

Positive Work Environment at W3C: Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct

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Abstract

W3C's *Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct* defines accepted and acceptable behaviors and promotes high standards of professional practice. The goals of this code are to:

- Define acceptable and expected standards of behavior.
- Provide a benchmark.
- Ensure transparency in community and group management.
- Ensure an environment where people can participate without fear of harassment.
- Contribute to the identity of the organization.

This is an unofficial proposal. Refer to [Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct](#) for the operational version.

Introduction

W3C is a growing and global community where participants choose to work together. W3C is committed to maintaining a positive working environment, where each participant feels appreciated and respected and where everyone adheres to the same high level of standards of personal behavior. In that process we experience differences in language, location, nationality, and experience. In such a diverse environment, misunderstandings and disagreements happen, which in most cases can be resolved informally.

W3C's *Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct* (CEPC) is useful to define accepted and acceptable behaviors and to promote high standards of professional practice. The goal of this code of conduct is to ensure that W3C is an environment where everyone can participate without fear of harassment. It also provides a benchmark for self evaluation and acts as a vehicle for better identity of the organization.

The CEPC is complemented by a set of [Procedures](#), applies to any member of the W3C community – staff, members, invited experts, and participants in W3C meetings, W3C teleconferences, W3C mailing lists, code repositories, W3C conferences or W3C functions, etc. Note that this code complements rather than replaces legal rights and obligations pertaining to any particular situation.

[Education and training materials](#) are available from the [Positive Work Environment public homepage](#).

Statement of Intent

W3C is committed to maintaining a **positive** work environment. This commitment calls for a workplace where participants at all levels behave according to the rules of the following code. A foundational concept of this code is that *we all share responsibility* for our work environment.

Code

Expected Behavior

Treat each other with respect, professionalism, fairness, and sensitivity to our many differences and strengths, including in situations of high pressure and urgency.

- Appreciate and accommodate our similarities and differences. We come from many cultures and backgrounds, ways of life, and standards of behavior. Cultural differences can encompass everything from official religious observances to personal habits to clothing. Be respectful of people with different practices, attitudes, and beliefs. To help us achieve and maintain these high standards, each individual participant is expected to share responsibility for our work environment by adhering to the behavioral guidelines herein.
- Have empathy when discussing sensitive issues. Some participants may have experienced (or been subjected to) various forms of violence in their lives, which may cause distress when they are reminded of it. Avoid making jokes or callously mentioning sexual violence such as stalking or sexual assault; in cases when the need arises to discuss these issues and how they affect people - do so with tact and empathy taking into account the gravity of the situation, and make sure that participants are appropriately warned in advance so they can choose to step out of these discussions.
- Treat everyone with respect. We are a large community of people who are passionate about our work, sometimes holding strong opinions and beliefs. We are committed to dealing with each other with courtesy, respect, and dignity at all times. Misunderstandings and disagreements do happen. When conflicts arise, we are expected to resolve them maintaining that courtesy, respect, and dignity, even when emotions are heightened.
- Do not accept or engage in abusive behavior in any form, whether it is verbal, physical, sexual, or implied.
- Be honest. Be truthful, sincere, forthright and, unless professional duties require confidentiality or special discretion, candid, straightforward, and frank.

Unacceptable Behavior

Unacceptable behaviors run counter to the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct. This list of unacceptable behaviors does not cover every case. Each person you interact with is unique, and behavior must be assessed on an individual level. Ensuring that your behavior does not have a negative impact is your responsibility. W3C strictly prohibits discrimination, intimidation, harassment, and bullying of any kind and on any basis.

Unacceptable behavior include, but are not limited to:

- Offensive comments related to gender, gender identity and gender expression, sexual orientation, disability (both visible and invisible), mental health, neurotype, physical appearance, body, age, race, socio-economic status, ethnicity, caste, nationality, language, or religion
- Unwelcome comments regarding a person's lifestyle choices and practices, including those related to food, health, parenting, drugs, and employment
- Misgendering someone by deliberately referring to a person using the wrong pronouns or by using someone's proper names or other terms that person has asked not to be used, also known as deadnaming.
- Microaggressions, which are small comments or questions, either intentional or unintentional, that marginalize people by communicating hostile, derogatory, or negative beliefs. Examples include:
 - ▼ Patronizing language or behavior:
 - Be aware that, regardless of the speaker's intentions, some phrases or constructions lead people to expect a patronizing statement to follow, and avoid such phrases. For example, beginning an interjection with "Well, actually..." can set this expectation and be taken as a sign of disrespect.
 - Assuming without asking that particular people or groups need concepts defined or explained to them. It's great to be sensitive to the fact that people may not be familiar with technical terms you use every day, but assuming that people are uninformed can come across as patronizing.
 - Assuming that particular groups of people are technically unskilled (e.g., "So easy your grandmother could do it").
- Retaliating, or taking adverse action, against anyone who files a complaint that someone has violated this code of conduct.

Safety versus Comfort

This Code prioritizes the safety of individuals, particularly those in marginalized communities, over the comfort of others, for example in situations involving:

- "Reverse" -isms, including "reverse racism," "reverse sexism," and "cisphobia".
- Reasonable communication of boundaries, such as "leave me alone," "go away," or "I'm not discussing this with you".
- Communication in a tone you don't find congenial.
- Criticisms of racist, sexist, cissexist, or otherwise oppressive behavior or assumptions.

Reporting Violations and Supporting the Code

If you are concerned about your immediate safety, contact [local emergency services](#). For a face to face event you may need to contact venue staff for assistance contacting emergency services.

In most instances if you have an issue with someone's behavior along the lines of this Code then please raise it; there are a few potential people you could raise it to depending on your situation and your safety.

In most cases, issues are best resolved at the source. Accordingly, raising the issue with the group chair or team contact of the relevant group is usually the best first place to raise an issue. Group chairs and team contacts also have more of the context which helps them address the issue.

Immediately

- Pointing out if someone is violating the CEPC to give them the chance to withdraw or edit their statement
- Reminding participants that meetings and work operate under the CEPC
- Asking someone to leave a meeting or a conversation thread

After the Meeting

- Following up with affected participants, possibly in separate meetings
- Reaching out to an Ombudsperson for assistance
- Further information and resources for Chairs are available via the Chairs Training program

Note that the action must be directly related to stopping harm, and must be proportionate. People affected may request an Ombudsperson consider whether such actions are unacceptable under the terms of this Code.

You can read more in the [PWETF Procedures](#) document.

If You've Done Something Improper

As we engage in diverse communities we may accidentally cause offense, whether through using unknowingly offensive terminology or through missing social cues.

If you realize (or are told) that you have offended someone then take the appropriate steps:

1. Acknowledge that you've done something improper
2. Briefly apologize. Don't try to explain yourself or minimize the issue
3. If possible, edit your message, restate your communication in a better way or withdraw your statement. Publicly revising your statement helps define the culture for others

Glossary

Acceptable Behavior

Within the W3C, this is behavior which abides by this Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct.

Workplace Bullying

A tendency of individuals or groups to use persistent aggressive or unreasonable behavior (e.g. verbal or written abuse, offensive conduct or any interference which undermines or impedes work) against a co-worker or any professional relations.

Cisgender/cis person

A person whose gender identity matches the one they were assigned at birth.

Cissexism

The belief or assumption that cis people's gender identities, expressions, and embodiments are more natural and legitimate than those of trans people. The term is related to transphobia.

Consent

Consent occurs when one person voluntarily agrees to the proposal or desires of another. It is a term of common speech, with specific definitions as used in such fields as the law, medicine, research, and sexual relationships. [Wikipedia](#)

Attribution

Large portions of the text for this policy were taken from the following resources:

- [W3C Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct 2014](#)
- [Geek Feminism Community anti-harassment/Policy](#).

Note: Only some portion of the document is available for practice. The entire document content is available [here](#)