

# WHAT IS OFFENSIVE BEHAVIOUR?

- When one or more individuals in the organisation, rudely or repeatedly, subject another person or other persons in the organisation to bullying, sexual harassment or other degrading behaviour at work. The behaviour must be perceived as degrading by the person(s) subjected to the behaviour (section 23 in the Executive order on psychological work environment).
- It is a generic term for bullying, sexual harassment, discrimination (e.g. based on race, gender and age), violence, threats or other forms of offensive behaviour.

# WE SHARE THE RESPONSIBILITY

At Aarhus University, we do not accept offensive behaviour.

Managers and employees at the university are jointly responsible for preventing, identifying and dealing with offensive behaviour in an active and clear way (section 26-28 of the Danish Working Environment Act).

Offensive behaviour is prevented by promoting a culture in which it is possible to discuss opinions, experiences and the expectations we have towards each other in an open and respectful way.

The people involved in offensive behaviour will often have different experiences regarding the reasons. We, therefore, have a shared responsibility to ensure that all parties are heard.

# INFORMATION

**AU's guidelines for dealing with offensive behaviour:**  
[medarbejdere.au.dk/en/administration/hr/workingenvironment/psychological-work-environment/offensivebehaviour](https://medarbejdere.au.dk/en/administration/hr/workingenvironment/psychological-work-environment/offensivebehaviour)

**Norms for daily working life:**  
[medarbejdere.au.dk/en/administration/hr/policies](https://medarbejdere.au.dk/en/administration/hr/policies)

**Conflict prevention:**  
[medarbejdere.au.dk/en/administration/hr/workingenvironment/psychological-work-environment/au-culture-and-well-being/preventing-conflict](https://medarbejdere.au.dk/en/administration/hr/workingenvironment/psychological-work-environment/au-culture-and-well-being/preventing-conflict)

**Psychological counselling:**  
[medarbejdere.au.dk/en/administration/hr/workingenvironment/psychological-work-environment/psychological-counselling-service](https://medarbejdere.au.dk/en/administration/hr/workingenvironment/psychological-work-environment/psychological-counselling-service)

**The Danish Working Environment Authority's hotline in matters concerning bullying and harassment:**  
[at.dk/en/about-us/contact-us](https://at.dk/en/about-us/contact-us)

## Questions for the SDD at IOOS:

1. How would you describe the work culture and tone of communication at your section/department?
2. Have you experienced something that your leader should pay attention to or act on?

HOW TO PREVENT  
AND DEAL WITH

# OFFENSIVE BEHAVIOUR

AT AARHUS UNIVERSITY

# HOW TO COMBAT OFFENSIVE BEHAVIOUR

## PREVENT

Create a healthy culture together

- Please note that managers and others in a mentor role or similar role have a special responsibility to always act professionally and objectively and in this way prevent offensive behaviour.
- Communicate clearly that offensive behaviour is unacceptable and encourage everyone to say no to offensive behaviour.
- Talk about the tone of communication and the culture you want in your unit on a regular basis. Involve the union representative, occupational health and safety representative and your HR partner, if relevant. You can talk about this topic e.g. at department meetings, committee meetings and in the SDDs.
- In case of conflicts, assess whether the parties need support to help them move on. Offer support to resolve the conflict so that unresolved conflicts do not result in offensive behaviour.
- Help to create a culture in which we say no to discrimination based on race, gender, age etc.
- Be aware that behaviour might be clearly offensive, or it may not be so obvious, and that it can be expressed verbally, physically and digitally.

MANAGER  
What is your responsibility?

## DEAL WITH

Talk about it and take action

- Intervene and look into the matter with the parties involved if you hear about offensive behaviour or if you witness it.
- Follow the three steps below if an employee who has been subjected to offensive behaviour contacts you:
  - Step 1: Clarify/investigate the incident with the employee.
  - Step 2: Clarify/investigate the incident with the suspected offender.
  - Step 3: Take action and follow up. Find more information on the back.
- Be impartial when you talk to the parties involved.
- Contact your HR partner if you need advice. If you assess that it is a serious offence, you must contact your HR partner.
- Note that AU offers psychological counselling. Find more information on the back.
- If the offence involves employees who work for other managers, you must also involve these managers.

## FOLLOW UP

Learn and prevent future incidents

- Communicate clearly what is expected, in the future, of the parties involved to ensure that the collaboration is reestablished. Follow up on the collaboration and communication between the parties on a regular basis, and consider whether any measures are required to prevent future offences.
- Offensive behaviour is not just a personal matter, but a shared problem. Be aware of any root causes of the offensive behaviour so you can prevent this behaviour in the future – for example undefined values, unfair differential treatment, unclear alignment of expectations, unresolved conflicts etc.
- Reflect on what you have experienced: What worked well and what did not work well in the way you handled the situation? Should a similar situation be handled differently in the future?

- Take responsibility together for a culture in which:
  - you respect each other's boundaries and it is OK to say no to offensive behaviour.
  - constructive communication is maintained, also when we disagree.
  - we have an open dialogue about the way we communicate and collaborate.
  - we say no to discrimination based on race, gender, age etc.

COLLEAGUE(S)  
What can we do together?

- If possible, intervene if you witness offensive behaviour. Avoid being a passive witness.
- Contact your occupational health and safety representative, union representative or manager if you need advice and support.
- Take it seriously if a colleague who feels subjected to offensive behaviour contacts you. Listen to what the person has experienced and help by referring your colleague to the occupational health and safety representative, union representative or manager.

- Pay attention to your colleagues' needs for support and care while focusing on the future.
- Continue the open dialogue about communication and collaboration and keep in mind that we all have different boundaries.
- Make sure to contribute to keeping the communication constructive.
- Talk to your manager, occupational health and safety representative or union representative if you experience that offensive behaviour happens again.

- Be aware
  - of your own and other people's boundaries.
  - that we have different boundaries and there must be room for everyone and for our differences.
- Contact your manager, occupational health and safety representative or union representative if you need advice on how to deal with specific observations or incidents.
- Read AU's guidelines for dealing with offensive behaviour and norms for daily working life. Find more information on the back.

EMPLOYEE  
What can you do?

- Say no if you experience offensive behaviour. Depending on the severity of the case:
  - Try to resolve the situation yourself by saying no, and by making the other person aware that you feel offended.
  - Contact your immediate manager or your manager's manager.
  - Contact the occupational health and safety representative and the union representative for advice and support.
- Take it seriously if you are accused of offensive behaviour:
  - If possible, talk to the person who feels offended and explain if you did not intend to offend.
  - Contact your manager, the occupational health and safety representative or the union representative.
- Please note that:
  - Your manager has a duty to act in case of a particularly serious offence.
  - The union representative and the occupational health and safety representative have a duty to maintain confidentiality.
- If needed, contact AU's psychological counselling services and the Danish Working Environment Authority's hotline in matters concerning offensive behaviour. Find more information on the back.

- If you have experienced offensive behaviour personally:
  - Talk to your manager about how you and the parties involved can move forward in the best possible way.
  - Consider what you can learn from the incident and how you can prevent it from happening again.