

# Meditation in Action

## Anti-bullying and Harassment Policy

### Policy Aim

Meditation in Action is committed to developing and maintaining an environment in which all those involved in the work of the charity, whether by direct contract with the Charity or otherwise, can work free from any form of bullying, harassment or victimisation (as defined in this policy).

Meditation in Action is committed to dealing quickly and efficiently with any incidents of bullying and harassment that arise.

Any incidents of bullying, harassment or victimisation will be regarded extremely seriously and could be grounds for disciplinary action which may include dismissal.

The vision of Meditation in Action is that no one working, volunteering or participating in events should:

- be subjected to any form of harassment, bullying or victimisation;
- feel that such harassment, bullying or victimisation has to be tolerated;
- feel that such harassment, bullying or victimisation is his/her fault.

All trustees, programme facilitators and associated personnel (e.g. volunteers, visitors, supporters) are entitled to be treated with dignity, fairness and respect. Anyone who feels that they may be victims of bullying, harassment or victimisation should pursue the issue either informally or formally by using the procedures described in this policy.

When reported, formal complaints of bullying, harassment or victimisation will be investigated and Meditation in Action will take appropriate action as quickly as possible.

Meditation in Action will, as far as possible, treat as confidential all allegations or complaints of bullying, harassment or victimisation and will investigate complaints impartially. There may be occasions where this is not possible, for example if an enquiry is needed as a result of alleged behaviour.

Meditation in Action will respect the particular sensitivity of bullying, harassment and victimisation complaints and their consequences.

## Definitions

Harassment, in general terms, is unwanted conduct which has the purpose or effect of affecting the dignity of individuals or groups of people. The Equality Act 2010 specifically prohibits three types of harassment. These are:

1. Harassment related to a “relevant protected characteristic”. The seven protected characteristics are listed below:
  - Age
  - Disability
  - Gender Reassignment
  - Race
  - Religion or Belief
  - Sex
  - Sexual Orientation
  
2. Sexual Harassment. Sexual harassment occurs when any such unwanted sexual attention creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment. Sexual harassment involves unwanted sexual attention which emphasises sexual status over that as an individual. It can be:
  - a. physical – this could range from suggestive looks to serious sexual assault,
  - b. verbal - this could include belittling or suggestive remarks, compromising invitations, aggressively foul language, unwanted demands for sex/sexual favours
  - c. visual/written - this could include displays of sexually suggestive or degrading pictures, suggestive, offensive or degrading emails, notes or text messages.
  
3. Less favourable treatment of a colleague because they submit to, or reject, sexual harassment or harassment related to sex or gender reassignment. This third type of harassment occurs when one person is treated less favourably by another because they have submitted to, or have rejected unwanted conduct of a sexual nature, or unwanted conduct which is related to sex or to gender reassignment, and the unwanted conduct then results in a violation of their dignity or the creation of an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment

Bullying may be characterised as “offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through means intended to undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient.”

Bullying can cover a wide range of behaviours and need not occur face to face. It may also occur in written communication, electronic mail and on the phone, some examples include:

- non-constructive criticism which is personal rather than related to the person’s performance
- public humiliation
- unwanted physical contact
- unwelcome remarks about a person's dress or appearance
- use of offensive language or obscene gestures
- gossip, or making defamatory comments
- the display of obscene or otherwise offensive posters or graffiti
- isolation or non-cooperation and exclusion from social activities
- intrusion by pestering, spying and stalking
- failure to safeguard confidential information
- shouting at staff
- setting impossible deadlines
- persistent criticism
- personal insults.

Bullying or harassment may be by an individual against an individual (perhaps by someone in a position of authority, or it could involve groups of people. It might involve a visitor or supporter. It may be obvious or it may be insidious. It may be persistent or may be an isolated incident. Any difficulty in defining what constitutes bullying or harassment should not deter anyone from complaining about behaviour which they feel violates their dignity, intimidates, offends, humiliates or degrades them. Nor should anyone be deterred from making a complaint because of embarrassment or fear of intimidation.

Victimisation can be defined as unfavourable treatment of a person because he or she has made a complaint about being discriminated against, harassed or bullied, because he or she intends to make a complaint about discrimination, harassment or bullying, or because he or she has or intends to act as a witness or give evidence in support of another person(s) relating to a complaint about discrimination, harassment or bullying.

Differences of attitude or culture and the misinterpretation of social signals can mean that what is perceived as harassment by one person may not seem so to another. The defining feature, however, is that the behaviour is offensive or intimidating to the recipient or a witness. It is not the intention of the perpetrator that is key in deciding if harassment or bullying has occurred, but whether the behaviour is unacceptable by

reasonable normal standards and is unwelcome to the person or people subjected to it.

## **Procedures for Reporting and Dealing with Harassment**

If you feel that you are being bullied or harassed, as a first step you should try to make it clear to the person causing the offence that such behaviour is unacceptable, unwelcome and should be stopped. This will often be sufficient to end the behaviour which is causing offence, because in some cases the person against whom the complaint is directed might be unaware that their behaviour is inappropriate or their words or actions may inadvertently have caused offence. If you need help or advice you can approach any of the trustees or programme facilitators. They will be willing to discuss in an informal way incidents or problems, however large or small they may seem. Any discussion, as far as is reasonably practicable, will be confidential and further action will not be taken without your express permission. At this stage the person you consult may go with you to speak to the alleged harasser, or go in your place, or help you to write to the alleged harasser with the specifics of your complaint. You should keep a copy of any correspondence.

### **Formal Complaint**

It is very important to note that if for any reason, you feel unable to approach one of the people listed above, or for any reason, you feel unable to approach the alleged harasser informally from the outset, or after communicating with the alleged harasser, you are not satisfied with the outcome of that approach (including that the harassment has stopped or will now stop); or the nature of the harassment is sufficiently serious as to make it inappropriate to deal with informally as a first step; know that you can take forward your complaints about bullying, harassment or victimisation using Meditation in Action's Complaint Policy.

However, the possibility that complaints may be made with mischievous or malicious intent is also recognised by Meditation in Action and will be treated as a serious disciplinary matter.