

What can unacceptable behaviour look like?

This document is intended to help clarify and show what unacceptable behaviour might look like in a volunteering context.

You can use this document as a reference if you are trying to identify behaviours which are of concern to you. We have included some examples from volunteering scenarios which illustrate different unacceptable behaviours. But these examples are by no means exhaustive.

Bullying, harassment, discrimination and threats may not necessarily happen face to face. They could also take place via written communications, images, videos, emails, text messages, social media and phone calls.

Unacceptable behaviour can be physical and non-verbal. It may be witnessed by others, rather than the person it has happened to. It might be directed towards someone you know, a stranger, or someone you don't know very well through volunteering. It may be persistent (continues to happen) or be an isolated incident.

Important!

Volunteers can and should address and report behaviour which they find offensive, even if it's not directed towards them. If the behaviour has the purpose or effect of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive volunteering environment, report it.

Anyone can report unacceptable behaviour, you don't need to identify with a particular characteristic or have personal experience which relates to the nature of the unacceptable behaviour. If you are ever in doubt and want to discuss a particular incident, please don't hesitate to reach out to your local volunteer coordinator or supervisor. In our **Reporting a concern document**, you can find details of how to make contact.

The Equality Act 2010 - Protected characteristics

There are nine characteristics which are legally protected:

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|----------------------------------|----------------------------|---------|
| 1. Disability | 4. Gender reassignment | 7. Sex |
| 2. Marriage or civil partnership | 5. Pregnancy and maternity | 8. Race |
| 3. Religion or belief | 6. Sexual orientation | 9. Age |

Protected characteristics mean that it is against the law in England, Wales and Scotland to discriminate or treat people less favourably because of their characteristics. Northern Ireland has its own legislation on discrimination, including the Race Relations Order 1997.

On the **Citizens Advice website**, you can find a more detailed description of what being treated differently based on protected characteristics could look like.

Bullying

People aren't necessarily bullied because of a particular personal characteristic. Bullying can also be when someone abuses their power over others or acts unfairly. Bullying can be direct and easy to identify, or subtle and harder to spot.

When someone is being bullied, they are experiencing unwanted and negative behaviour towards them from someone else. This could be directed by an individual or a group of people. The negative behaviour could make the person feel upset, humiliated, undermined and vulnerable.

Some examples of bullying:

- Patronising, belittling or unfairly criticising a volunteer when they're alone or in front of others. This could include providing unfair or directly destructive criticism.
 - Talking badly about another volunteer behind their back, or creating gossip, rumours or lies about them.
 - Excluding a volunteer from meetings, information or social events on purpose.
 - Coercing a volunteer into doing something, speaking rudely or shouting at them.
 - Using sarcasm, banter or calling a volunteer by a nickname with the purpose of humiliating them.
 - Making unreasonable work requests or setting a volunteer up to fail.
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Discrimination

Discrimination is treating a person or a group of people differently. Typically, the person who is being discriminatory treats someone in a worse way than they would someone else in a comparable situation.

It doesn't matter if the person treating you differently didn't mean to discriminate against you.

Some examples of discrimination:

- Refusing to allow anyone over 60 years old to volunteer, or refusing a volunteer to join an activity because of their religion.
 - Purposefully promoting new volunteer opportunities only by word of mouth to be selective about who joins a group. This practice disadvantages others who might have considered volunteering if they'd had the chance to hear about it. This is indirect discrimination.
 - Rejecting a volunteer application because of a person's ethnic background.
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- Refusing to let a volunteer use certain equipment because they are pregnant. Even if this is done out of good intentions with concern for the volunteer's health, this is direct discrimination.
 - Refusing to allow someone to volunteer because it's perceived that they are gay. Even if they are heterosexual, this is direct discrimination by perception.
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Harassment

Harassment is unwanted behaviour which has the purpose or effect of violating someone's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating and/or offensive environment for you or others.

Harassment could be offensive or negative comments related to personal characteristics such as a person's gender, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance, body size, race, religion, age or more.

Some examples of harassment:

- Repeatedly directing sexist and racist jokes towards a black woman, even after having been told to stop.
- Speaking to or about people who all identify with the same characteristic (eg ethnicity, sex or age) in a generalising or insulting way. For example, 'You gypsies are all the same. You don't want to be accepted by other communities.'
- Using offensive or outdated words to describe a disabled volunteer, such as 'crippled' or 'retarded' and continuing to use such words after being informed that they are offensive.

Harassment of a volunteer could also be (but is not limited to):

- Unwanted phone calls, texts, letters, emails or visits
 - Verbal or written abuse, including bullying online
 - Stalking, following or spying on a person
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- Inappropriate or unwanted physical contact
 - Deliberate intimidation, using different means to frighten someone
 - Unwelcome sexual or romantic attention
 - Jokes and remarks that could easily be misunderstood
 - Asking intrusive or unpleasant questions unrelated to volunteering
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Threats

Threats can be verbal, written and physical.

Some examples of threats

- Threatening to share sensitive or personal information about a volunteer.
 - Stating “If you don’t do this, then I will do this...”
 - Grabbing a person hard by the arm while saying something intimidating.
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Victimisation

Victimisation is treating someone less favourably or harassing them, because they have reported concerning behaviour, or assisted someone else to do so.

An example of victimisation:

Treating a volunteer badly because they have reported a case of harassment within their volunteer group. This might include:

- Ignoring the volunteer
 - Spreading rumours about the volunteer
 - Unfairly criticising the volunteer’s work
 - Deliberately trying to get the volunteer into trouble.
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