



Preventing bullying and harassment
A guide for ministers and church leaders

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A word of encouragement as you read this guide

Jesus said:

'A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another.'

John 13: 34-35

The Bible is clear that we are made in the image of God and that we are all equal before God. The way in which we treat each other in our church life together is part of our witness to the world, and one of the ways in which we demonstrate our love to each other.

However, we know that in church life we hold different roles and responsibilities, and that these roles come with differing levels of power and authority. To use these well is a life-long learning journey, and requires self-discipline, humility and grace day by day. Sometimes the power and authority that we hold can be intentionally or unintentionally misused, with the outcome that others are hurt, dismissed or made to feel 'less than' in some way.

This guide aims to help you understand some of the dynamics of our relationships in church life, and in particular to help you recognise and avoid behaviours and situations that may leave others feeling that they have been bullied or harassed. Not all disagreements or disputes will fall into these categories, and there are times when an honest conversation and a willingness to seek each other's forgiveness will be a simple way forward that leads to resolution. In other situations, the need for a more formal supported process will be the only way to resolve issues that threaten to permanently damage working relationships.

I hope that you will be willing to read this guide with an open mind and a humble heart, recognising that sometimes we do not spot our own flaws or inadequacies or understand their impact on others. I would encourage you to pray before you read, asking God to illuminate your own attitudes and behaviours as well as giving you deeper understanding of those you work alongside. Let us commit to learning together, growing more and more in His likeness and seeking to bless others in our connections and communications day by day.

Lynn Green
General Secretary
17 December 2024

1. Introduction

The Bible sets out a clear model for Christian fellowship and community. God's standards are high, and each of us is tasked to play our part in building a healthy and flourishing community where we live and work alongside others to build God's kingdom.

We are encouraged to seek for ourselves the fruit of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control and these are some of the distinguishing marks of the Christian life. Alongside these things we are also called to commit ourselves to justice, mercy, forgiveness and reconciliation. It's a tall order, and each of one of us would recognise that we are striving towards these things, rather than mastering them.

Unsurprisingly, there are times when we don't get it right. Perhaps in thinking back on your own life you will recall occasions when you behaved in ways that were inappropriate or simply unacceptable, and where your choices of words or actions cause distress or deep hurt to others. Perhaps you have been on the receiving end of this type of behaviour from others and recall how hard it was to deal with the impact it had on your self-esteem or sense of safety. Perhaps you have seen a staff team, house group or entire church torn apart by the impact of bullying and harassing behaviour that was not properly dealt with or resolved.

In Hebrews 4 we are reminded that Jesus knows our human frailty and that we need help to deal with the consequences of our own actions:

'Jesus understands every weakness of ours, because he was tempted in every way that we are. But he did not sin! So, whenever we are in need, we should come bravely before the throne of our merciful God. There we will be treated with undeserved grace, and we will find help.'

Hebrews 4:15-16 (CEV)

1.1 Creating healthy church culture

We would encourage you and your church leadership team to commit yourselves to creating and maintaining a church culture where all are welcome, where the dignity of each person is recognised and supported, and where mutual respect is evident in all communications, relationships and interactions. We recognise that there are issues of theological position and church tradition where each church will need to reach its own agreed stance, after studying Scripture and seeking the mind of Christ through their church meeting process. Our series of guidance leaflets on Christian ethos and religious exemptions can provide help with this discernment process [The Baptist Union of Great Britain : Guideline Leaflet L09: Equality law and your church](#) However, these positions in relation to the Christian ethos of your church should not hamper you in modelling the fruit of the Spirit in your church life together, or from dealing with difficult conversations and decisions with the grace and mutual respect that the Bible sets out for us.

1.2 Leaders as role models

As leaders, you set the example, and you may choose to spend time together learning more about healthy church culture, more about the impact of bullying or harassing behaviour, and committing to informal and formal processes in your church to make sure that unacceptable behaviour is dealt with. This includes support for all those involved, and a commitment to long term resolution and reconciliation wherever this is possible.

As you work in your wider local communities, these commitments to mutual respect and the dignity of each person can also be part of the way in which you conduct yourselves as you reach out to local people and come alongside those who may be hurting because of bullying and harassment in other aspects of their lives.

1.3 What happens if bullying and harassment are not challenged in our churches?

Sadly, we can see what happens when things go wrong, and where bullying and harassing behaviour, either by individuals or by groups, is allowed to go unchecked.

The experience of some Baptist churches, ministers, leaders and members who have shared their stories with us shows that real damage can result:

- Relationships between leaders deteriorate, and vision is lost
- Strong leadership can turn into oppressive management of others
- Members lose confidence and respect in the leadership team
- People are hurt and step back from the life of the church – often those who have experienced severe bullying or harassment find that this affects them on a deeply personal level including damaging their faith
- Ministers and leaders who experience bullying sometimes step back completely from their church leadership roles
- Teams of church staff and volunteers suffer from poor morale and a sense of fear
- Levels of anxiety, stress and ill health rise
- Church meetings become toxic events where accusations, speculation and graceless behaviour take away from the likelihood of discerning well together
- There is a real risk of reputational damage – for individuals, for churches and for the name of the Gospel

So, we can see that being able to recognise and prevent bullying and harassment, creating a culture where bullying and harassment is simply unacceptable, and having clear processes to follow if concerns arise, must be a key part of maintain a safe and secure environment in our churches.

The remaining sections of this guide look at dealing with bullying and harassment in more detail.

2. What constitutes bullying and harassment?

2.1 What is bullying?

You may be surprised to find out that bullying is not currently defined by law.

One of the most helpful definitions comes from an organisation called ACAS the (Advisory, Conciliation & Arbitration Service) who produce guidance for employers and employees on all aspects of working life. They describe bullying as:

Offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour and abuse or misuse of power through means that undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient.

The Anti-Bullying Alliance have an even simpler definition:

Bullying is the repetitive, intentional hurting of one person or group by another person or group, where the relationship involves an imbalance of power. It can happen face to face or online.

In practice, this looks like unwanted and unwarranted behaviour that seeks to put down and belittle someone else or a group of other people.

2.2 What is harassment?

Harassment is the term used for bullying and other unwanted conduct relating to one or more of the protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010. These are: age, race, disability, sex, gender reassignment, religion or belief, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity.

The Equality Act 2010 defines harassment as:

'Unwanted conduct which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual. It can include behaviour that is not directed at an individual but is offensive to them, even if they do not possess one of these characteristics.'

More detail on harassment in relation to the protected characteristics is given in Section 10.

2.3 If harassment is defined by law, can someone bring a legal complaint if they feel they are being harassed?

Yes. Employees and office holders can bring specific legal complaints if they believe that they have been subject to discrimination and harassment.

2.4 Can others in my church workplace bring a legal complaint if they see harassment taking place around them?

Yes, they can. Even if a person has not been personally subjected to harassment, they can claim that they have witnessed unwanted conduct that has made their workplace seem a hostile or offensive place to be. For example, this could be that one of your church team overhears malicious comments made to another member of the team that seem to be based on one of the protected characteristics. Regular comments about someone's age, or teasing of a disabled volunteer, or a failure to address the problem of inappropriate banter about sex could all fall within this area.

2.5 So, what is the difference between bullying and harassment?

Both involve unwanted and inappropriate behaviour towards others. Harassment means that the apparent reason for the poor behaviour relates to one of the 9 protected characteristics listed on the previous page. The conduct may be similar, but the reasons behind it may be different. Whether it constitutes bullying or harassment, the one common theme is that the words or actions are not welcome by the person or people who are on the receiving end.

2.6 Different types of bullying and harassment

Bullying and harassment can take place in almost any context or setting. Sometimes individuals are bullied or harassed, and sometimes it happens to whole groups of people.

Bullying and harassing behaviour can take place face to face as people work or interact with each other on a regular basis. It can also take place in writing, by email, through social media or even behind the back of the person or people concerned. Sometimes a bully will try to persuade others to behave badly in support of their own behaviour or will claim that others share their views to try to put additional pressure on the person they are targeting.

There are times when one single serious incident could be regarded as bullying or harassment, but usually bullying and harassment involve a repeated pattern of behaviour that continues over time, often getting worse as time goes on. Whether bullying or harassment is overt i.e. done openly in front of others, or covert, i.e. done directly to the individual privately so others do not see, it is always harmful to the individual it is directed at. Bullies will often try to minimise the impact of their poor behaviour, but in reality, bullying can result in serious psychological harm and often damages the wellbeing of the person who is experiencing it, affecting their work, their relationships and their sense of safety at church or in church groups.

3. What does bullying behaviour look like?

3.1 Personal bullying

Personal bullying is unwanted behaviour that attacks someone's character or personality. Here are some examples, but this is not intended to be an inclusive list. As you read, you may want to reflect on whether you have seen examples of this in your church or in previous place you have worked.

- Deliberately ignoring, excluding, isolating or marginalising someone;
- spreading rumours or gossip, or manipulating other people's opinions about someone else;
- making belittling or undermining remarks, questioning a person's judgment, or mocking someone or ignoring their opinion;
- public humiliation, for example making someone look stupid in front of others or posting demeaning pictures of them on social media (for example, this could include using the same person repeatedly as the butt of your jokes when you are preaching or leading);
- ridiculing, insulting or teasing someone, or verbal or practical jokes or sarcasm;
- physically intimidating someone, for example shouting or yelling, finger pointing or standing too close to someone;
- physical attacks or inappropriate physical contact;
- verbal abuse or using obscene or offensive language;
- making offensive gestures or giving someone 'dirty looks';
- making threats of any kind;
- making unfounded accusations about someone;
- tampering with a person's personal effects, or stealing or destroying their property;
- making insulting or derisory comments about a person's private life, beliefs, attitudes, lifestyle, appearance or mental health;
- ganging up with others against someone or encouraging others to criticise someone else;
- spying on or following someone or instructing others to do so;
- making someone feel guilty without foundation; or
- responding to complaints of unfair treatment by making accusations of weakness, a lack of sense of humour or oversensitivity.

Sadly, many of us will have seen behaviour of this type on occasions in our work and church life.

3.2 Work-related bullying (this could apply to church staff, ministers or volunteers)

Work related bullying usually focuses on some aspect of how someone carries out the responsibilities of their job or volunteer role. It may be done with the intention of causing someone to fail in their work, or to feel so ostracised that they feel they cannot stay in the role that they do. As you read, you may want to reflect on whether you have seen examples of this in your church or in previous place you have worked.

Work-related bullying includes (but is not limited to):

- setting up someone to fail by giving them unachievable tasks, an unmanageable workload or impossible deadlines, or making unreasonable demands of them;
- singling out someone for meaningless or trivial tasks or unpleasant jobs;
- negative attacks on someone or questioning a person's ability without any evidence;
- intrusive monitoring of someone's work or overbearing supervision;
- persistent undeserved criticism or nitpicking;
- giving someone too little work or work that is below their competence;
- removing or reassigning a person's responsibilities for no good reason, or demoting them or attempting to reduce their hours without justification;
- withholding information that is needed to complete a task, deliberately "losing" information, failing to pass on messages or deliberately giving someone incorrect or unclear information;
- undervaluing a person's contributions, giving no credit where due or taking credit for someone else's work;
- sabotage of someone's work in an attempt to damage their ability to successfully complete something they are responsible for;
- refusing to cooperate or accept someone's authority when that is part of their role;
- unfairly changing goalposts or targets;
- deliberately withholding training or resources from someone that are necessary for them to perform the role, or opportunities for advancement or promotion;
- reducing or denying opportunities for someone to express their views, interrupting a person when they are speaking, ignoring their ideas or shutting down discussion;
- making inappropriate threats or hints about job security;
- withdrawing or refusing reasonable support; and
- unjustified disciplinary hearings or warnings.

Church leaders and trustees need to be aware that they have a duty of care towards those who are employed as church staff, and that workplace bullying needs to be tackled quickly and fairly.

4. Spotting the patterns of behaviour that might indicate that bullying or harassment are taking place

4.1 Signs that bullying might be taking place

In your role as the minister or one of the leaders in your church, what might you spot taking place in church life that could mean that someone is being bullied or harassed?

A good starting point is to look for patterns of behaviour that suggest tension or misunderstanding.

Overt bullying or harassment will usually be visible in how people talk to each other, relate to one another and in the ways in which conflict is handled in your team. However, sometimes bullying and harassment takes place covertly and quite passively, so it is hard to spot when a problem arises. Look out for regular and repeated incidents of poor behaviour that might suggest a problem is developing or already exists, especially when one person holds far less power or authority than the other. For covert bullying, watch out for members of the team who seem to be finding it hard to speak up or to engage when the whole team is present, or appear to be avoiding contact with a colleague or church member. There may be other reasons for this, but one possibility is that someone feels that they are being bullied.

4.2 Is all bullying and harassing behaviour intentional?

No, not always. Sometimes people don't understand that their behaviour might have a very negative effect on someone else. They might regard their comments as 'banter' or gentle teasing', seeing themselves as an amusing colleague or someone who 'tells it like it is'. Unintentional misunderstandings, lack of awareness or insensitivity can also lead to others experiencing what they believe to be bullying behaviour.

However, when complaints of bullying and harassment are made, the emphasis for those who have to make decisions about appropriate action needs to be focused on the impact on the individual who says that they are being bullied or harassed, rather than on the intentions of the person they have raised their concern about.

Clearly there is a real difference between someone who sets out to humiliate or denigrate others, and someone who just doesn't think about what they say, but the impact of their remarks or actions can be equally damaging.

4.3 What if I think someone's behaviour towards a colleague has been malicious or deliberate?

You may come across someone in church life who behaves in such a way that others often find them bullying or harassing in style. Sometimes they can be hard to spot, as people who deliberately or maliciously harass or bully often behave differently in front of those they perceive as having influence or authority. So, they may reserve their bullying or harassing behaviour for those they see as weak or vulnerable, and yet behave well in other situations.

It is quite common that someone who has a natural tendency to bully or harass does not recognise their own behaviour for what it really is. When confronted about it, they will usually start by denying it, often followed by launching their own accusations about the person who has raised the complaint

and presenting themselves as the victim. They are likely to seek to gather people to their 'side' and often attempt to lobby within the church to force the leaders to drop an investigation.

In these difficult cases, it is vital that you follow your investigation process carefully and accurately, sticking to any written procedure that you have and making it clear that you expect the individual to comply with the process you are using.

If you do impose new behavioural requirements on someone who tends to behave in this way, it is likely that you will need to be very clear about future expectations and robust in your management of that person in the future.

4.4 What about the person who says that they have been bullied or harassed?

People react to bullying and harassment in different ways. They may feel anxious or scared, angry and frustrated or they may feel isolated and alone in dealing with the unwanted behaviour that is directed at them. Stress, loss of self-confidence and self-esteem brought on by bullying or harassment can lead to illness, absence from work and even resignation. Being bullied or harassed means that people will often struggle to maintain work performance and often their relationships suffer as they find it more difficult to express how they are feeling and what is actually happening to them.

Many people who have been bullied in the workplace talk about feeling unsafe, and that their sense of empowerment and enjoyment of their work has been taken away. Often people worry that if they do come forward and tell someone more senior about what is happening then there is a high likelihood that they won't be believed.

Some people will simply leave their job or their church rather than challenge the person who is bullying or harassing them. This is especially common where an individual believes that they are being bullied by a group of people who they cannot challenge or bullied because of something about themselves that they cannot change.

This is one of the reasons why it is important that someone who manages to come forward and say that they are being bullied is given a pastoral supporter to 'walk with' them as they navigate through the process your church adopts to respond to allegations of bullying and harassment.

4.5 Are there situations that might escalate into bullying or harassment?

Sometimes incidents happen in church life where people simply disagree, and occasionally conversations can become heated. A situation where two or more people simply argue about an issue is unlikely to be construed as bullying unless it forms part of a longer-term pattern. However, if the disagreement cannot be resolved, and leads to ongoing poor behaviour on either side, or if one party holds particular authority over the other, then as a church leader you will want to step in to take action to restore relationships, particularly if this escalates or starts to involve others. This could be an informal process of supporting reconciliation or may need to be handled through a grievance or dispute resolution process.

4.6 Taking care of those who are especially vulnerable

Ministers and leaders should take particular care to watch out for those people who are living with the long-term impact of previous experiences of bullying, harassment or abuse, or who have experienced trauma at an earlier stage in their life, or who are currently vulnerable because of bereavement, ill health or difficult life circumstances. People in these situations may be more sensitive to criticism or less able to handle difficult relationships at church. Those who bully often sense who is most vulnerable or lacking in power and repeat patterns of bullying behaviour in different contexts.

Watch out for the person who clearly needs more support to be able to continue in their normal relationships, or who struggles to gain perspective because of previous experiences. Offering extra support and a listening ear can make a big difference.

If you can see that a repeated pattern of bullying or harassing behaviour is being directed toward a child or young person, or towards someone who could reasonably be seen as an adult at risk, please speak to your Designated Person for Safeguarding as this could need to be treated as a safeguarding concern. In this case, your Designated Person for Safeguarding can seek advice from their Regional Safeguarding Lead.

5. Misuse of power and authority

5.1 Recognising that you are in a position of authority

If you are a minister or church leader in a Baptist church, then your church members have come to a decision together before God that you are the right person to be given that extra level of responsibility. This could be your first time as a deacon or your first ministerial role after your training period, but you are now perceived to be someone who has authority in the church.

In practice, power and authority are a double-edged sword. You have the authority to make things happen, but you are open to comment and criticism from those around you as to whether you are doing it well! Sometimes holding power means that you will make difficult judgements about the performance and capability of others, including those you might well regard as your friends.

We can have great confidence that all power comes from and belongs to God. His Holy Spirit working through us enables and equips us to work for His kingdom and to serve His people. Human beings tend to be less consistent and more variable in the ways in which we use power and exercise authority. It's particularly important to understand this in the context of church where, as leaders, we can tend to downplay our own power and miss the impact of our position on the way in which others see us.

Sometimes bullying and harassment can take place where there is an imbalance or misunderstanding of the power and authority at work in our church relationships. When used for good, power can energise and enable great things to happen. In other situations, power can be misused or used without sufficient thought, which causes others to feel undervalued, at risk or simply pushed around.

5.2 Where does power lie in church life?

We hold power and authority in many different ways. The chart overleaf suggests some of the ways in which power is held and used in church life, together with some examples of where this could cause or allow the potential for bullying and harassment to take place. For clarity, we are not suggesting that all power is unhealthy! Exercised well and with humility and grace, power and authority can help us to accomplish things together for God, to influence and lobby in our society and to organise our church life from week to week. However, the examples given focus on what can happen when an imbalance in power arises.

In your church, you may like to reflect on who holds power and authority and in which ways they do this. Helping leaders to recognise that they are perceived as holding power and having authority can help them to understand that they need to take care when dealing with others who might see themselves as relatively powerless in your church environment.

5.3 Power and authority types in church life

Type of power or authority	Examples	Opportunity for misuse
Holding church office	Minister, pastor, Church Secretary, Treasurer, trustee, elder, deacon, paid staff member	Opportunity to insist or exert authority over others, even if this is not to their benefit.
Relationships	Long standing members, those with close friendships with leaders, those married to elected leaders	Opportunity to unduly influence change in church life or the perceptions of others on relation to an individual
Resources	Treasurer, major donor to church, office manager	Opportunity to withhold funds or resources
Physical	Age, level of health, physical stature, strength, power of their voice	Opportunity to influence or intimidate others, especially those who have physical restrictions or limitations
Personality	Charisma, charm or authoritative style Volatile or unpredictable	Opportunity to dominate, subdue or manipulate
Professional occupation	High status job or reputation in business or the community	Opportunity to patronise or intimidate others or use status to push decisions through
Knowledge and information	Theological understanding, practical knowledge (how does the heating system work?) or knowledge of decision-making processes	Opportunity to empower or disempower others
Experience of leadership	Longstanding experience in church life	Opportunity to put down others' ideas or to insist on maintain tradition
Spiritual authority	Role or reputation in the church	Opportunity to influence how other perceive themselves or to manipulate situations e.g., 'God has told me this about you', or 'You don't really understand what the Bible says'
Gender and power	How power is held within the church	Opportunity to block leadership or development opportunities for women

(Our thanks to the Diocese of Derby for this helpful explanation of types of power in church life)

6. What makes it hard for people experiencing bullying or harassment to complain?

We know that it is incredibly hard for people to come forward to say that they are experiencing bullying or harassment. It is especially difficult where that behaviour is being perpetrated by someone who holds power or authority over them. Both recipient and witnesses may fear that they will not be believed or that there will be retribution if they complain. Some people will be concerned that they will be seen as unforgiving, or that they will be seen as 'telling tales'. Often people who are experiencing bullying and harassment will put up with many incidents of poor behaviour before they finally decide that they need to tell someone. In the light of this, you may want to have a clear pathway in your church that allows people to approach a trustee or leader if they believe that they are being bullied or harassed.

6.1 As a church leader how can I show that I am taking them seriously?

Firstly, it is important that you listen carefully to the information they are sharing with you. Someone raising a concern about bullying or harassment will have chosen you as the person to trust with their story, and they will not have done that lightly. Maybe they have come to you because you hold a leadership role, or because you are regarded as pastorally sensitive or because you are someone they have trusted in times past.

Most people will want to know that you will hold the information they share carefully and in confidence and will expect that you will talk with them before you tell anyone else. There may, however, be exceptional circumstances where there is a risk to the safety of others, particularly children or vulnerable adults, where the complaint will have to be investigated, and you will need to speak to your church's Designated Person for Safeguarding.

6.2 Do people sometimes make false accusations?

It is unusual for people to make false accusations of bullying and harassment, although it does happen on occasion, usually because of a breakdown in the working relationship between two or more people, and sometimes because of underlying prejudice. Sometimes individuals will feel that bringing a formal accusation is the only way to be heard by their church leaders. In such situations, it is important to try to understand the underlying problem, which may have festered for some time. You may need to call in someone with mediation experience to help you resolve this.

If an allegation is shown to be deliberately malicious or vexatious, or if an individual continues to bring accusations but can show no evidence to support those accusations, then the church leaders may need to take formal action against the individual concerned.

7. Investigating allegations of harassment and bullying

If you receive an allegation of bullying, you should always take it seriously. Your first step should be to find out more, and to do this you will need to carry out an investigation. Please note that if someone raises serious allegations of bullying and/or harassment against a BUGB Accredited Minister, Nationally Recognised Pastor, or Recognised Local Minister, you should contact the Ministries Team at Baptist House before taking any further steps. You can do this directly by writing to the Ministries Team at Baptist House or through your Regional Minister if you prefer.

This section sets out the steps you can follow to make sure that you understand the nature of the allegations made, that support is provided to both the person bringing the allegations and the person against whom the allegations are made, and that a fair decision can be made, and appropriate actions taken. Please note that if your church has a grievance procedure for staff and/or volunteers, this would be an appropriate procedure to use. If you do not have such a policy, and need to act quickly, then the following steps will act as a guide.



It is not appropriate to ask someone to come and share their story with the whole leadership team. Many people would find this intimidating and difficult. So, appoint two people to act on behalf of the leadership team who will meet with the individual in the first instance and who will keep a detailed note of what is shared with them. Write up your notes as soon as possible after the meeting. Try to arrange your meeting in a quiet place where you will not be interrupted, and where the individual can feel comparatively safe.

Step 1 -Hearing from the individual who believes that they are being bullied or harassed

- Make sure that they are given time to explain their concerns in a confidential setting. If they would like to bring someone with them for support, make it clear that this is possible.
- Be prepared to accept their account of their own experience and to ask for more detail if needed.

- Make it clear to the individual how you will handle the information they have shared with you and agree with them who else might be involved.
- Agree with them how and when their allegations may be raised with the person they accuse of bullying or harassment. You may need to wait some while until they feel able to give their consent to this.
- If there is a risk of harm to children, young people or adults at risk you should involve your church DPS as soon as possible, who will be able to advise if there is a need to take action to minimise current risk or to report matters to the statutory authorities. Wherever possible, these decisions should be taken to empower the individual to report themselves, perhaps with support from the church DPS or a trusted friend in the church.
- Make sure that you keep a clear record of the allegations shared and any other information the individual shares with you that is relevant to understanding the context of the allegations. Ask the individual to check and confirm that they agree with the account taken.
- Agree a timescale for investigating the concerns raised and for responding to the individual who has raised them. If the investigation is likely to take longer than two weeks, set a timetable for updating the individual on progress.

Step 2 -Pastoral Support

- Check that the individual raising the allegations has someone to provide pastoral support whilst your investigation takes place. This could be someone they have already confided in, or you may wish to offer someone from your pastoral care team.
- Agree what will be shared with the pastoral supporter.

Step 3 - Carry out an investigation

- Identify who else may have witnessed the alleged bullying or harassing behaviour and meet with them to gather any information they may be able to share.
- Keep a clear record of each meeting and ask the witness to check and confirm that they agree with the account taken.
- With the prior agreement of the individual raising the allegations, arrange to meet separately with the person who is alleged to have carried out the bullying or harassing behaviour. Allow them to bring someone to support them if they wish. Set out each of the allegations simply and clearly, giving examples where you can. If you are using your grievance process, make sure the alleged bully is given a copy so they understand what will happen in the process.
- Give the person the opportunity to respond to what they have heard and to reply, including any explanation for their behaviour or any reflections on the situation. If they deny bullying or harassing behaviour, ask them to provide their own perspective on the quality of their relationship with the individual who has raised the allegations. They may need time to reflect on this, so be open to a further meeting to enable this to happen.
- Make sure that the individual is clear of the impact of their behaviour on others.
- Keep a clear record of the meeting and ask the person to check and confirm that they agree with the account taken.

Step 4 Coming to a decision

- At this stage you will need to consider the information gathered during the investigation. If you believe that bullying or harassment has taken place, then you will need to consider three points:
- How can we best protect the individual who has raised these allegations?

- What outcomes would they like to see from this process?
- What action do we need to take in terms of the person who has carried out the bullying or harassment?
- Is it time to move into our disciplinary process to look at a disciplinary warning or even the possibility of dismissal?
- If disciplinary action is not needed, what steps should we take to minimise the likelihood of this behaviour happening again?
- Is the perpetrator now aware of the consequences of their actions or do we need to spend further time in explanation or arranging training for them?
- Were there factors in this situation that relate to the work or church environment that we need to change to reduce the likelihood of further bullying or harassment taking place?
- Are there other people who were involved who have contributed to the problem and how will we address this?

Step 5 - Implementing the decision

- Everything you agree in terms of actions and changes should be recorded and shared with both the individual bringing the allegations and the individual against whom allegations were made.
- If the individual bringing the allegations is prepared to meet with the person who may have bullied or harassed them, offer to arrange a meeting, but don't push this idea too hard, as it may take some time for the individuals to process their emotional reactions and be ready to talk together.
- Make sure that all parties are clear about the behavioural standards required and the consequences if further incidents take place.
- Make sure that the person who was bullied or harassed has support to enable them to stay involved in their work or church life. This may include the offer of counselling support, changes to their work or role in church if they feel that would be of help, or the chance for more regular support meetings with their manager.
- Build in review points to check that no further problems arise.
- If you have used your grievance or disciplinary procedures make sure that you have followed all steps carefully and that the outcomes are recorded.
- If you have been able to deal with this through a less formal set of conversations and investigation, reflect on the process you have used to assess whether it has helped to address the concerns raised. If not, plan to use your more formal processes in future situations.
- Consider whether you may need to offer training for all staff to understand more about acceptable behaviour, and avoiding discrimination, bullying and harassment.

Ongoing monitoring

Once you have found and agreed a way forward, make sure that you keep an eye on the future behaviours and interactions between all those involved.

- Can you see that the behaviour that caused the problem is no longer occurring?
- Can you see that the person who was found to have exhibited bullying behaviour understands why their behaviour has to change?
- Is the person who was bullied feeling more comfortable in their workplace at church?
- Are there any other steps to take to make sure that this will not happen again?

8- I think I have been the target of bullying or harassment, what can I do?

As a minister or church leader, if you are experiencing bullying or harassment, please speak to someone about it. You do not need to suffer in silence or feel too embarrassed to tell anyone. It is best to act as early as possible. It may be tempting to delay in the hope that things will improve but dealing with the matter early can prevent it becoming public or escalating.

Most people who experience bullying and harassment find that it undermines their confidence and makes them feel as if they are not of value. We would want you to know that you are precious in the eyes of God, and that you do not deserve to be treated badly in any situation. For most people in the life of the church, whether in a paid role or as a volunteer, their involvement is more than a job; it is not something from which they can easily choose to walk away, because God has called them to it. On many occasions it is possible to put a stop to bullying and harassment, and your church leaders will want to understand what has happened and to support you.

8.1 Action you can take yourself

Start by keeping a factual log of all incidents as soon as possible after the event: dates, times, what happened and why it distressed you, anyone who witnessed the bullying behaviour, details of accusations or criticisms and how you felt in response, copies of e-mails and other correspondence. You could do this by using a notebook or by setting up a file for notes on your computer or phone.

Keeping a log will help you see more clearly whether there is a pattern of bad behaviour, even if the incident(s) seem relatively trivial. It will also provide evidence, should harassment, victimisation or bullying continue/ recur, or action become necessary.

As far as possible, avoid situations where you are alone with the bully, and if there are witnesses to what is happening, think about whether you could ask them if they would be prepared to support you.

If the alleged bullying or harassment is focused on your work performance, it may be helpful to clarify if responsibilities or duties allocated match your role/job description. Are you being asked to do far more than your job description suggests? Are you being asked to do work that is well below the usual work associated with your role?

Get support: talk with a trusted colleague or pastoral supporter who understands the need for confidentiality and who is able to offer support and help clarify the issues and possible courses of action. Your Regional Minister will also be happy to speak with you.

8.2 Reporting bullying behaviour

It's not a good idea to approach a bully by yourself. If you believe that you are being subjected to bullying or harassing behaviour, please find someone you can talk to. Your church grievance or disciplinary process might give you a name or job title of who you should speak to, or you might want to approach the minister or the person who looks after pastoral care for your church. They will want to listen carefully to what you have to say and will then think about how best to investigate the matter. They will also want to take steps to keep you safe in the meantime.

Those investigating will need to establish the facts. In particular they will need to know:

- What happened?
- Where and when did it occur?
- Was this the first incident or have there been others? Do you see a pattern?
- Who was involved?
- Can you share something of how this has made you feel and how it has affected you?
- Were there any witnesses?
- Has any action been taken about it, or any attempts to prevent further bullying or harassment?

They may need to see your detailed log of evidence, if you have kept one, together with copies of any emails or other correspondence, to enable them to get as full a picture as possible.

They will need to speak to any witnesses and also to the person who has been bullying or harassing you, and they will talk to you about how to keep you safe in your role whilst all of this happens.

They may choose to use the church's grievance or disciplinary process to do this, and in this case, they will explain these processes to you. You will also be offered pastoral support if you need it to help you cope whilst the investigation takes place.

It may help you to know that the alleged perpetrator may be offered help to recognise, understand and modify their behaviour and will be strongly advised to accept this help. Where possible and reasonable, your church leaders will look to see if reconciliation may be possible and how this might be achieved. However, in some situations this will not be a realistic outcome, and other steps will be taken to discipline or remove the perpetrator from their role.

9. I have been accused of bullying or harassment, what can I do?

Firstly, speak to your line manager or minister and let them know what you have been told. If you have heard information second hand, be clear about how you have been made aware of the problem.

As you would expect, bullying and harassment will always be taken seriously, but it is important that you know that the investigation of an allegation does not signify a judgement that you are guilty or an assumption that you have behaved inappropriately.

As part of any investigation, you will be asked to reflect on your behaviour and the possibility that you might be at fault, whether consciously or not. Such investigation is essential in uncovering the truth but does not mean that anyone has leapt to conclusions about you.

9.1 How should I behave towards the person who has made the allegations against me?

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 you might feel sure that you have done nothing wrong, the perception of the person complaining of bullying or harassment must also be carefully considered.

For example, it is possible that a problem has arisen because you did not realise the effect of your actions and did not appreciate that they would have such significant impact on someone else. 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. Whatever the situation, make every effort not to aggravate or cause further distress to the other person, and if possible, talk to your minister or line manager about how you might have less regular contact with the person whilst the investigation takes place. Do resist the urge to discuss the matter widely with others as this rarely helps to resolve relational difficulties.

If you are unsure of how your behaviour or actions have been received by others, this can be a good time to ask for some detailed feedback. Very few people would set out to deliberately bully or harass others, although it does happen. More often, an individual needs to understand that their actions, which may seem reasonable to them, are having a very negative and damaging effect on someone else. All of us have to learn to adapt our behaviour on occasion, and help may well be available to support you to do this.

The aim of any investigation will be to understand what has happened and to facilitate discussion with a view to resolving the problem at source, if possible. If there is a need for more formal steps to be taken, then your fellow church leaders are likely to use the existing grievance or disciplinary processes to address this, in which you will be given the full opportunity to hear the allegations made against you, to provide your own statement and information, and to appeal against any disciplinary outcome reached.

10. Harassment on grounds of the protected characteristics

10.1 Overview

Throughout this guide we have looked at how to define and recognise bullying and harassment and we have looked at how ministers and church leaders might respond to and investigate bullying and harassment in their churches.

However, the Equality Act 2010 contains specific provisions that relate to bullying and harassment in relation to the protected characteristics set out in the Act. We stated these in Section 2, but it is helpful to restate them in this section. Please note that there are additional preventative requirements for employers in relation to sexual harassment. (Our guidance leaflet L08 | Employment provides more details on this [The Baptist Union of Great Britain : Guideline Leaflet L08: Employment](#)).

The 9 protected characteristics are: age, race, disability, sex, gender reassignment, religion or belief, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity.

However, the law does not refer to any specific protections against harassment in relation to marriage or civil partnership.

Some important things to know about harassment and the law:

- It is the person receiving the unwanted behaviour who decides if it's unwanted, not the person doing the behaviour.
- It doesn't matter if other people think the unwanted behaviour is acceptable or if it's common in the place it's happened in.
- It can be a one-off incident, if serious enough, or repeated incidents or occasions.
- Just because certain behaviour was welcomed or not objected to in the past doesn't mean that it can't become unwanted.
- Unwanted behaviour doesn't need to be intentionally directed at the victim or survivor – it can be something they witness or overhear and still be regarded as harassment.
- If a victim or survivor of harassment is treated badly or less favourably because of their reaction to that harassment, the Equality Act 2010 says that this is also harassment.

Let's look in more detail at these different types of harassment and what harassment might look like in relation to each of the protected characteristics. Please note that the examples given in these sections below reflect the types of cases that have been brought to employment tribunals where harassment has been held to have taken place.

10.2 Harassment on grounds of age

What is it?

Harassment is defined as 'unwanted conduct' and must be related to a relevant protected characteristic – in this case, age. This might be because:

- of the employee's age, or
- the age they are thought to be, or
- the age of someone else they are associated with – for example, a partner who is older than them, or
- ageism is common in that particular workplace.

The harassment must have the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them. So, for example, if someone is continually taunted by a colleague with age-related insults, or where they are not invited to work social events because they are of a different age to the rest of the team.

What might this look like?

This can include:

- bullying,
- use of age-related nicknames,
- threats to force them to retire,
- intrusive or inappropriate questions and comments,
- excluding them (ignoring, not inviting them to meetings or events etc)
- insults relating to their age
- unwanted jokes and/or gossip which they find offensive.
- young staff may have a claim where they have been subjected to degrading workplace 'initiation rites' or if they are continually told to 'listen to their elders and betters'.

To say the behaviour was not meant to be harassment or that the comments were 'banter' is no defence.

For example:

Sixty-year-old Lana feels humiliated and undermined at the church café where she works because of her age. Despite years of experience working in restaurants and having recently renewed her Food Hygiene certificate, her supervisor Elaine regularly tells her in front of other staff that she is 'out of touch' and that 'the café needs younger people who look trendy'. Elaine's behaviour is likely to be harassment.

Andrew is 19 and has been working for his local church as a paid intern. He is constantly talked over in staff meetings and the other staff call him 'green behind the ears'. He is starting to find this offensive, and has asked them to stop, but they all treat him as if he were still at school. He feels undervalued and thinks that his age means they don't take him seriously.

10.3 Racial Harassment

What is it?

Racial harassment is an incident, or a series of incidents intended or likely to intimidate, offend or harm an individual or group because of their ethnic origin, colour, race, religion or nationality.

Someone's race is made up of one or more of these things:

- colour
- ethnic origin or ethnic group
- national origin
- nationality
- racial group

It is against the law to harass anyone on the grounds of:

- their race
- the race of someone they know or have a connection with, for example a family member, friend or colleague ('discrimination by association')
- someone's 'perceived' race – this means thinking someone is a certain race when they are not ('discrimination by perception')

What might this look like?

Examples of racial harassment may include:

- Derogatory name calling.
- Use of racial slurs.
- Verbal threats, insults and racist jokes.
- Display of racially offensive material – for example, racially offensive cartoons or artwork, drawings or symbols
- Use of racist gestures.
- Exclusion from normal workplace conversation or activities.
- Physical attack.
- Encouraging others to commit any such acts.

For example:

Vita, who came to the UK from Pakistan 25 years ago, works in the charity shop that the church has set up in their town high street. She is part of a team of 6 women who work on a rota system to keep the shop open. She is aware that the other women meet each Saturday afternoon for coffee after the shop closes, but she has never been invited. She did once ask if she could attend but was told that 'it was not for her'.

Richard is a black British man who serves as one of the associate ministers in his local Baptist church. One of the church members refuses to accept the communion elements from Richard, who believes that this is because of his ethnic origin. The same church member has been heard using racist language about Richard in the coffee time at the end of services.

10.4 Harassment on grounds of disability

What is it?

Disability-related harassment is unwanted, exploitative or abusive conduct against disabled people which has the purpose or effect of either:

- violating the dignity, safety, security or autonomy of the person experiencing it, or
- creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading or offensive environment.

Disability-related harassment is also such conduct against the family, friends and associates of disabled people because of their connection with a disabled person. It also includes such conduct against a person perceived to be a disabled person.

What might it look like?

Examples of disability-related harassment include:

- derogatory, demeaning or humiliating remarks, name-calling or ridicule
- offensive or patronising language
- insults
- threats and intimidation
- invasion of personal space
- unnecessary touching
- unwanted comments about appearance or disability
- intrusive questioning about disability
- offensive jokes, banter
- abusive verbal or written comments related to disability
- offensive emails
- cyberbullying, using the Internet, interactive and digital technologies or mobile phones to threaten, bully or intimidate
- offensive graffiti
- financial exploitation of a disabled person including taking their benefits money
- deliberately putting aids and adaptations out of reach
- damage to a disabled person's property, including aids and adaptations

Anne has attended her local Baptist church for 7 years now. She is a wheelchair user and has recently been appointed to the role of Children, Youth and Families Worker. It is going well so far, but one of the parents of a child in the church keeps calling her unpleasant nicknames relating to her disability which makes others laugh at her. Anne wants this to stop and expects the church leaders to step in, but nothing has happened so far.

Austin looks after the sound desk at church and has a neurological condition that affects his balance when he's walking. Every time Austin attends the men's prayer breakfast at church, the Pastoral Care Worker comes over and starts to pray for his healing. He never asks Austin for his permission or even whether he wants prayer at that point. This has happened at the last 4 breakfast meetings.

10.5 Sexual Harassment

What is it?

Sexual harassment is any unwanted sexual behaviour that makes someone feel upset, scared, offended or humiliated, or is meant to make them feel that way.

The Equality Act 2010 says someone sexually harasses another person if they:

- Engage in unwanted conduct of a sexual nature **and**
- The conduct has the purpose or effect of either violating the other person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them.

This unwanted sexual conduct can happen in person, on the phone, by text or email, or online. Both the harasser and the victim or survivor can be of any gender.

Employers need to be aware of the new requirements introduced at the end of 2024 requiring them to take proactive measures to prevent sexual harassment taking place in their organisations. More details on this can be found in our guidance leaflet L08 Employment.

What might it look like?

Sexual harassment includes a wide range of behaviours, such as:

- Sexual comments or noises – for example, catcalling or wolf-whistling.
- Sexual gestures.
- Leering, staring or suggestive looks. This can include looking someone up and down.
- Sexual 'jokes'.
- Sexual innuendos or suggestive comments.
- Unwanted sexual advances or flirting.
- Sexual requests or asking for sexual favours.
- Sending emails or texts with sexual content – for example, unwanted 'sexts' or pictures of genitals.
- Sexual posts or contact on social media.
- Intrusive questions about a person's private or sex life.
- Someone discussing their own sex life.
- Commenting on someone's body, appearance or what they're wearing.
- Spreading sexual rumours.
- Standing close to someone.
- Displaying images of a sexual nature.
- Unwanted physical contact of a sexual nature – for example, brushing up against someone or hugging, kissing or massaging them.
- Stalking.
- Indecent exposure.
- Taking a photo or video under another person's clothing – what is known as 'upskirting'.

Some forms of sexual harassment automatically break criminal law in England and Wales and are therefore crimes. These include stalking, indecent exposure, 'upskirting' and any sexual harassment involving physical contact (this amounts to sexual assault in English and Welsh law)

Janet has been the Youth and Families Pastor at her church for 4 years. She loves the role but is starting to feel that she will need to move on.

She works alongside a male Childrens Pastor who seems to 'inadvertently' touch her every time they meet. It's a hand on her shoulder, or a touch to her back, or sometimes a hand on her knee to emphasise a point he's making. She finds it really uncomfortable, but he doesn't seem to notice. Last week he came up to talk to her at her desk and placed his hands on her shoulders when he stood behind her. She felt that this was an escalation of his previous behaviour and doesn't know how she can continue to work with him.

Marielle has been the Pastoral Care Team Leader for her church for six months now. She is employed for three days each week and loves the work she does. She does not feel the same about her supervisor, one of the trustees, who often tries to ask her questions about her relationships and sexual experience. She finds this unnerving and unpleasant. She has asked him to stop, but he takes no notice of her requests.

Most recently, he is pushing her to give him her private email and WhatsApp details and says that these are necessary for 'church emergencies'.

10.6 Harassment on grounds of gender reassignment

What is it?

Transgender harassment is harassment on grounds that an individual proposes to undergo, is undergoing or has undergone gender reassignment. Gender reassignment is the medical and social process whereby a person changes their sex to match their chosen gender identity. The Equality Act 2010 has removed the former requirement that the gender reassignment process must take place under medical supervision.

This legal definition is limited to gender reassignment and does not cover harassment on grounds that someone is, for example, a transvestite person, although harassment on the grounds that someone is perceived to be undergoing gender reassignment is likely to be unlawful.

It does not matter if the harassment is intentional or unintentional and doesn't necessarily need to be aimed at the person witnessing it. Examples of this might include the telling or tolerating of transphobic jokes and the use of derogatory trans-phobic terms as part of an accepted organisational culture.

What might this look like:

This could include:

- nicknames,
- insults,
- abusive language,
- threats,
- jokes or banter,
- gossip,
- asking intrusive or inappropriate questions,
- excluding or ignoring someone,
- or even excessive monitoring or excessive criticism of someone's work.

For example:

Charlie is the church caretaker (and a church member) and told his minister some months ago that he was about to start gender reassignment process, and that he was nervous of how the church would respond.

His house-group decided that they no longer wanted him to attend their weekly group and are no longer inviting him to their meetings. Charlie feels that he has been shunned by people who he trusted and who he thought were his friends.

Christine went through gender reassignment surgery 8 years ago. Since then, she has joined a new church where she did not initially disclose that her biological sex was male. She recently disclosed this to the minister who told the rest of the leadership team. Now the whole church seems to know. Christine is receiving some very unpleasant Facebook messages that she believes are being sent by two church members. She has kept the messages although they make her feel scared to come to church.

10.7 Harassment on grounds of religion or belief

What is it?

Harassment on grounds of religion or belief takes place where a person is subjected to unwanted conduct related to their religion or belief that has either the purpose or effect of violating their dignity, or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive working environment for them.

What might it look like?

Harassment in the workplace essentially refers to any form of bullying behaviour by the employer or other employees because of someone's religion or belief, whilst victimisation can include anything from being labelled a troublemaker to being denied opportunities or being disciplined or dismissed, for complaining about unfair treatment or unlawful conduct.

For instance, a Christian could be teased relentlessly by co-workers in their secular employment over reading the bible during breaks and could then complain to their line manager. If the employee's line manager then refuses the employee a well-earned promotion because they're not a 'team player', this would potentially provide two separate but related examples of religious discrimination.

In a church setting, it would be likely to be seen as harassment if a non-Christian staff member was continually pressured to join in with staff prayer meetings or expected to attend Sunday morning services despite expressing their discomfort at doing so.

For example:

Lawrence is the Church Administrator for a small Baptist church based just outside of a major city. He is not a Christian, but likes the ethos of the church, and enjoys being part of the church team of 3.

He attends the staff meetings, which always include a time for prayer, but recently he is being pressured to pray out loud in those meetings. Since he doesn't pray at all normally, he is feeling that this is an attempt to convert him despite his clear statement that he does not hold a personal faith.

Annie's local church runs a sports club for kids on Friday evenings. She has been taken on as a part-time sports coach to help with the football training. There was no mention in the job advert for any need for her to be a Christian. There is now a vacancy for the Senior Coach position, and she would like to apply but has been told she would only be considered if she agrees to attend church on Sunday mornings. There doesn't appear to be any good reason for this, and Annie feels she is being held back from a promotion she is capable of because she is not prepared to attend church.

10.8 Harassment on grounds of sexual orientation

What is it?

Sexual orientation harassment at work occurs when someone engages in unwanted conduct related to sexual orientation which has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. This applies to any conduct that violates a worker's dignity, even if it was not intended as such.

This includes actions such as homophobic comments made to a worker even if they are not and are not perceived to be homosexual. It could also be reflected in an employee's terms of employment, such as access to family friendly benefits, or a refusal to offer employment, promotion or training.

What might this look like?

in this context, harassment includes behaviour by others in the workplace that leaves someone feeling:

- humiliated;
- subjected to unwanted comments; jokes or banter;
- ignored; or
- excluded.

Outside of the workplace, if you are harassed or receive offensive treatment because of your sexual orientation, this may be direct discrimination.

Under the religious exemption contained in the Equality Act 2010, a religious or belief organisation e.g. a church, can lawfully exclude persons of a particular sexual orientation from its membership or participation in its activities, or its provision of goods, facilities and services. However, this only applies to organisations whose purpose is to practice, promote or teach a religion or belief, whose sole or main purpose is not commercial. The restrictions imposed must be necessary either to comply with the doctrine of the church, or to avoid conflict with the 'strongly held religious convictions' of the religion's followers. Our leaflet [The Baptist Union of Great Britain : Guideline Leaflet L09: Equality law and your church](#) gives more details of how this applies to employment, church membership and the provision of goods, facilities and services.

Even with this potential exemption, churches still need to ensure that staff, ministers, volunteers and church members understand that harassment in any form is unacceptable. So, whilst a church may choose to take a particular position in relation to its views on homosexual practice, for example, it still has a responsibility to make sure that someone attending the church is not treated in a way that humiliates them or violates their dignity. This will take careful thought for many churches, who wish to be welcoming, and in some cases affirming, but hold to a specific theological position in relation to sexual orientation.

For example:

David is gay and has been attending his local Baptist church since the beginning of this year. He has felt welcome until now but is conscious of an increasing number of church members who do not speak to him at all.

He believes that this is deliberate and is connected to his sexuality. He asks the leadership team to address this, as he is feeling increasingly isolated.

Kerry is just 18 and is a volunteer with the children's Sunday School class on Sunday morning. She is undecided about her sexuality but is currently in a new relationship with Savannah, another young woman who attends the same church. She is coming under pressure from one of the other Sunday School teachers to break off her relationship and is finding this deeply distressing.

Her church does not hold an agreed position on sexual orientation.

10.9 Harassment on grounds of pregnancy or maternity

What is it?

Harassment on grounds of pregnancy or maternity takes place when unwanted conduct related to a woman's pregnancy, maternity leave or breastfeeding cause a distressing, humiliating or offensive environment for her.

The Equalities and Human Rights Commission conducted a formal investigation into pregnancy discrimination in 2015. Their final report found that one in five mothers experienced harassment and negative comments because of their pregnancy and 10% of mothers were discouraged from taking time off for their antenatal care. Women involved in the in-depth interviews experienced a wide range of negative treatment at work, ranging from more subtle changes in the attitudes of their colleagues and employers, to unfair selection for redundancy, dismissal, denial of promotion opportunities and sexual and verbal harassment. Many also reported enforced changes to their job during pregnancy.

The report is available at:

www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/managing-pregnancy-and-maternity-workplace/pregnancy

What might it look like?

Examples of harassment related to pregnancy or maternity include:

- Sexual comments in relation to the woman's sex life
- Verbal comments in relation to her growing size or comments in relation to changes in breast size.
- Unwanted physical contact e.g., touching a woman's abdomen.
- Pressure to resign or to give up a senior role.
- Comparing a returning female worker to the temporary replacement employed during her maternity leave.
- Constant questioning of a returning female worker's commitment to her work
- Negative comments about more than one maternity absence

Marianne has just returned to her role as the church's Support Worker for older members after the birth of her first baby.

At staff meetings the Office Manager continually makes comments about whether she is committed enough to her work now that she has a baby. Marianne is working hard and also juggling her home and work commitments She finds the Office Manager's comments hurtful and believes that she is being singled out for unfair treatment.

Rosemary is the minister of a large church in a seaside town. She is pregnant with her third child and expects to continue to work until the end of the eighth month of her pregnancy. Each Sunday at least two or three church members come up and put their hands on her stomach and then talk to her about the baby. She finds this intrusive and unpleasant and has asked the trustees to discourage church members from this behaviour. It's Sunday morning and an elderly member has just approach her and placed his hand on her stomach without her permission.

11. More reading and resources

The following websites are useful sources of additional information:

Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service: www.acas.org.uk

Anti-Bullying Alliance www.Anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk

Bullied and Abused Lives in Ministry: www.balmnet.co.uk

Bully Online: www.bullyonline.org

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/emp-law/harassment/factsheet

Dignity at Work Partnership: www.dignityatwork.org

Unite the Union: www.unitetheunion.com

Restorative Justice Training Foundations: www.restorativejusticetraining.co.uk

Further reading

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- ACAS (2005) *Bullying and harassment at work: a guide for managers and employers*. London.
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- Coloroso, Barbara (2005) *The Bully, the Bullied, and the Bystander*. London: Piccadilly Press
- Eggleton, Martin and David Trafford (2000) *At Cross Purposes: Handling Conflict in the Church*. Peterborough, Foundery Press.
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- Preece, Roger (2011), *Understanding and Using Power: Leadership without corrupting your soul*. Grove Books, Cambridge.
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