

# Define discrimination, bullying and harassment

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Discrimination, bullying and harassment define a wide range of inappropriate behaviours that can occur in the workplace.

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## Discrimination

All employees have the right to work without discrimination. Discrimination refers to negative treatment that is based on a personal characteristic that is protected by the [Human Rights Code](#).

It includes negative treatment based on any of the following:

- Indigenous identity



- Race
- Colour
- Ancestry
- Place of origin
- Religion
- Family status
- Marital status
- Physical disability
- Mental disability
- Sex
- Age
- Sexual orientation
- Gender identity or expression
- Political belief
- Conviction of a criminal or summary conviction offence unrelated to employment

## Bullying and harassment

Bullying and harassment is defined in [HR policy 11 – Discrimination, bullying and harassment in the workplace \(PDF, 211KB\)](#). It includes any inappropriate conduct or comment that a person knew or reasonably ought to have known would be humiliating or intimidating. Bullying and harassment excludes reasonable actions taken by a supervisor relating to managing the workforce. The conduct may be written, verbal, physical, online, or electronic, a gesture or display, or any combination of these.



## Examples of bullying and harassment



Bullying and harassment is usually targeted with an intention to intimidate, offend, degrade or humiliate. Actions and tactics that harass or bully can be either obvious or subtle as well as either physical or psychological.

Here are some examples of behaviours that may be determined to be bullying and harassment. This is not an exhaustive list:

- Aggressive or frightening behaviour such as swearing, shouting or intimidation by threatening violence
- Spreading false accusations about a person
- Criticism, humiliation, invasion of privacy, slanderous comments, undermining, destructive rumours, gossip or making unreasonable demands
- Rude, belittling or sarcastic comments
- Abusive, belittling or intimidating phone calls, emails, notes, etc.
- Baiting or unreasonable teasing. For example, singing derogatory songs and inserting the person's name or using cruel nicknames
- Nasty practical jokes
- Deliberate and unreasonable isolation or exclusion from work discussions, communication or other work-related activities
- Ignoring the person
- Withholding necessary information or deliberately withholding workflow so that a person cannot carry out their duties
- Removing areas of responsibility without cause

Bullying and harassment is not necessarily face to face. It may be done by written communications, sharing visual images such as embarrassing photographs, online communications or by phone.

Bullying and harassment may or may not be connected to a protected ground under the Human Rights Code, depending on its nature.

## What is not considered bullying and harassment

Not every inappropriate, uncivil or unpleasant behaviour is considered bullying and



harassment. Some behaviours may be inappropriate but are not serious enough to meet the definition.

The following are not usually considered bullying and harassment:

- Making a complaint about an employee's conduct, if the complaint is made through appropriate methods and is in good faith
- Occasional, one-off incidents which are minor in nature, like a single inappropriate remark
- Comments that are objective and intended to provide constructive feedback
- Unskilled managers handling difficult conversations poorly
- Rigid rules consistently applied by a supervisor
- Poor communication or disagreements between employees
- Difficult work conditions or changes to the organization

Inappropriate or uncivil behaviour that does not meet the definition of bullying and harassment may still be considered a breach of the [Standards of Conduct](#).

If you are unsure whether particular conduct meets the definition of bullying and harassment, you are encouraged to reach out to your supervisor, another manager you trust or your union or professional association for advice and support.

## Definitions of harassment

[BC Public Service Harassment Definitions \(PDF, 85KB\)](#) provides a detailed review of additional forms of harassment that can occur in the workplace.

### Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is a form of discrimination and includes any unwelcome comment or conduct of a sexual nature that may detrimentally affect the work environment or lead to adverse job-related consequences for the victim. The prohibited conduct, as determined by a reasonable person, may be verbal, non-verbal, physical, deliberate or unintended.



## Gender harassment

Gender harassment is a form of discrimination and includes any unwelcome comment or conduct of a non-sexual nature aimed at another person's sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity or expression that may detrimentally affect the work environment or lead to adverse job-related consequences for the victim. The prohibited conduct, as determined by a reasonable person, may be verbal, non-verbal, physical, deliberate or unintended.

## Racial harassment

Racial harassment is a form of discrimination and includes any unwelcome comment or conduct relating to a person's race, colour, ancestry, place of origin or Indigenous identity that may detrimentally affect the work environment or lead to adverse job-related consequences for the victim. The prohibited conduct, as determined by a reasonable person, may be verbal, non-verbal, physical, deliberate or unintended.

## Cyberbullying and online harassment

Cyberbullying and online harassment includes any inappropriate comment or conduct online that the person knew, or reasonably ought to have known would be humiliating or intimidating.

Online includes but is not limited to, private or public messages on social media (Facebook, X, Instagram, blogs, etc.), other websites, emails and instant or text messaging.

Employees are also encouraged to review their [public service collective agreements](#) for further information about harassment.

## Misuse of supervisory authority

Many public service collective agreements also address the misuse of supervisory authority. These agreements provide procedural protections for employees whose supervisors harass or bully them on grounds which are not specifically outlined in the Human Rights Code. For example, under the [BCGEU Collective Agreement](#), Article



states that misuse of managerial authority occurs when a person who supervises exercises that authority in a manner that serves no legitimate work purpose which a reasonable person would consider inappropriate.

## Get assistance

Involved in a respectful workplace issue?

Review [Address discrimination, bullying and harassment](#).

## Health, safety and sick leave resources

The BC Public Service is committed to a culture that supports employee safety and health.

Whether you're managing your own health or looking for information to support your team, we have the [resources and supports](#) you're looking for.

## Resources

- [HR policy 11 – Discrimination, bullying and harassment in the workplace \(PDF, 211KB\)](#)
- [Discrimination, Bullying and Harassment FAQs \(PDF, 105KB\)](#)
- [Words Matter: Speaking Up for Inclusion \(PDF, 55KB\)](#)
- [Building a Respectful Workplace: Checklist for Employees \(PDF, 82KB\)](#)
- [Building a Respectful Workplace: Checklist for Supervisors \(PDF, 82KB\)](#)
- [Conflict Management Office](#)
- [Employee and Family Assistance Services](#)



## Did you find what you were looking for?

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