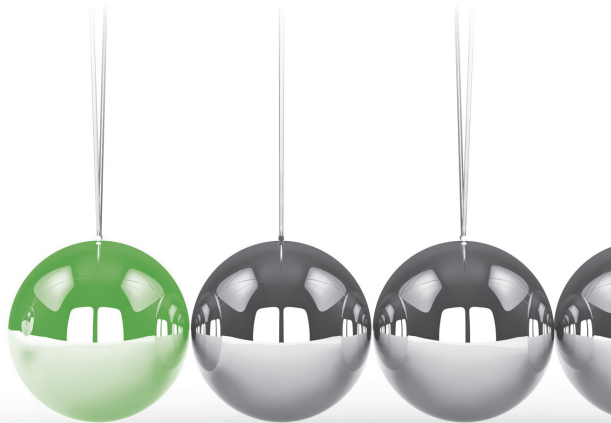


Positive **Working Together**

A Short Guide



Promoting good working relationships and managing conflict in the Church

This booklet is a summary of the guidelines which have been produced to assist districts, circuits and local churches in dealing with bullying and harassment.

We recognise that the Church is not immune to displays of unacceptable behaviour. Our primary intention is to provide advice on issues relating to bullying and harassment, recognising that this often occurs when conflict arises. Promoting positive behaviours in the life of the Methodist Church and managing conflict well, when it occurs, are closely linked and of critical importance.

This guidance provides information and resources to promote positive working and good conflict management within the context of bullying and harassment. Our aim is to promote informal approaches to dealing with these issues, while recognising that some matters are so serious, or relationships have become so strained, that it is appropriate to hold others to account and challenge behaviours via the Church's formal processes.

This is our definition of 'bullying' and 'harassment':

Any behaviour, always involving a misuse of power, which an individual or group knows, or ought reasonably to know, could have the potential effect of offending, humiliating, intimidating or isolating an individual or group should be regarded as unacceptable.

'Unacceptable behaviour' changes its label to 'bullying' or 'harassing behaviour' when it causes actual harm or distress to the target(s), normally, but not exclusively, after a series of incidents over a prolonged period of time.

Lack of intent does not diminish, excuse or negate the impact on the target or the distress caused. The degree of intent is only relevant in terms of how the behaviour should be challenged and the issues subsequently resolved.¹

Who is this for?

This document should be useful to anyone associated with The Methodist Church but will apply differently to some groups, depending on their relationship with the Church, and their employment status.

¹ *Dignity at Work: Unacceptable Behaviour, Bullying and Harassment. A Comprehensive Guide for Workplace Representatives in the Not for Profit Sector of Unite the Union* (Rosenburgh and Connolly 2008, Unite 2007)

Ministers: this guidance is offered to all ministers and is put forward within the context of the covenant relationship which exists between ministers and the Conference. If the informal processes shared here are appropriate in a particular situation but fail to resolve the issues then the matter may potentially be raised under complaint procedures.

- **Members of the Methodist Church:** this guidance is offered to all Church members.
- **Lay employees:** lay employees have contractual provisions which refer to specific personnel procedures. Such provisions take precedence over this guidance. Further guidance for lay employees is available in the Lay Employment Guidance Pack (www.methodist.org.uk/layemployment).
- **Persons who are not Church members** but are involved in the life of an individual church or circuit. The Church has no jurisdiction over such people but expects all those involved in its life to behave with respect and dignity for others, as set out in this guidance.

Why “Positive Working Together”?

The Methodist Church recognises the serious impact which poor behaviour and badly managed conflict can have on individuals, communities and on the Church more widely. We also recognise the importance of promoting a more proactive

approach, helping people work together to prevent bullying and harassment, and manage conflict well at an informal level. A positive and proactive approach can help avoid everyday, low-level poor behaviour escalating into highly damaging conflicts, without reaching a point where individuals feel they have no option but to raise a formal grievance or complaint.

The Positive Working Together guidelines www.methodist.org.uk/pwt aim to:

- establish a basis for the Methodist Church’s approach to prevention and management of poor behaviour by informal means
- be clear about how such informal approaches relate to the context and formal procedures of the Church
- be clear about what the Church expects from those to whom the guidance is offered, in terms of positive behaviours and those which the Church considers to be unacceptable
- describe the range of options available to those wishing to pursue an informal route to resolution of conflicts or concerns
- be rooted in the covenant relationship that exists between ministers and the Conference (recognising that this is not applicable to lay employees, volunteers or others).

There is an established legal framework concerning bullying and harassment. In

reality, only a very small number of the most serious, protracted cases are likely to end up on a legal pathway to resolution. Even these cases can only proceed if all formal, internal Church procedures have been exhausted. Considering our underpinning Methodist and Christian principles and beliefs can provide helpful insights into promoting positive working relationships and behaviours which help to prevent conflict from escalating in the first place.

Theological themes

Positive working together is viewed through the lens of three key themes: shared humanity; journeying together in learning and understanding; humanity's need of God's grace. You can read the theological reflections in more detail www.methodist.org.uk/pwt (page 7, section 5). These themes provide helpful ways of looking at poor behaviour, based upon Methodist thinking and theology.

Promoting positive working relationships

Starting from a distinctively Christian standpoint creates an opportunity for individuals associated with the Church to behave in a manner which models the very highest standards of human interaction and relationships. On an everyday basis high standards of behaviour require attention to how individuals communicate with each other, how people are treated,

how information is managed and shared and how difference is understood and embraced. A fuller list is available here www.methodist.org.uk/pwt (page 11, section 6). In practical terms this means:

Communication

- paying attention to how we greet and address each other on an everyday basis, ensuring that we are at all times courteous, respectful and appropriate, regardless of the medium
- being mindful of the impact our communication has on others and making efforts to understand our communication from the perspective of how it is received by others
- being aware of how our power over others is communicated and taking measures to ensure that such power is not misused or abused
- only communicating about other people what we would be prepared to communicate to them face-to-face unless there are overriding and justifiable reasons not to do so
- making an effort to check with others whenever we fear we may have upset or offended them in order to promote confidence and clarity in our relationships with others
- making time to genuinely listen to what others communicate to us,

particularly when the situation is sensitive or personally challenging to us. A list of examples of negative behaviour is here **www.methodist.org.uk/pwt** (page 34, appendix 3).

How we treat each other

- treating every person fairly, equally and with dignity and respect
- behaving at all times with integrity, honesty and openness
- adjusting our behaviour, including language, if we understand it to be causing offence
- bringing unfair treatment to the attention of others so as to avoid it being repeated
- challenging inappropriate or unacceptable behaviour we have witnessed and doing this in a constructive, sensitive and proportionate way
- responding to criticism of our own behaviour by genuinely listening to what is being said, remaining calm and reflecting honestly on its potential validity before responding
- being aware that at times we may lack self-awareness and that this may impact negatively on our behaviour.

Positive working together in disagreements

Manage conflict, or it will manage you. Whenever churches have faced conflict openly, the congregations have grown stronger in the process. But whenever they have hidden from conflict, it has emerged when congregations are the weakest and least prepared. The longer the congregation hides, the more 'political' and power-orientated the struggle becomes, and the more destructive its impact.²

Inappropriate or unacceptable behaviour often arises from a context where conflict is not dealt with well. We recognise that conflict is an inevitable part of life. However, when it is handled badly it often leads to poor behaviour. Although informal approaches to dealing with conflict are offered here, in some situations, due to the gravity of what is alleged to have occurred, it may be necessary to move quickly to formal processes to ensure that individuals are properly held to account.

Typical causes of conflict in church settings

- **Power struggles** - people will take sides with the leader or worker that they personally support.
- **Spiritual bullying** - sometimes leaders or those in authority use their position to claim superior spirituality which

2 *Handling Holy Wars*, by Ron Kraybill - <http://salvationist.ca/2009/05/how-to-manage-conflict/>

they believe gives them the right to be directive about how others should live.

- **Different perspectives** - everyone sees the world a little bit differently.
- **Different goals** - people think they are saying the same thing, yet they have very different goals.
- **Different values** – whilst we are all part of one Church which holds a core set of beliefs in common, we sometimes hold values which are at odds with the values of others in the Church.
- **Personality clashes** - certain personalities struggle to function effectively together.
- **Unrealistic expectations** – whilst some people expect church to be a place for quiet prayer and reflection, others expect it to be lively and loud.
- **Personal issues and insecurities** – individuals who have experienced difficult or dysfunctional parental relationships may struggle to relate to males or females in leadership roles.
- **Ideological and theological differences** – the inclusive and democratic traditions of the Methodist Church can enable debate, but also conflict, on a wide range of theological issues.

For help in dealing with conflict you can refer to the full Positive Working Together guidelines, there is also a helpful selection of case studies in Appendix 1 of the full guidelines.

The importance of seeking support

It is extremely important to seek support if you need it when experiencing negative behaviour from someone, or when you are seeking to challenge someone about their behaviour. In many situations it is sufficient to talk matters over with a trusted friend or colleague who is outside your immediate environment. This will often give you a fresh perspective on your situation. Dealing with issues of bullying and harassment, whether you feel you are the victim or the alleged perpetrator, can often be very stressful and it is important to ensure that you have appropriate support in place.

Good support can be helpful in many ways, for example, in restoring a sense of control when you feel out of control in a situation; achieving a sense of empowerment so that you feel that you have choices and options in a situation; providing a way of separating the negative behaviours themselves from the impact they have on you; reflecting on difficult issues of power, victimhood and forgiveness and understanding that one's response (which might include tears or loss of confidence) is a normal response to abnormal circumstances or poor treatment.

Sources of support

Support is often best provided informally by a friend or colleague, working with you in a peer capacity. However, it is important to be mindful of the role of

the superintendent as a source of both oversight and support in these matters, and where appropriate the district chair. If individuals feel that these people are the sources of difficulty then it would better to have support from outside the circuit, such as a neighbouring superintendent (or district chair). Each district also has a Reconciliation Group consisting of skilled and experienced people in these matters. These groups provide a space where support and advice can be provided.

A source of support which can be very effective is that provided by an informal **peer support group**. This can occur naturally between friends and colleagues, and can be effective as a means of exploring emotions, reactions and understandings. An alternative is to set up an **intentional peer support group** to help you work through more systematically how you may take forward a situation of alleged bullying and harassment.

Other options include the provision of **counselling**, which for ministers is available from the Churches' Ministerial Counselling Service (www.cmincs.net). Counselling is often helpful in exploring and understanding one's own behaviour and developing strategies to work constructively.

Alternatively, working with a **spiritual director** provides an opportunity to examine the impact of a situation on one's individual journey of faith. There are regional networks

and registers of spiritual directors which can easily be found via the internet, or the Retreat Association may be able to help www.retreats.org.uk/spiritualdirection.html

Pastoral supervision may provide an opportunity to examine your day to day practice and explore fresh perspectives in a difficult situation. Pastoral supervisors are often known in a local context, so it may be useful to explore contacts in your area. Alternatively, the Association of Pastoral Supervisors and Educators (APSE) has a national list of contacts www.pastoralsupervision.org.uk

Districts and circuits may also know of local **coaches** or **mentors** with whom you can work with in a structured and time-limited way on specific issues of concern.

Finally, there may be **wise and experienced individuals** available locally who can provide advice and support on a one-to-one basis. In thinking about whether to work with such a person it is useful to consider their skills and background, along with their knowledge and understanding of the Church and its processes. It is also useful to think about what kind of support you are looking for and whether the individual can reasonably provide it.

Moving forward

The hurt and distress that can come about as a result of bullying and

harassment are often significant and can feel overwhelming, affecting many areas of our life. The process of challenging poor behaviour may likewise be demanding and painful, and may challenge us to reflect on our own actions.

However, there comes a point in all situations where it is right to move on and move forward. This may be at the conclusion of an informal process where issues have been explored and agreements reached for the future. This can be a particularly difficult stage and raises a number of important questions, see full guidelines for all of these (page 23, section 12).

How do we positively move forward?

We all have the potential to experience pain and damage as completely disabling in an area of life, and when this happens we often get ‘stuck’ and cannot move forward. It is important to acknowledge this, and that the process of moving forward may take a long time. It is also important to acknowledge that sometimes we find the process of learning and reflection difficult, and that individuals may not be able to simply learn and move forward, be they the victims or perpetrators, and regardless of the amount of support given. These situations must be respected, but also held within a context of hope that change is possible.

Further resources

The full guidelines contain liturgical and related resources www.methodist.org.uk/pwt (page 37, appendix 4), which may be helpful to individuals at different stages of the process of moving forward from a situation of bullying or harassment. Often these will be useful after much hard work has been done, as a way of acknowledging personal change. In particular, the *Methodist Worship Book* contains the following liturgies:

- an order of service for healing and wholeness
- a service of repentance and reconciliation.

A prayer which may be helpful to those wishing to move forward from difficult experiences.

*Lord,
you know our deepest desires
and we know the vision of your
kingdom...
we bring before you those elements in
our lives
in need of your transforming power:
that which we misuse or neglect,
that which we reluctantly let go of,
that which we believe is not good
enough:
inspire us and disturb us to examine our
deepest desires.³*

³ *Your Kingdom come from Prayers for forgiveness*, ed Kathy Galloway (Wild Goose Publications, 2007) available from www.ionabooks.com