should be known to everyone and accessible. The rules of the organisation should be part of the in-house training of management and employees.

### **What to do if inappropriate treatment occurs at the workplace**

Inappropriate treatment should, in the first instance, be dealt with the methods available at the workplace. If a person feels treated in an inappropriate manner, he or she should, if possible, take the matter up at work. The target of inappropriate treatment should notify his or her supervisor, for appropriate action to be taken. If the person responsible for inappropriate treatment is the supervisor, the matter should be taken up with his supervisor.

If the target of inappropriate treatment is unwilling or unable to take the matter up on his or her own, or the problem can't be solved with the supervisor, the matter may be referred to an occupational safety representative, a shop steward or a representative of the occupational health service. Co-workers can also contribute to the solution of a problem.



### **Management must act without delay**

The management of the organisation must supervise the workplace in order to observe any possible inappropriate treatment. This is best achieved as part of normal supervision. Regular supervision apart, various workplace and personnel questionnaires or development discussions may provide further information on the state of the workplace.

When management is informed that an employee has been the target of inappropriate treatment, they must take action without delay. The facts must be investigated, all parties must be heard and the appropriate measures for each case must be defined.

### **Cooperation at the workplace**

Workplace security is developed and risks and hazards are identified as part of the occupational safety and health programme.

Smooth cooperation between the employer and personnel representatives in matters relating to the work environment and occupational safety are a sign of a good place to work. In case of a problem, the employee representatives, for instance the occupational safety representative or the shop steward, can support the target of inappropriate treatment.

### **The occupational health service provides professional help**

The health and safety of the workplace is monitored through questionnaires and calls at the workplace. The occupational health service monitors the health

and working ability of employees in connection with checkups and calls at the health centre. The health service provide the workplace with professional help and can support management and personnel where necessary. The responsibility to deal with actual situations rests, however, with the employer.

### **The Occupational safety and health administration supervises adherence to legislation**

The national occupational safety and health administration is responsible for monitoring adherence to the Occupational Safety and Health Act at the workplace. The administration is also responsible for monitoring adherence to legislation concerning harassment and inappropriate treatment. The actual monitoring is carried out through workplace inspections and other forms of investigation.

If necessary, the authorities can give the employer instructions and recommendations. The authorities also provide both the employer and employees with advice and help on request.

### **Labour organisations provide guidance and, if necessary, legal aid**

The trade unions work for the prevention of inappropriate treatment by participating in the formulation of legislation and general regulations.

Employer and employee organisations give their members guidelines for preventing inappropriate treatment and, if necessary, provide legal aid if problems arise.



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## Remember!

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- Everyone at the workplace is responsible for good manners.
- The employer must deal with inappropriate treatment without delay.
- Different people at the workplace see things and situations differently.
- Ask for help and support if you need it.
- An atmosphere of openness and trust prevents inappropriate treatment.
- If a problem can't be solved at the workplace, help can be provided by the health care service, by labour organisations and the occupational health and safety authority.



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