

Respectful Workplaces

RESOURCE GUIDE



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1. Purpose

This guide is designed to assist Alberta Health Services (AHS) managers and employees with promoting respect and inclusiveness by providing information, strategies and tools to address disruptive behaviour in the workplace in a constructive manner. This guide is part of a larger AHS strategy to prevent and address violence in the workplace as well as to create a psychologically safe work environment.

2. Introduction

Respect is one of our core AHS values. A respectful workplace is one where employees can expect to be treated fairly and courteously in an environment that promotes engagement and contributes towards the safe, effective and quality delivery of service. Respect is showing consideration for other employees as well as patients and their families, demonstrating compassion, treating others with dignity and fairness as well as valuing and honouring diversity.

2.1 Code of Conduct

The AHS [Code of Conduct](#) provides five guiding principles:

- Treat people with respect, compassion, dignity and fairness
- Be open, honest and loyal
- Act ethically and uphold professional standards
- Take responsibility for our own actions and expect the same of others
- Respect confidentiality and privacy

Our Code of Conduct is based on the [AHS Values](#) of Compassion, Accountability, Respect, Excellence and Safety. Diversity and inclusiveness are embedded within our Code of Conduct, in addition to the guiding principles outlined above, respect means valuing and honouring diversity, being sensitive to the unique needs of individuals and groups, and recognizing and affirming individual and team contributions.

2.2 Policies, Procedures and Framework

We have a [Workplace Violence Prevention and Response Policy](#) that sets out the processes for reporting and investigating workplace abuse and harassment claims. Workplace abuse and harassment is not conducive to a respectful workplace and is not tolerated at AHS.



Additionally, we have a [Recruitment and Employment Practices Policy](#) that promotes the development of a diverse and inclusive workforce that is representative of the population that we serve. We adhere to the Alberta Human Rights Act which supports and encourages the elimination of systemic barriers, racism and discrimination during the hiring, transfer and promotion of our workforce. Respect, diversity and inclusiveness are anchored within AHS policies, procedures and bylaws and are at the core of our organizational culture.

In March of 2013, the Health Quality Council of Alberta (HQCA) developed a provincial framework for managing disruptive behaviour in the healthcare workplace. Our Respectful Workplaces Guide is based on the HQCA framework and provides processes and information specifically adapted for our organization. We would like to thank the HQCA for allowing us to reference and adapt their framework and tools within this guide.

2.3 Just Culture

In practicing the [Just Culture Guiding Principles](#) we are living out AHS organizational values and contributing towards a respectful workplace that promotes the safe, effective and quality delivery of service.

Through Just Culture, we will:

- Be respectful in how we engage with those involved;
- Be transparent in the evaluation processes used;
- Hold our system, ourselves and others accountable; and
- Learn from mistakes and close calls to improve safety and performance

2.4 Definitions

What does it mean to have a respectful workplace? There is no one definition of respect; it is a holistic and pervasive concept that applies to every individual, decision and action taken throughout Alberta Health Services. A respectful workplace is generally a highly productive environment. People can be expected to demonstrate polite and courteous behaviour towards each other (verbal and non-verbal), feel empowered to perform their roles and feel safe to suggest changes for improvements in a collaborative and constructive manner. Additional examples may include, but are not limited to:

- The use of [inclusive](#) language and behaviour
- Responding to requests and information in a timely and professional manner
- Using the phone or in-person communication if the tone or intent could be misinterpreted by e-mail
- Refraining from making assumptions about motivations by giving other people the benefit of the doubt when conflict arises and attempting to find a common ground and solution
- Acknowledging the contributions of others and only taking credit for your own work
- Including people in the communication and decisions that need to be involved
- Demonstrating the values, principles and standards of conduct outlined within the AHS [Code of Conduct](#)

Sometimes it is hard to identify or name a problem that exists within our workplace. When trying to determine if behaviour is disruptive, and does not support a respectful workplace, we need to consider its nature, the context and the consequences.

Disruptive behaviour is personal conduct (words, actions or inactions) beyond that normally accepted as respectful interpersonal behaviour, which disturbs the work environment and/or potentially poses a risk to delivery of safe and quality healthcare.¹

¹ Adapted from the Health Quality Council of Alberta. [Managing Disruptive Behaviour in the Healthcare Workplace. Resource Toolkit](#)



Disruptive behaviour includes the following²:

CATEGORY/DEFINITION	EXAMPLES OF BEHAVIOURS
<p>Inappropriate forms of communication</p> <p><i>Unacceptable words or actions, used generally or as part of targeted harassment of an individual or group and may involve explicit or implied threats that create fear of the consequences of not complying.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using profane, disrespectful, abusive, demeaning language • Using inappropriate labels or comments about others, name-calling, derogatory labeling or stereotyping • Patronizing and insulting remarks • Shaming others publicly • Exhibiting uncontrolled anger or engaging in public displays of temper including tone of voice • Yelling or screaming • Using intimidation tactics to gain compliance from others • Threatening others with retribution, litigation or violence • Verbal insidious intimidation, (e.g., gossiping, spreading rumors, sarcasm, constant criticism) • Intimidating gestures such as slamming doors or throwing objects) • Nonverbal behaviours (e.g., rolling eyes, exaggerated sighing, making faces, glaring, turning away) • The use of language or behaviours that are not inclusive, including the purposeful exclusion/ignoring of other individuals
<p>Harassment</p> <p><i>Harassment is any behaviour that demeans, embarrasses, humiliates, annoys, alarms, or verbally abuses a person that is known or would be expected to be unwelcome.</i></p> <p><i>Bullying is the activity of repeated, aggressive or disrespectful behaviour intended to hurt another person physically or mentally. Bullying is characterized by an individual or individuals behaving in a certain way to gain power over another person. If bullying is done by a group it is called mobbing.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeated use of inappropriate forms of communication (above) against an individual • Words, gestures or actions such as intimidation, purposeful exclusion, threats, belittling, yelling, rumors, bullying, coercion etc. • Actions such as threatening or implying unwarranted discipline or job loss • Berating an individual in front of others or in private • Excessive and unreasonable monitoring of someone's work • Sabotage or setting someone up to fail such as deliberately excluding someone from communication they need to be involved in, withholding information or resources needed to perform work, unreasonable work assignments • Cyber bullying – personal harassment occurring through internal or external electronic communication (e.g., email, text messaging, internet sites, Facebook, Twitter etc.)
<p>Discrimination</p> <p><i>Any unwelcome practice, comment or behaviour (intentional or not) related to the following grounds protected in legislation: race, color, ancestry, place or origin, religious beliefs, gender, age, physical or mental disability, marital status, family status, source of income and sexual orientation.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making derogatory comments related to protected grounds • Telling or posting of discriminatory jokes, slurs, posters, cartoons, etc. • Drawing attention to an individual's protected grounds to undermine his/her role in a professional or business environment • Innuendo, taunting, or ostracizing an employee based on the protected grounds • Making an employment decision on protected grounds that negatively affects the individual

² Adapted from the Health Quality Council of Alberta. [Managing Disruptive Behaviour in the Healthcare Workplace. Resource Toolkit.](#)



<p>Sexual Harassment</p> <p><i>Behaviour that is sexual in nature, is not welcomed by the recipient, and adversely affects the recipient's working conditions, job security or prospects for promotion or earnings. Sexual harassment is considered discrimination on the grounds of gender and is covered by human rights legislation.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telling sexist jokes that are clearly embarrassing or offensive, especially after the joke teller has been asked not to • Leering, staring, commenting or gesturing in an obscene or sexual manner • Displaying degrading or stereotypical images of a sexual nature • Using sexually degrading words to describe a person • Making derogatory or degrading remarks toward a person's gender or sexual orientation • Making unwelcome inquiries or comments about a person's sexual life • Pursuing unwanted contact or attention in a persistent manner after a consensual relationship has ended • Requesting sexual favors • Making abusive or threatening verbal comments of a sexual nature • Imposing unwanted touching or committing sexual assault
<p>Retaliation</p> <p><i>Making threats of or taking action against someone who reports disruptive behaviour or acts as a witness regarding disruptive behaviour. Making threats of or taking action against those expressing a difference of opinion, including involvement in appropriate advocacy or performance management activities.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unwarranted job dismissal of the reporter or witness • Demotion, transfer or denial of opportunities • Escalating personal harassment • Threats of retribution, litigation or violence • Intimidation, (e.g., gossiping, spreading rumors, sarcasm, constant criticism, purposeful ignoring/exclusion or mobbing etc.)
<p>Uncooperative Behaviours</p> <p><i>Intentional behaviours that are subtle and uncooperative in nature, show disrespect for others and contribute to a negative workplace.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intentional noncompliance with clinical and administrative policies or processes, such as refusing to complete forms, manage records, sign orders, return calls in a timely manner • Intentional noncompliance with work schedules or assignments, chronic lateness • Refusal to work collaboratively (e.g., not sharing information, not consulting when appropriate, not offering assistance when it is requested)
<p>Unethical Behaviour</p> <p><i>Behaviour in contradiction to the overall guiding principles and values of the organization, in particular, actions that are not consistent with AHS Values as well as the AHS Code of Conduct</i></p>	<p>Additional examples may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attempting to exploit others (e.g., patients, and/or their family members or staff) for personal gain or status. For example, placing patients or families in the middle of a conflict between healthcare providers, or with a healthcare organization, or using care issues to meet one's own agenda • Taking credit for someone else's idea or work • Inappropriately accessing or using a co-worker's personal information



Disruptive behaviour is not³:

Performance Management	<p>It is important to differentiate between disruptive behaviour and a person's legitimate authority. All employers have the right to direct and control how work is done, and managers have a responsibility to monitor workflow and give feedback on performance.</p> <p>It is not considered disruptive to give an employee objective, constructive feedback to help them improve their work performance as long as it is done in a respectful, fair, consistent and accountable manner.</p> <p>In situations where an employee is dissatisfied with management practices, the problem should be raised in a manner that remains professional and objective.</p>
Collaborative Team Interactions	<p>Within a productive, collaborative team environment, expressing an opinion, speaking up about a patient safety or quality of care concern, or giving colleagues or team member's constructive feedback in a respectful manner is not considered disruptive.</p>
Isolated Incidents	<p>Situations may arise in which individuals behave in a disrespectful way in a spontaneous, unexpected outburst. While repeated episodes of such behaviour are difficult to excuse, an isolated incident of disrespectful behaviour is generally not considered disruptive if the recipient is not put at risk of physical harm, patient care is not impacted, and the individual acknowledges that their behaviour was inappropriate and the behaviour is not repeated.</p>
Healthcare Advocacy	<p>Advocacy by an individual or a group aims to influence decisions on clinical care, resource allocation, policies or process that affect the health and wellness of Albertans. AHS employees have an obligation to advocate for the best possible care of the individuals, communities and population they serve. Advocacy activities, even those that challenge the status quo, are not considered disruptive when they are undertaken in a mutually respectful collaborative manner, adhere to accepted principles or fair process, and are not directed at achieving personal gain or status at the expense of others.</p>

³ Adapted from the Health Quality Council of Alberta. [Managing Disruptive Behaviour in the Healthcare Workplace. Resource Toolkit](#)



2.5 Impact of Disruptive Behaviour

Disruptive behaviour negatively affects our teams, patient care/service delivery, damages relationships, contaminates the work environment and employees may begin to lose confidence in management and AHS.

Outlined below are some of the potential negative consequences of disruptive behaviour⁴:

Healthcare Worker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychological issues • Stress-related illness • Impaired job performance • Reduced job satisfaction • Adoption of disruptive behaviours • Increased absences • Loss of reputation, respect, trust – both perpetrator and target
Team and Work Unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impaired professional relationships • Communication breakdown • Ineffective or absent collaboration • Loss of efficiency and effectiveness • Decreased productivity • Higher rates of absenteeism • Higher rates of injuries or illnesses • Low morale
Patient Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treatment delays • Increase in errors, improper or ineffective treatment • Adverse events related to care delivery • Loss of confidence, respect or trust in care providers or team • Increased number of complaints or legal action by patients and families • Higher level of patient dissatisfaction
Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial consequences of absenteeism, increased turnover as well as recruitment and retention issues • Loss of reputation of a care unit, facility or organization • Negative organizational culture • Loss of confidence in management and organization by staff • Increased numbers of grievances in unionized workplaces • Legal risks of human rights complaints • Decreased productivity and organizational engagement • Impact on the human resources and legal departments – time, energy and stress of dealing with behaviour related complaints

2.6 Disruptive Behaviour Checklist

The HQCA has developed a [checklist](#) for employees and teams to complete to help determine if disruptive behaviour is a problem in their work areas.

⁴ Adapted from the Health Quality Council of Alberta. [Managing Disruptive Behaviour in the Healthcare Workplace. Resource Toolkit](#)



3. Responding to a Respectful Workplace Problem

3.1 What is AHS Doing to Support Respectful Workplaces?

AHS is developing and implementing policies, procedures, training and resources in order to support a respectful workplace and address disruptive behaviour with the goal of creating psychologically safe work environments. Please reference [Appendix D](#) for additional information.

3.2 Responsibilities and Rights

It is important that we lead by example and model the behaviours that we expect of others. If you experience or observe disruptive behaviour in our workplace, it is important that you do not ignore the incident. Ignoring it can make our workplace feel unfriendly, impact morale and engagement as well as patient care and service delivery.

Outlined below is a copy of a matrix that represents how modeling respectful behaviour can improve our workplace⁵.

SETTING EXPECTATIONS	PREVENTION	RESPONSE
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Modeling of desired behaviours by leaders, managers and clinical facultyPublic support by executive and clinical leadersVocal support by respected champions in all areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Improve general communication and team skillsDevelop assertiveness and conflict management skillsImprove awareness about disruptive behaviourDevelop conflict management and intervention skills (leaders and managers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Confront disruptive behaviour appropriately when it is personally experienced or when observing others being targetedDocument disruptive behaviour when it threatens individual well-being, patient care or service deliveryReport appropriately and in a timely mannerSupport and advocate for colleagues who are targeted

It is important that disruptive behaviour is managed and resolved as close as possible to where the concerns originated, at the interpersonal level. Disruptive behaviour can be intentional or unintentional. Sometimes individuals do not realize that their behaviour is disruptive or fully understand the negative impact on others and on the workplace. By simply raising attention to the behaviour in a constructive manner it can have a positive impact on the work environment and allows the individual an opportunity to change their behaviour.

There are times when a manager is advised of a respectful workplace issue and a decision must be made on whether an informal or formal investigation must occur. The information in this guide is geared toward those investigations that can be conducted informally. If managers encounter a workplace problem that they believe may

⁵ Adapted from the Health Quality Council of Alberta. [Managing Disruptive Behaviour in the Healthcare Workplace. Resource Toolkit](#)



require a formal investigation they should consult with their [Advisor, HR Business Partnerships](#) on appropriate next steps.

We all need to feel safe and supported in the workplace if it becomes necessary to confront someone who is behaving in a disruptive manner. The person who reports the behaviour (**complainant**) and the person who conducted the behaviour (**respondent**) both have rights and responsibilities. The **complainant** must feel safe and supported and free from retaliation throughout the process. Outlined below are the rights and responsibilities of the **complainant** and the **respondent**⁶:

	Rights	Responsibilities
COMPLAINANT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To feel safe and supported and free from retaliation To report allegations in a timely and appropriate manner To be heard and understood To choose someone for support (colleague, union, Advisor, HR Business Partnerships or other appropriate support representative) To have assistance in writing the report To have no fear of retribution for reporting To expect (and receive) confidentiality and respect for privacy balanced with principles of natural justice To receive information about progress with the investigation and how the issue was resolved while respecting needs of confidentiality of the respondent To meet safely with the subject of the complaint in person if appropriate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To be objective, fair and complete in reporting, focusing on the facts and avoiding opinion, gossip or speculation To fairly weigh any apologies and commitments to change made by the respondent To not commit frivolous or vexatious reporting (false or malicious claims or reports) To reflect on one's own behaviour and how it may have influenced the disruptive behaviour situation To maintain confidentiality and respect for privacy of everyone involved in the incident
Respondent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To be informed of a report, its nature and the content of allegations To choose someone for support when appropriate (colleague, union, Advisor, HR Business Partnerships or other appropriate support representative) To respond to allegations in a timely and appropriate manner To be heard and be understood To receive a fair and objective investigation To expect (and receive) confidentiality and respect for privacy, balanced with principles of natural justice To engage legal counsel and/or union representation To meet safely with the complainant in person when appropriate To receive information about progress and conclusions of the investigation as appropriate To respond to the investigations conclusions or appeal an adverse outcome if appropriate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To change behaviour if found to have been disruptive To be fair, honest and complete in responding to allegations To accept responsibility for one's own actions To understand that others' perspectives are important To cooperate in the review, assessments and follow-up evaluations of any intervention To accept referral and recommendations for assistance if needed, including education To maintain confidentiality and respect for privacy of everyone involved in the incident To ensure actions towards individuals involved in the review/investigation

⁶ Adapted from the Health Quality Council of Alberta. [Managing Disruptive Behaviour in the Healthcare Workplace. Resource Toolkit](#)



- To expect efforts to reduce or eliminate contribution system stressors

are respectful and refrain from retaliation

3.3 Employee Process

There are a number of ways you can address or report disruptive behaviour. Outlined below are several personal response strategies to assist you if you experience disruptive behaviour⁷:

Inform the person who is behaving in a disruptive manner that their behaviour is unwelcome

Don't ignore the behaviour. Focus on the behaviour and its effect on you or other individuals, not on the person who is behaving in a disruptive manner (using "I" statements). Avoid references to motives or speculation and use objective, non-judgemental and respectful language. Attempting to put yourself in the other person's shoes may help to focus the discussion on common ground and on finding a positive solution to the issue. Sometimes it helps to take a moment to consider the situation and the circumstances before responding as this may prevent a heated response (never respond to disruptive behaviour with disruptive behaviour). You should make it clear that the behaviour is unwelcome and ask that it stop. Remain calm, be polite and direct.

Examples of "I" statements:

- *'When I am spoken to in that way I feel...'*
- *'When I am excluded from that activity I feel like I am not part of the team and it makes it difficult to do my job.'*
- *'I want us to both have input and I feel frustrated when I don't get to contribute and my suggestions are disregarded'*

The conversation should focus on solving the problem and should be conducted in an appropriate location. It is important that issues of this nature are not discussed in front of patients, families or colleagues. Please note: if you feel unsafe or threatened you may want to enlist the support of a friend or colleague as a witness (please refer to the section below for further information).

Enlist the support of a friend or colleague as a witness

A witness is particularly important for individuals experiencing serious disruptive behaviours suggestive of abuse, harassment or bullying. If possible, you should avoid being alone with someone you feel is harassing you, and stay connected with colleagues in the workplace to prevent being physically isolated. Please note: group action against an individual acting in a disruptive manner is strongly discouraged because it may be perceived as intimidation, mobbing or disruptive behaviour itself.

Document ongoing or significant incidents of disruptive behaviour

Documenting an incident can help you clarify and try to understand the situation as well as relieve stress. In addition, documentation will be required in order to support a formal review and intervention process if this becomes necessary. You are strongly advised to document when disruptive behaviour occurs (e.g., ongoing pattern suggesting harassment or bullying), if it causes anxiety or stress or threatens patient safety and quality of care. Ideally documentation would include personal records that outline the facts of each episode (e.g., date, time, what happened, specific comments, the outcome, any witnesses present) while avoiding opinion, speculation, gossip or judgements towards the individual or their character. Keeping personal records of disruptive behaviour

⁷ Adapted from the Health Quality Council of Alberta. [Managing Disruptive Behaviour in the Healthcare Workplace. Resource Toolkit](#)



that makes you uncomfortable (whether it's directed at you or towards others) can help demonstrate a pattern to your supervisor, manager or senior leader.



Seek confidential advice

If there is a pattern suggestive of serious incidents of disruptive behaviour, resources on how to handle the situation include talking to a supportive supervisor, Advisor, HR Business Partnerships or your union representative. External resources include assistance programs (e.g., [Employee and Family Assistance Program \(EFAP\)](#) or through a professional association) or a health profession regulator. These resources provide advice without requiring a formal complaint against an individual to be made. The identity of the individual whose behaviour is in question should not be revealed if you are seeking general advice.

Offer support to colleagues who are targets

Supporters can be a silent witness or can speak up in defence of a co-worker. They can help prepare a report or prepare for a meeting with a supervisor as well as accompany their co-worker to the meeting if appropriate. Please note: group action against an individual acting in a disruptive manner is strongly discouraged because it may be perceived as intimidation, mobbing or disruptive behaviour itself.

Report disruptive behaviour that is recurring or serious

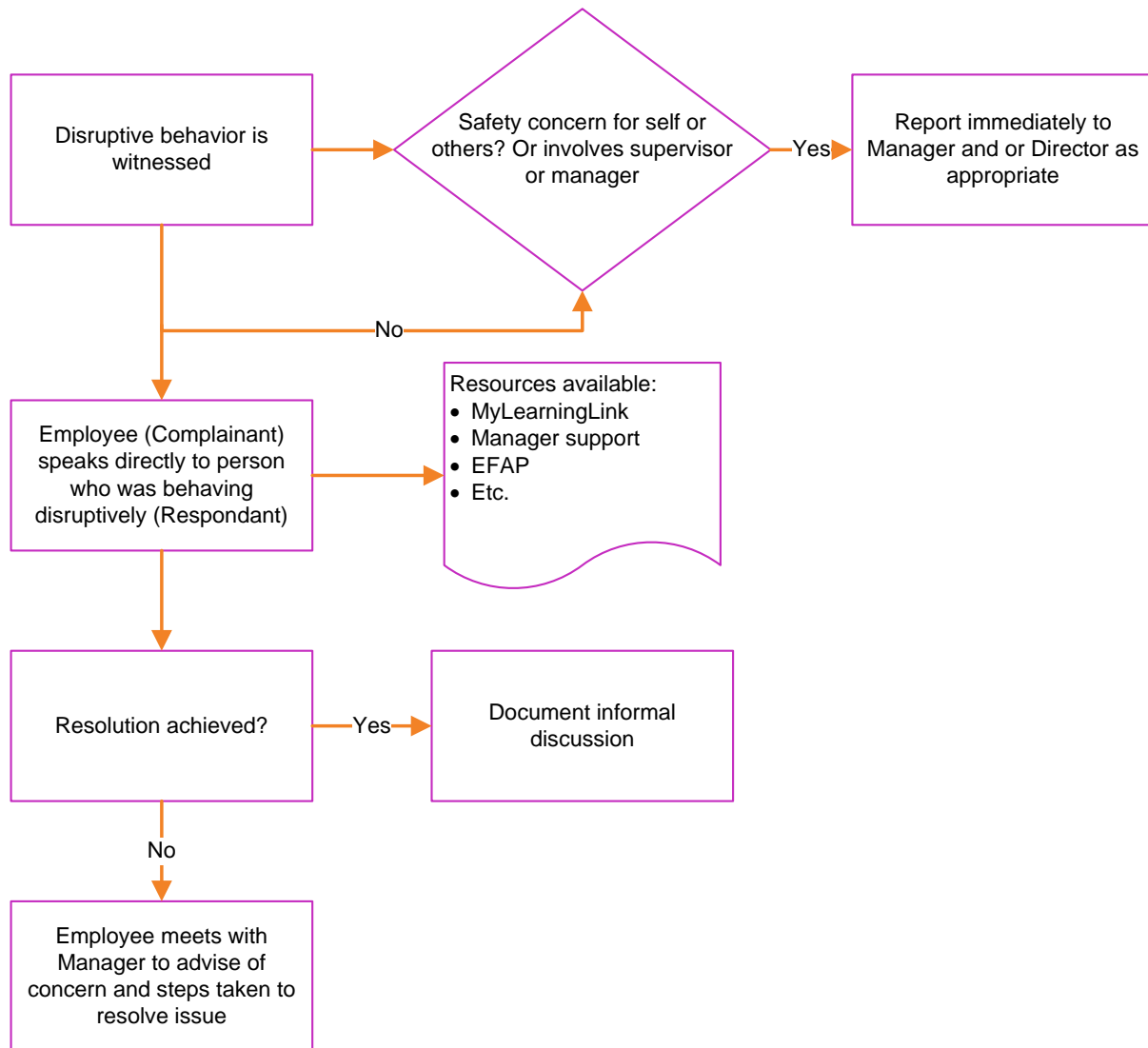
Reporting can be informal, such as to your supervisor or Advisor, HR Business Partnerships or more formally through AHS's reporting systems that are described in the applicable AHS [policies, procedures or bylaws](#). When a supervisor demonstrates disruptive behaviour, you may need to report your concern one, or even two management levels above. Centralized reporting systems may provide additional support for staff reporting disruptive behaviour by a supervisor. You are accountable for reporting and refraining from vexatious or frivolous (false or malicious) reporting. Serious incidents of disruptive behaviour occurring across organizations or care settings may also be reported to a health profession regulator. **Such reporting should be reserved for situations where other means of addressing conflict have not been successful.**

If you don't feel comfortable talking directly to the individual or your manager, you can seek confidential advice or support on options for proceeding by utilizing the following resources:

- [Advisor, HR Business Partnerships](#)
- Your union
- [Employee and Family Assistance Program](#)
- [Safe Disclosure Line](#)
- Please refer to [Appendix D](#) for additional information and resources related to disruptive workplace issues.



Outlined below is the general **process** to follow if an **employee witnesses disruptive** behaviour in the workplace:



3.4 Manager Process

It is critical that everyone in a management or leadership role model the desired behaviours and take action when they observe behaviour that is not consistent with the AHS Code of Conduct or AHS Values. Managers are required to respond to any informal or formal reports of disruptive behaviour regarding an employee, contractor or colleague. All complaints about disruptive behaviour will be acknowledged and dealt with appropriately in accordance with AHS policies and procedures.

It is important that when responding to a disruptive workplace incident that the principles of consistency, timeliness and natural justice (fair and without bias) are adhered to. Manager intervention should focus on helping employees change their behaviour. Disciplinary measures are reserved for employees who have not responded to other intervention strategies or for more serious incidents as per the AHS [Progressive Discipline procedure](#).

When an employee raises concerns related to disruptive behaviour with their manager, the manager needs to decide if the incident can be resolved locally and informally, on an interpersonal level, or if a formal investigation is required. The decision to complete an informal or formal investigation is dependent upon the following factors:

1. The nature and seriousness of the allegation/misconduct
2. Whether other persons were impacted
3. Whether anyone was injured or there was potential for harm
4. Civil and legal ramifications of the conduct
5. Whether there is a statutory obligation to take action
6. Whether there is a dispute over what happened
7. The employee's past history
8. Whether incidents are likely to continue or escalate
9. If there are clearly defined rules about the misconduct
10. Are there any systemic or process contributing factors (see [Just Culture](#) for additional information)
11. The employees acceptance of responsibility
12. How similar incidents were handled in the past
13. The impact the incident had on AHS's reputation
14. Additional mitigating and aggravating factors surrounding the misconduct

The following questions can be utilized in order to assist with decision making related to escalating the issue⁸:

1. Would a reasonable person find the alleged behaviour to be objectionable or inappropriate?
2. Does the alleged behaviour meet the definition of disruptive behaviour as described within this guide?
3. Was anyone harmed in the incident?

If the answer is 'No' to these questions, a discussion with the complainant is still warranted in order to determine how to resolve the issue.

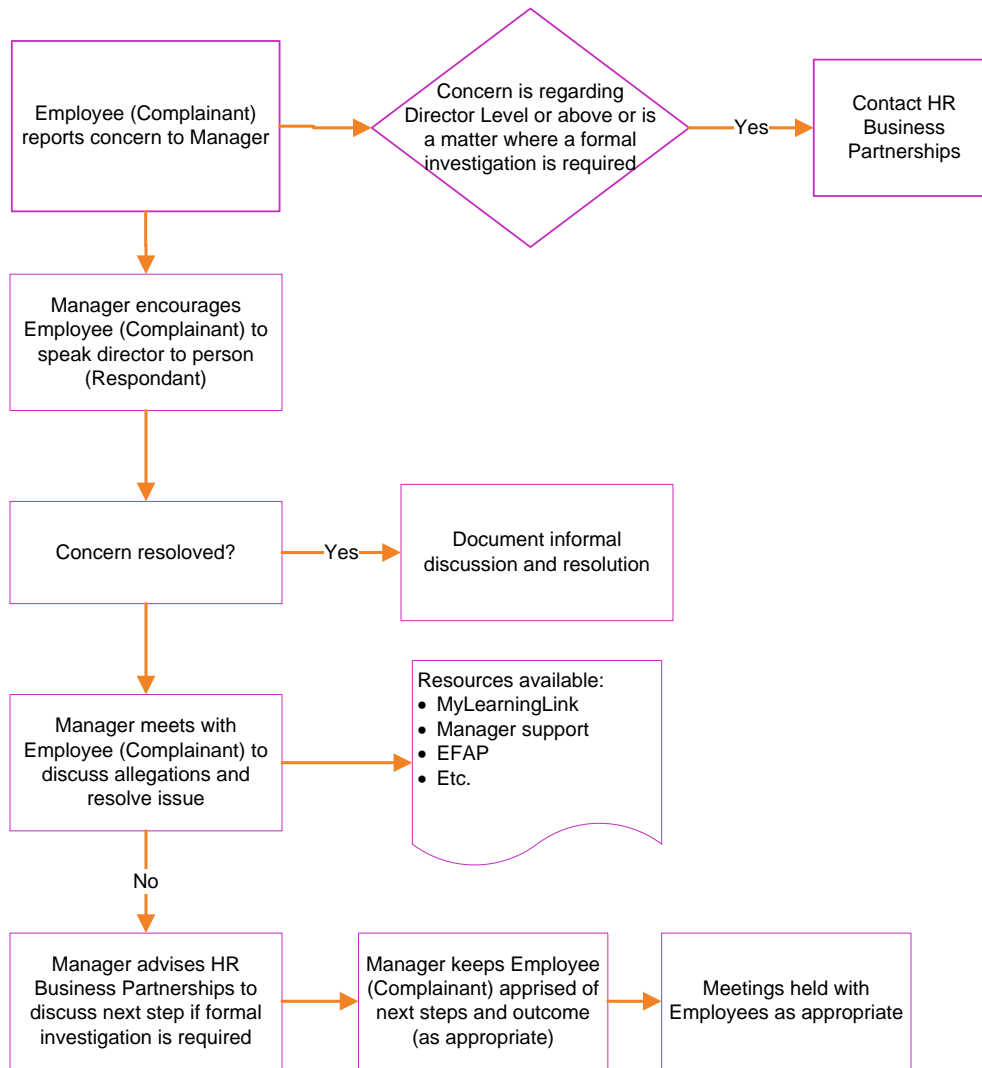
If the answer is 'Yes' to any of these questions, an initial review is required in order to verify the facts of the situation with all those involved (i.e., complainant, respondent, witnesses) in a timely, objective and fair manner. It's important that throughout this process, the respondent is treated respectfully and fairly regardless of the allegations.

⁸ Adapted from the Health Quality Council of Alberta. [Managing Disruptive Behaviour in the Healthcare Workplace. Resource Toolkit](#)



For additional assistance please consult with your [Advisor, HR Business Partnerships](#). A Manager Investigation Toolkit has also been developed to assist Managers when a formal investigation is required (under development).

The process outlined below is intended to address those incidents that can be managed and resolved informally and on an interpersonal basis.



3.4.1 When an Employee Reports Disruptive Behaviour⁹

The following section outlines what you, the manager, can do if an employee reports disruptive behaviour.

Step 1: Listen to the complaint

- Practice active listening skills
- Provide the individual with an opportunity and place where they feel safe to share what is going on
- Record the following details:
 - Date and time of event(s)
 - Names of people involved
 - Names of any witness
 - Description of what happened

Step 2: Encourage employees who witness or experience disruptive behaviours to resolve it with the individual directly

Often employees will bring forward concerns about disruptive behaviour and either not want you, as the manager, to do anything or do not feel comfortable addressing the employee directly. Below are some suggestions for dealing with these types of situations:

- If it is **safe**, encourage the complainant to resolve the problem with the individual directly:
 - Let them know that you are there to support them and ensure that they feel safe. Note: when there is a more serious report of disruptive behaviour, such as bullying, abuse or harassment, the employee's perceived safety may be compromised in the workplace environment. Therefore, having manager support and ensuring the employee feels safe is critical.
 - Remind them that sometimes individuals may not know that what they are doing is disruptive and impacting others, and by addressing them directly, they are being given the opportunity to change their behaviour.
 - Give them some coaching on possible ways to address the concern using "I" statements:
 - 'When I am spoken to in that way I feel...'
 - 'When I am excluded from that activity I feel like I am not part of the team and it makes it difficult to do my job.'
 - Remind them that you require specific information, as opposed to vague or very general information related to complaints, and that you have an obligation to follow up on any specific allegations that are brought to your attention.
 - It is important to highlight that the individual that they are complaining about (respondent) should have the opportunity to respond to the complaint, provide their side of the story, and if the allegations are founded they should be provided with an opportunity to change their behaviour. Often asking them how they'd feel if they weren't given this opportunity can be effective.
 - If the complainant is uncomfortable addressing the individual alone offer to be available for a facilitated conversation or mediation. With the use of established ground rules, this type of a meeting can be very productive as it allows both parties an opportunity to share information and be heard in a safe and respectful environment.

⁹ Adapted from the [AHS Managers Toolkit to Address Bullying](#)



- Once the complainant has attempted to address the issue with the other employee directly or, alternatively, if the complainant does not feel comfortable addressing the respondent (e.g., if there is a difference in power relations), or in situations where the complaint is serious enough that it would be inappropriate or unsafe to address the respondent directly, it is your role as the manager to take appropriate action. This action may include an investigation that can either be formal or informal depending on the nature and severity of the complaint.

Step 3: Conclude the meeting

- Advise the employee that they have the option to make a formal complaint and reference applicable AHS policies and procedures.
- Set up a time in the near future to check back in with the reporting employee (complainant) and to confirm next steps. If the incident proceeds to a formal investigation, the complainant should be advised of next steps which typically involves speaking to the complainant, respondent and any witnesses if applicable or appropriate. Your Advisor, HR Business Partnerships and a union representative may be engaged in the process as required.

Step 4: After the meeting

- Record the reported incident of disruptive behaviour
- Consult your [Advisor, HR Business Partnerships](#) for information on how best to proceed and to determine if a formal investigation is appropriate
- Maintain contact with the reporting employee (complainant) to determine if the behaviour has stopped, to provide appropriate updates as well as to see if there have been additional incidents of disruptive behaviour. Further consultation with your Advisor, HR Business Partnerships may be required.

3.4.2 Guidelines for a Conversation with the Respondent¹⁰

Behaviour related discussions can be difficult for both you as the manager/supervisor and the individual whose behaviour has been identified as disruptive (respondent). In preparing for the meeting, it can be helpful to script some key phrases to start the conversation, convey positive intent, and keep the meeting focused on the behaviour in question as well as on finding solutions. When preparing for the meeting, think about what can be said to:

- Convey positive intent
 - Work together to find a solution
 - Express support for the respondent throughout the process
- Describe what behaviour was observed
- Describe the impact of the behaviour on others
- Ask questions to clarify the facts and obtain a response
- Focus the dialogue on solutions
- Clarify expectations and consequences
- Create a plan for follow-up

¹⁰ Adapted from the [AHS Managers Toolkit to Address Bullying](#)



The meeting with the respondent should include the following:

1. Provide the respondent with the option to include a union representative if applicable. Please note: if a union representative will be in attendance at the meeting it is important to ensure your Advisor, HR Business Partnerships is notified.
2. Introduction: Why are we here? This is where you clearly state the facts of what has happened (either what has been reported to you or what you have directly witnessed) and why you're meeting.
3. Note: It is important that you provide the employee with a factual description of observable behaviours (i.e., actions, tone, statements made, body language, etc.) as the discussion largely hinges on the employees understanding what the actions/ disruptive behaviours are as well as the negative impact of those behaviours.
4. Hear them out, get their reaction/side of the story and try to gain a better understanding of why this behaviour is happening as well as the root of the issue. Review the situation from a [Just Culture](#) perspective and determine if there are any process or systems issues that might be contributing to the problem.
5. Discuss follow-up: if the allegations are founded, it is important to establish the steps that will be taken to ensure that the behaviour changes and clearly outline what will happen if the behaviour does not change.
6. Ensure the respondent has an understanding related to expectations related to confidentiality and that retaliation will not be tolerated.
7. Book a time to meet in the future to discuss progress.

See [Appendix A](#) for a checklist to help you prepare for a behaviour based meeting

TIPS: How to start the conversation?

Some suggestions include:

- “You have worked here since... and we value you as a (profession or job). However there are some specific issues that have been brought to my attention that I can't ignore. We need to talk about these and resolve them.
- “The behaviours you are exhibiting are disruptive to the work environment and are unwelcome.” (describe the specific behaviours)
- “I really want to help you and this may be a difficult conversation but I want to support you.”

See [Appendix B](#) for sample phrases to help you have a behaviour related discussion



3.4.3 Recommended Strategies During the Conversation with the Respondent¹¹

- It is important to ask questions related to the alleged incident(s) in order to obtain the facts, determine if the allegation(s) are founded and establish whether or not a formal investigation is required based on any new information that comes to light
- Wait out anger, bargaining, and deflection
- Focus on their actions
- Consider the timing and location of the conversation – avoid scheduling the meeting in front of others and try to hold it at the end of the day in a private and appropriate location
- Remind the employee of the AHS [Code of Conduct](#):
 - Treat people with respect, compassion, dignity and fairness
 - Be open, honest and loyal
 - Act ethically and uphold professional standards
 - Take responsibility for our own actions and expect the same of others
 - Respect confidentiality, privacy and the principles of [Just Culture](#)
- Inform the employee of the [Workplace Violence Prevention and Response Policy](#) and that workplace abuse and harassment is not tolerated at AHS
 - This policy sets out the processes for reporting and investigating workplace abuse and harassment claims
- If the allegations are founded ask the employee what they can and will do in order to change their behaviour in the future
 - Be ready to provide some suggestions if they ask such as taking a few seconds before responding in a heated situation
- If the allegations are founded it is important to ensure that the individual is aware that if their behaviour continues and is not corrected, more formal action can and will be taken

See [Appendix C](#) for addressing possible reactions from the respondent

¹¹ Adapted from the [AHS Managers Toolkit to Address Bullying](#)



3.4.4 Concluding the Meeting

Once you've discussed the behaviour issues and you are ready to conclude the meeting, it's important to set up a follow-up meeting(s) and to determine next steps with the employee. Some examples for this follow-up meeting include:

- Determine – how to prevent similar behaviours in the future
- Together make a list of specific actions that can and will be taken
- Be clear in your expectations of the employee's behaviour
- If the allegations are founded it is important to outline the consequences that will result if the employee's behaviour does not change
- Provide information about the [Employee and Family Assistance Program](#) (EFAP)
- Provide the employee with information about respectful workplaces and possible education sessions and resources for them to access ([Appendix D](#))
- Remind the employee that the discussion is confidential and is not to be shared with co-workers
- Remind the employee that any form of retaliation against those that may have reported the behaviour will not be tolerated
 - Please see the [Workplace Violence Prevention and Response Policy](#) or the [AHS Whistle Blower Policy](#) for more information
- Set up a follow up meeting (within the next couple of weeks or a month) to review a performance plan and any next steps you have for the employee or that the employee has identified for themselves
- Document the meeting, either in your own notes, with a follow up email to the employee or with a learning or performance plan at a future meeting

Things to watch for after / consequences after discussion

- Employees may go looking for support / sympathy from their colleagues
- Monitor any concerns about retaliation for the employees that the individual suspects reported them
- Possibility of increased sick time right after the meeting
- If sick time does increase, managers should contact their Advisor, HR Business Partnerships for support

Managers are asked to contact their [Advisor, HR Business Partnerships](#) to discuss the issue when the informal approach has not resolved the concerns. If the informal approach doesn't work, or for more serious incidents, the Managers Investigation Toolkit (in development) can also assist in outlining next steps and best practices for conducting a formal investigation.

Additional Considerations

If an employee has to be removed from the workplace on a temporary basis, a strategy to return them to the team is required. Returning the employee back to work can be difficult for both the employee and their team members. Hostile feelings on all sides may need to be dealt with openly. A premature return to the workplace without adequate supports can result in a relapse. It is recommended that a reintegration plan is developed and formalized that is both mutually acceptable as well as clearly outlined.



3.5 Promoting Team Awareness

The following information, resources and recommendations are available to assist managers in the promotion of a respectful workplace and the prevention of disruptive behaviours through team awareness:

Promoting respectful workplaces through team awareness

Talk to your team about respectful workplaces and disruptive behaviour:

- What does it mean to have a respectful workplace
- What is disruptive behaviour
- Why it is important to stop disruptive behaviour
- What can be done together as a team to deal with disruptive behaviour
- Promote diversity, respect and inclusiveness in a manner that recognizes, affirms and values individual differences, similarities and worth
- Recognize and value team diversity as a strength
- Promote the use of [inclusive language](#)
- Schedule a respectful workplace awareness day which can include posters, information and articles or formal training on the issue

Involving the team in developing standards of conduct and behaviour can be an important way to gain buy and support. Your [Advisor, HR Business Partnerships](#) can assist you with preparing for this presentation

Education and Resources

There are several courses and resources available to assist managers and employees in addressing disruptive behaviours, please see [Appendix D](#) for further information.

Obtain Confidential Advice or Support

- Consult with your [Advisor, HR Business Partnerships](#)
- Call your supervisor, Advisor, HR Business Partnerships or an impartial managerial colleague for support and to share ideas of how to address the situation
- Practice the conversation you are going to have with the respondent with an appropriate colleague, as outlined above, as well as discuss what has worked and what has not worked related to managing similar situations in the past



Promoting a respectful workplace by improving teamwork

How can you improve teamwork in your workplace? Improving teamwork is a great way to promote a respectful workplace. Employees should be encouraged to:

- Be supportive of co-workers and seek to understand their needs and concerns
- Provide timely, helpful, courteous service to their co-workers
- Maintain commitments to co-workers on assignment and meetings
- Respect the privacy of fellow co-workers
- Resolve conflicts respectfully, directly and quickly with the person involved
- Ask for assistance in a courteous manner
- Anticipate co-workers needs for assistance, without being asked
- Give people the benefit of the doubt before jumping to conclusions
- Feel comfortable in raising errors or mistakes in an appropriate, respectful and constructive manner
 - For additional information, please reference [Just Culture](#) resources

Additionally, you should:

- Model the desired behaviours and promote a high standard of behaviour
- Confront disruptive behaviour immediately when observed – it is crucial that disruptive behaviour is not tolerated, condoned or ignored
- Let people know when they have done a great job and have gone the extra mile
- Foster a comfortable, welcoming and equitable work environment for all employees
- Value different ways of looking at and performing tasks or processes and promote respect for individual differences
- Keep an open door policy and ensure that employees know they can talk to you if they have questions or concerns



Appendix A: Checklist for Preparing for a Meeting¹²

Background: Preparing for a behaviour-related discussion with an individual who is the subject of a complaint (respondent) is recommended. If possible, the meeting should convey positive, constructive intention. Create a meeting plan to ensure the meeting is focused and all issues are addressed. Scripting some of the phrases to use can help keep the meeting on track and convey key messages

Create a written narrative of the incident and related facts gathered through the review to:

- Clarify thinking
- Ensure adequacy and quality of data
- Be consistent (very important if there is a legal challenge)

Plan content for the meeting:

- Focus on the behaviour
- Use objective, non-judgmental, respectful language
- Avoid references to motives or speculation – never refer to a medical diagnosis or the respondents character
- Include as many examples of the disruptive behaviour as possible
- Include the date, time, and location of events
- Refer to facts from witness statements
- Include other relevant circumstances and context
- Prepare a list of questions for the respondent in order to obtain clarity on the facts related to the alleged incident(s) (e.g., determine if there are discrepancies between the witness and respondent statements and establish if there are any mitigating or extenuating factors)
- If allegations are founded, include the reasons the behaviour is unacceptable

Prepare a script or a few select phrases that will:

- Convey your positive intent
- Describe what was observed
- Describe the impact of the behaviour on others
- Ask for a response
- Focus the dialogue on solutions
- Clarify expectations and consequences
- Express your support for the individual – focus on the behaviour and not on the individual
- Create a plan for follow-up

Plan logistics for the meeting:

- Determine if someone else should be present as a witness with input from the respondent (e.g., Advisor, HR Business Partnerships, union representative)

- Set out the goals for the meeting and inform the respondent well in advance of the meeting
- Choose a suitable site for the meeting that is private and safe should there be an escalation in behaviour (the meeting should not occur in a corridor or public space)
- Negotiate a time with the respondent and keep the meeting to a maximum of one hour
- Prepare a draft action plan for behaviour change before the meeting
 - Determine which items are negotiable and which are not

During the intervention meeting:

- Always be respectful – thank the individual for their participation
- Set up the rules of engagement – speak first and allow the individual time to respond; get their agreement before proceeding
- Clearly explain the purpose and goals of the meeting
- Acknowledge the individuals worth and identify positive attributes and contributions
- Review the written narrative of facts related to the incident or events, obtain the respondents statement and determine if you have enough information to appropriately determine if the allegations are founded
- Follow scripted and planned content and try not to deviate from what you prepared
 - Please note: the exception would be if new information comes to light that may warrant a different approach such as a formal investigation
- Speak slowly and carefully
- Refocus the discussion on behaviour if the individual tries to divert the issues; offer to discuss those matters at a separate meeting
- Stop and repeat information regularly to prevent misunderstandings; paraphrase and ask the individual to repeat what he or she understands from your statement
- Conclude with acknowledgement of your confidence in the individual's good intentions and expectations of cooperation for improved conduct in the future



¹ Adapted from Health Quality Council of Alberta, *Managing Disruptive Behaviour in the Healthcare Workplace Resource Toolkit*

Appendix B: Sample Phrases for a Behaviour-Related Discussion¹

Describe what behaviour was observed...

- Specific examples of what I'm concerned about are as follows.... On (specify date), you (describe observed behaviour)...
- Your colleagues/other members of the team report that over the last (specify time frame, months, weeks) you have... (summarize the behaviours documented by others). While each incident might seem relatively minor on its own, together they reveal a pattern of behaviour that is a concern. It is creating problems for others and interfering with smooth functioning of this team/unit/department.

Describe the impact of the behaviour on others...

- Because of your behaviour, your colleagues/other members of the team... (give examples of how the behaviour has affected others, e.g., are reluctant to call you to clarify orders/have been requesting shift changes or call in sick so they don't have to work with you/avoid including you in meetings/delay taking action to avoid having to discuss a problem with you).
- When you said you would do this... but instead did this... this is what happened...
- Your colleagues/other members of the team/other staff have reported feeling... when they have to work with you.
- Your colleagues value you as a co-worker and are also concerned. Your behaviour is impacting them and the work environment and is affecting the quality of care/work the unit provides.

Ask for a response...

- Tell me what happened.
- Help me understand what was happening when...
- What were you thinking/feeling when...
- If applicable, refer to ongoing behaviour related issues: we discussed these concerns/behaviours when we met on (specify the last date) and you agreed that you would change your behaviour. This hasn't happened. Can you help me understand why the behaviours have continued? Can you help me understand what is going on?

Focus the dialogue on solutions...

- We have a responsibility to provide a safe and respectful workplace for everyone who works here. What do you think you can and will do to change your behaviour? How can we support you in that?
- You mentioned some workplace issues that you believe contributed to the incident. I will look into these.
- The individual(s) involved in this incident would appreciate that you apologized for your behaviour that day. Are you willing to do this? How do you think we should handle this? Do you want me to arrange a meeting with them?
- Here are some resources that you might find helpful in (e.g., coping with stress, anger management, cultural sensitivity, team communication, etc).

Clarify expectations and consequences

- We need you to stop doing... keep doing... start doing...
- I'll be sending you a letter to summarize today's meeting. This letter will outline our expectations and what we have agreed to today as a plan of action (HR Business Partnerships consultation is recommended).
- You are responsible for your behaviour and we will continue to hold you accountable in that regard. If this happens again then we'll have to consider further steps including the possibility of disciplinary action.

Express support for the individual

- You are an important member of this team/department/organization.
- The quality of your work is excellent and we value you as a member of the team.
- I am concerned about you and your well-being.

Create a plan for follow-up

- Let's meet again in (set a time and date) to discuss how things are going.
- I expect to see progress by...



Appendix C: Possible Reactions from the Respondent

During informal conversations related to allegations of disruptive behaviour employees may become agitated and try to shift blame or become confrontational. Below are some common questions that often come up with some suggested responses¹². These are guidelines only and need to be tailored to each individual conversation and circumstances.

1. **Who said that?**

Possible Response – *I've heard from a number of staff members, and also observed some of these behaviours myself.*

2. **I'm just reacting to what's happening around me**

Possible Response – *I appreciate that in the heat of the moment we often don't react the best to every situation, however we still expect all staff to act in a respectful way to their colleagues. The behaviours we're talking about are not acceptable in the workplace.*

3. **That is just who I am**

Possible Response – *The behaviours we are talking about go beyond personality issues or concerns. While everyone is unique we all still need to act respectfully towards our team and colleagues.*

4. **Denial – I did not do that**

Possible Response – *The information that I am receiving/the behaviours that I have observed does not support that.*

5. **Why are you not talking to everyone else?**

Possible Response – *We're here today to discuss the concerns that I have about your behaviour. I can't discuss other team members' behaviour with you, just as I couldn't discuss yours with them.*

6. **I feel as though you are harassing me and singling me out**

Possible Response - *I'm not singling you out. Your behaviour has been observed and/or we have received several complaints about your behaviour. As your manager, it's my responsibility to make sure you're aware of these concerns so that you have the opportunity to respond.*

7. **Dealing with an emotional employee – should you wait?**

Possible Response – *I see that you're upset, and I understand that this is emotional. Do you wish to take a brief break to have some time to compose yourself?*

8. **Threats – leave, call union, etc.**

Possible Response to calling the union – *You are more than welcome to discuss this with your union rep. As this discussion is not a disciplinary discussion your union rep was not required at this meeting.*

Possible Response to threatening to leave – *This meeting has not concluded and there are more points that I wish to cover with you. Do you need a brief break to compose yourself? The meeting will continue after. OR you can reschedule at a later date if the employee is extremely upset.*

¹² Adapted from the Health Quality Council of Alberta. [Managing Disruptive Behaviour in the Healthcare Workplace. Resource Toolkit](#)



Appendix D: Education and Resources

There are several courses provided by AHS to help employees and managers promote a respectful workplace and address disruptive behaviours; some suggestions include:

- Art of Accountability
- Conflict Resolution
- Constructive Conversations for Leader
- Managing a Unionized Workplace
- See [MyLearningLink](#) for these and other educational opportunities

Additional resources may include the following:

- [Workplace Violence Prevention and Response Policy](#)
- AHS [Code of Conduct](#)
- [Safe Disclosure/Whistleblower Policy](#)
- [AHS Values](#)
- [Ethics & Compliance General FAQs](#)
- [Let's Talk: A Guide to Resolving Workplace Conflicts](#)
- The [Expectations and Responsibilities](#) of AHS workers, patients and families when it comes to the providing a respectful workplace as part of Accreditation Canada's Required Operational Practice (ROP) on Workplace Violence Prevention ([poster](#) and [patient brochure](#))
- [Working Alone](#) policy information on how to complete a Working Alone Plan or take online training
- [Respect Poster](#)
- [Protection for Persons In Care Act](#)

Diversity and Inclusion Resources:

- [Diversity 101: Dealing with cultural differences in the workplace](#)
- [Recruitment and Employment Practices Policy](#)
- [Diversity and Inclusion Definitions](#)
- [Inclusive Language](#)
- [Additional Resources](#)

Bullying Resources:

- [AHS Managers Toolkit to Address Bullying](#)
- [AHS Employees' Toolkit to Address Bullying](#)
- [Bullying in the Workplace](#): A handbook for the Workplace. Practical suggestions for managers and staff to help reduce incidents of workplace bullying.
- [Bullies at Work: What to Know, What You Can Do](#)
- [Employers: What You Need to Know About Bullying in the Workplace](#)
- [Workplace Bullying Fast Facts](#)
- Additional educational resources on bullying located on [Insite](#)



Employee and Family Assistance (EFAP) Resources:

- AHS Shepell•FGI (EFAP) at 1-877-273-3134 or visit their [work-health-life](#) webpage for more information
- [The EFAP Program Resource Guide for managers, supervisors and other people](#) leaders
 - Preventing workplace conflict
 - Promoting a healthy workplace
- [EFAP seminars](#)
 - Bullying in the Workplace
 - The Art of Managing Conflict (Basic)
 - Dealing with Difficult Personalities
 - Effective Communication at Work
 - Lighten up Your Day
 - Mental Health Awareness

Health Quality Council of Alberta Resources:

- [Health Quality Council of Alberta – Managing Disruptive Behaviour in the Healthcare Workplace](#)
- [Framework: Managing Disruptive Behaviours in the Healthcare Workplace Framework](#)
- [Resource Toolkit: Managing Disruptive Behaviours in the Healthcare Workplace](#)

Violence in the Workplace Resources:

- Violence Awareness ([staff](#) and [patient](#))
- [Workplace violence](#) (Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety)
- [Violence in the workplace awareness](#) (online course)
- [Workplace violence](#) (info graphic)
- [Violence and aggression](#): health care (video)
- [Violence and aggression](#): long-term care (video)
- [Domestic violence in the workplace](#) (video)
- Go to the [Workplace Violence Prevention](#) page on Insite for more information

Alberta Human Rights Commission Resources:

- [Is it harassment? A tool to guide employees](#)
- [Workplace bullying and harassment](#) (video)

