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# **Operating model for addressing harassment and bullying**

**In the Student union of the University of Vaasa**

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## Introduction

In the 2021 Action Program for the Prevention of Bullying, Violence and Harassment in Early Childhood Education, Schools and Educational Institutions, the Ministry of Education and Culture has determined that each higher education institution has a clear operating model and guidelines for preventing harassment and inappropriate behavior. This operating model for intervening in harassment and bullying is intended to support the handling of harassment and bullying situations that come to the attention of the student union or occur within the student union. Internal activities of the student union mean VYY's office, representative council, and other activities within VYY. The model only includes instructions related to preventing harassment and bullying. This operating model is always updated as needed, based on the feedback, development ideas and other suggestions.

Uwasa guidelines for harassment and Inappropriate Treatment

<https://www.uwasa.fi/en/students/harassment-and-inappropriate-treatment>

## Glossary

**Harassment** is unwanted behavior that intentionally or actually violates a person's mental or physical integrity or value and creates a threatening, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive atmosphere. Relationships between people and previous experiences affect what is perceived as harassment. The essential thing is that the target of the harassment finds the behavior unpleasant.

**Sexual harassment** is verbal, non-verbal or physical unwanted behavior of a sexual nature. Sexual harassment can be e.g. inappropriate gestures or suggestions. Some jokes may be funny to some, but others may find them unpleasant and disturbing. Sexual harassment is discrimination according to the Equality Act. Sexual harassment is a crime, that violates a person's right to sexual self-determination.

**Discrimination** means when a person is treated worse than others or is put in a worse position based on some personal characteristic without an acceptable reason.

**Bullying** is repeated and systematic inappropriate behavior towards the bullied. Bullying is a form of emotional abuse that can involve verbal, mental or physical aggression, often deliberately aimed at a specific person to cause harm or hurt. Bullying can cause serious psychological problems, so it must be addressed as early as possible.

## General principles

**VYY's harassment contact person supports and advises students who have encountered harassment.** The contact person for harassment has a duty of confidentiality, and the conversations held are strictly confidential, and no notes are kept, unless otherwise agreed separately. They do not talk about it with anyone without the permission of the person who experienced the harassment or bullying. The task of the harassment contact person is not to punish the person accused of harassment, but to help clarify the situation. They are neither psychologists nor lawyers, so they cannot offer the necessary professional help in such matters, but can refer you to the right person.

**In the student union of the University of Vaasa, reports of harassment and/or bullying are received mainly to the harassment contact person at [hairinta@vyy.fi](mailto:hairinta@vyy.fi) and by direct contact to the student union's harassment contact person.**

Notifications can also be given using a separate form. If harassment reports come to the attention of other people in the office, these are forwarded to the harassment contact person. However, the person connected to the harassment cannot do much about it, unless the person experiencing harassment or bullying has been in direct. That's why everyone should instruct students to contact the harassment contact person themselves, either by e-mail or, in urgent matters, by phone. If reports of harassment occur to those working in organizations or among tutors, they can assess for themselves whether it is necessary to refer the matter all the way to the contact person for harassment.

**The student union's harassment contact person always makes contact with a person who has experienced harassment or bullying and tries to arrange a meeting with them.** If necessary, the harassment contact person instructs parties to harassment or bullying situations to also contact e.g. the services of a study psychologist, YTHS or

university chaplain or the police, if the situation seems like a crime has been committed.

**If the case falls outside the university's or student union's operating model for harassment and bullying situations, VYY's harassment contact person can, if necessary, take responsibility for investigating the situation, but will not take any possible measures without the permission of the parties involved** (for example, recording a criminal complaint). If possible, they talk with the different parties in the situations and finally convenes a joint discussion if the parties so wish.

**The harassment contact person will respond to incoming contacts as quickly as possible**, preferably within the same day. Getting in touch is probably already a long-considered act and a big threshold, which is why answering the message as soon as possible is very important.

**Two employees of VYY are responsible for harassment and bullying issues, who coordinate the harassment contact person activities and are the support of anti-bullying persons and in their work.**

### **Instructions for dealing with harassment and bullying in and around VYY**

We follow e.g. Operational models developed by the Institute of Occupational Health, which are partially quoted in this chapter.

#### **If you are harassed or bullied**

1. Discuss the harassment or bullying you experience with the person behaving inappropriately as soon as possible. Tell us what kind of behavior you have



experienced as inappropriate and how you feel. Discuss it. Sometimes it can be a matter of misunderstanding. Tell them to stop. Talk about behavior, not their qualities. However, remember to put your own personal safety first. If the situation seems like you don't dare to talk about it alone, bring a friend along. If you don't have a support person that you can ask to join the situation, you can ask the harassment contact person to be supportive in the case. If the situation seems dangerous in any case, report the matter to VYY's harassment contact person.

2. If the inappropriate behavior does not stop, report it to VYY's harassment contact persons or the supervisors, depending on the situation and the venue. The chairman or general secretary and anyone else can also behave improperly. In this case, you can contact VYY's harassment contact person to clarify the situation. If, for one reason or another, the situation has become such that the person behaving inappropriately is VYY's harasser contact person, contact VYY's general secretary. If the person behaving inappropriately is a tutor or a member of the organization, contact the tutor coordinator, the chairman of the subject organization or VYY's harassment contact person.
3. If you find it difficult to discuss the matter with the person who is behaving in a disruptive manner, take the matter directly to the harassment contact person. Tell them about specific situations in which you felt you were bullied or harassed.
4. Journaling helps you understand the continuity of the situation and is useful and supports your memory when you talk about your experiences. Don't respond to bullying or harassment "in the same measure", but try to be matter-of-fact in everything and towards everyone. Remember your own safety and mental endurance in this situation.

### **If you notice harassment or bullying**

1. Go up to the person who is behaving inappropriately or disruptively and tell them that you think their behavior is bullying and ask them to stop. You can also do this together with someone else who has also observed the bullying behavior. However, remember safety and health, if the situation seems threatening, just try to get the disturbed or bullied person out of the situation.
2. Go to the person who is being bullied or harassed and ask them how you can help them.
3. Report the improper or harassing treatment you observe to the harassment contact person or the supervisors. The harassment contact person has an obligation to intervene in the matter and the good ones have instructions on how to act in these situations.

### **If you act as chairperson or general secretary and you notice bullying or harassment within the board/office**

1. After receiving information about experienced or perceived inappropriate behavior, harassment or bullying, take the matter seriously and start to investigate the situation without delay. The situation may be such that it is impossible for the parties to resolve the situation between themselves, so offer your help. You should go into the investigation with an open mind and without prejudices. Treat the parties equally and fairly. You can ask VYY's harassment contact person for help in clarifying the situation.





2. If the message comes through another party, ask the person named as bullied to come to you, tell them what you heard and ask "how do you feel about the situation?".
3. First, listen to the person who experienced bullying or harassment and the person accused of it separately, and then try to organize a joint discussion in which you try to find solutions for how to act in the future. Sufficient hearing of both parties is important. However, act in the situation especially on the terms of the person who has been bullied/harassed, but impartially. If they do not want to discuss the situation, tell them that it is not necessarily possible to find a solution to the situation without a joint discussion. Agree with the parties involved on work and behavioral changes that will stop the inappropriate behavior. If there is a suspicion of a crime, ask the victim to contact the police and remind them of the presence of the harasser. You can also send a message to the harasser contact person about the matter. Remember, however, that the harasser contact person will not take action unless specifically requested.

## A model for discussion in situations of harassment or bullying

- Always talk first with the harassed or bullied person and then with the person accused of the harassment or bullying. Remember to be impartial when dealing with the matter. When talking to the person suspected of harassment, emphasize that you are not accusing them of anything at this point, but you want to hear their point of view about this situation.
- Tell why the discussion event has been organized, who will participate in the event and why.
- Find out what has happened and how the party in question sees what happened. Always remember at the beginning of the conversation to give the person the opportunity to talk calmly about what happened from their own point of view. You can ask clarifying questions when the person has first told their own story. Be empathetic and listen. Don't discount someone else's experience.
- Tell the other party's point of view about what happened, if you have received permission to do so from the person in question. Observe the person's reactions, but beware of excessive interpretations.
- Find out how the party in question wants the matter to be handled in the future. May the report be shared in writing or orally with another party? Do they voluntarily agree to a joint discussion session, where we try to find solutions to what happened together?



- If the incident involves university staff, tell us about the university's/employer's legal obligation to act to stop harassment or bullying, and check the university's website for the model for intervening in disruptive situations.
- Tell me about the measures to be taken or possible alternatives in the situation. Make sure that person knows who to turn to if the matter is still bothering them. These parties include, for example, the study psychologist, VYY's harassment contact person, helplines or the police.
- Agree on monitoring the situation with the person(s) (e.g. follow-up meeting)