

Guide to Civility

Creating a culture of respect at Ryerson
and dealing with incivility in the workplace

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**Ryerson
University**

**Human
Resources**

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Introduction

The *Guide to Civility* provides recommended practices to promote civility in the workplace and processes to deal with incivility, including workplace harassment. It should be used in accordance and in concert with Ryerson's *Workplace Civility and Respect Policy*, which states:

"All faculty, instructors, managers and staff have a responsibility to act in good faith and be active participants in contributing to the creation and enhancement of a community culture of respect, inclusion, civility, dignity and understanding for the people with whom they work. This requires taking action to deal with incidents of incivility."

The Policy applies to incidents and complaints relating to uncivil behaviour that may impact faculty, instructors or staff, regardless of the status of individuals responsible for the incivility. The uncivil behaviour may be directed to, or by students, contractors or visitors. For definitions, please cross reference with the [Ryerson's Workplace Civility and Respect Policy](#).

Note: Workplace Sexual harassment is also covered under the Discrimination and Harassment Prevention Policy.

Through this Guide, the *Workplace Civility and Respect Policy*, the *Discrimination & Harassment Prevention Policy* and the *Sexual Violence Policy*, the University maintains a comprehensive harassment policy and program as required by the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*. This Guide is also a part of Ryerson's Environmental Health and Safety System, which provides a comprehensive framework as mandated by the *Occupational Health & Safety Act*. This includes, but is not limited to, the *Environmental Health and Safety Management System Policy*, *Workplace Civility and Respect Policy*, *Discrimination and Harassment Prevention Policy*, the *Sexual Violence Policy* and the *Workplace Violence Prevention and Response Program*.

Nothing in this policy shall be construed to impinge upon the academic freedom provisions specified in University collective agreements or policies. However, faculty, instructors and others, who have academic freedom rights, have a responsibility to exercise these rights in a civil and respectful manner.

These guidelines are intended to provide guidance on the application of legal, collective agreement and policy provisions in specific situations, and aid in decision making.

What does it mean to be civil?

Civility is about more than merely being polite, although being polite is an excellent start. Civility is about being aware of other people's feelings, and listening and seeking common ground as an initial point for dialogue when differences occur, while at the same time, recognizing that differences are enriching. Through positive, respectful communication, one person has the power to improve morale, productivity and teamwork.

How does incivility affect the workplace?

Incivility and disrespect in the workplace can be a barrier to effective communication, coaching, and performance. Incivility deals with a broad range of unacceptable behaviours which compromise and devalue the individual, and there may be severe psychological and physical impacts. For example, violence in the workplace may have origins in minor acts of incivility long before the physical violence occurs.

At a basic level, incivility can be in the form of: rude comments; insensitive actions; unintentional slights; complaining; gossip; rumors; crude jokes; profanity. As issues escalate, incivility can become more verbally aggressive and can include yelling, belittling comments, intimidation and discriminatory comments. At its most extreme, incivility can take the form of violence or threats of violence.

Incivility can be subtle or overt. It may be a single event or may involve a continuing series of incidents, and may involve the abuse of authority or position. Uncivil behaviour may be unintended or deliberately directed at another individual. In any case, the impact on that individual is what must be addressed.

Incivility, harassment and violence

Everyone that works, studies or visits Ryerson University has a right to do so free from harassment and violence.

The employer has a duty to protect employees from workplace harassment including workplace sexual harassment and will conduct an investigation into the incident and complaint that is appropriate in the circumstances.

Most, if not all, of the behaviours described as incivility above can constitute harassment under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* and the *Ontario Human Rights Code*. If behaviour is related to one or more personal characteristics that are protected under the *Human Rights Code*, the University's *Discrimination and Harassment Prevention* policy and procedures apply. Examples include comments or conduct related to religion, race, disability, sex, gender or sexual orientation.

If the behaviour is not related to one or more protected personal characteristics, the Workplace Civility and Respect Policy and this Guide apply.

Reporting

Incivility can also include violence. Workplace violence is managed under the *Workplace Violence Prevention and Response Program*, which requires all community members to report incidents of workplace violence and behaviours (including harassing behaviours) that may indicate a risk of workplace violence.

Normally, incidents and complaints of uncivil behaviour, including workplace harassment are reported to the Manager. However, in the event that the employee is not comfortable making a report or complaint to their Manager, the employee may report incidents or file a complaint of workplace harassment to a more senior Manager or Human Resources.

Guidance for promoting a civil work environment and procedures for dealing with incidents of incivility are available in this Guide. Managers should seek advice and assistance from their manager/supervisor or Human Resources Consultant.

Being proactive to create a civil work environment

Managers

A Manager with the assistance of HR will normally investigate an incident or complaint. The complaint will be provided to a more senior manager or a manager in Human Resources if the employee's manager is the subject of the incident or complaint. Examples of Managers include, Dean, Chair, Director, Supervisor, Supervising Instructor, Human Resources Manager etc.

Managers and supervisors regularly comment and offer advice on the work performance or work-related behaviour of their employees. Legitimate comment and/or advice is not a sign of disrespect. It differs from incivility or harassment in that feedback is intended to assist employees to improve work performance or the standard of their behaviour. However, civility does require that even the most critical feedback be delivered respectfully, privately and courteously.

The following tips can help managers be proactive in creating a congenial and team orientated work environment.

1. Treat your employees, peers and superiors with respect.
2. Tap your employees' hidden talents and bring them to the front.
3. It is not wise to play favorites and show bias when dealing with your employees.
4. Trust your employees to do their jobs effectively.
5. Praise in public. Pointing out an employee's mistake in public has the worst kind of demoralizing effect. On the other hand, complimenting them on a job well done in the presence of others serves to motivate them to perform better. Of course, sometimes constructive criticism and feedback, e.g. of a proposal, is the purpose of a meeting or group discussion. Managers should depersonalize the discussion.

6. Do not over react to mistakes that happen inadvertently. Instead, help employees understand the error so they do not repeat it. A loud, condescending or rude tone of voice will only make your employees tune out the message you are trying to convey.
7. Make them feel they count. Every employee likes to know that he/she is making a positive contribution. The fact that they make a difference will drive them to be more productive.
8. Constructive criticism works. If you feel that an employee has the potential to do much better at their job, take him or her aside to discuss. Sometimes, the belief that a superior has in you pushes you to achieve more.
9. Do not flaunt your authority; "You have to do it because I say so" is not the way to get employees' respect. You may get the job done but lose your employees' loyalty in the process, and may eventually lose them to another employer.

Employees

The following tips can help employees be proactive in creating a congenial and team orientated work environment.

1. Treat your co-workers, peers and superiors with respect.
2. Before acting, consider the impact of your words and actions on others.
3. When there is an issue, try talking to the other person directly and not to co-workers behind their back.
4. Don't take feedback, suggestions or constructive criticism of your work as a personal attack. See it as a positive contribution and inspiration to excel.
5. Be careful about making assumptions about other people's behaviour and intent based on your values, beliefs and customs. Specific actions that are considered polite or rude can vary dramatically by place, time and context. Differences, including but not limited to, social role, gender, social class, religion and cultural identity may all affect the perception of a given behaviour. Consequently, a behaviour that is considered perfectly acceptable by some people, and in some cultures, may be considered rude by others.
6. Acknowledge the contributions of other employees.
7. Understand your triggers or "hot buttons." Knowing what makes you angry and frustrated enables you to manage your reactions and respond in a more appropriate manner.
8. Be willing to apologize sincerely to people if you said or did something that may have offended them.
9. Use active listening when discussing issues with others.

Active listening

When applied in appropriate situations, active listening is one of the most important skills people can have in dealing with and avoiding issues of incivility. How well you listen has a major impact on your job effectiveness and on the quality of your relationships with others. There are five key elements of active listening. They all help ensure that you really hear the other person, and that the other person knows you are hearing what they are saying.

1. Pay attention. Give the speaker your undivided attention, and acknowledge the message.
2. Show that you are listening. Use your own body language and gestures to convey your attention. Recognize that non-verbal communication also "speaks" loudly.
3. Provide feedback. Our personal filters, assumptions, judgments, and beliefs can distort what we hear. As a listener, your role is to understand what is being said. This may require you to reflect what is being said and ask questions.
4. Defer judgment. Interrupting is a waste of time. It frustrates the speaker and limits full understanding of the message.
5. Respond Appropriately. Active listening is a model for respect and understanding. You are gaining information and perspective. Even if you don't agree with another person's perspective, you should respect and acknowledge their feelings.

Dealing with incivility

In order to create and maintain a civil culture and environment it is important to identify incidents of incivility, such as harassment, and to deal with these incidents quickly and appropriately. Addressing incidents of incivility as soon as possible is an important preventative measure to reduce the risk of escalating severity of behaviour and the potential for workplace violence.

The following guidelines apply to all faculty, instructors and staff, as well as other individuals subject to the policy under terms of contracts or agreements.

Courses of action

Whenever feasible, the following steps should be followed in addressing civility related concerns and complaints:

1. Peer to peer communication: The parties involved should attempt to resolve issues in the moment or as soon as possible from when the uncivil actions occurred.

2. If the parties involved cannot effectively resolve the issue on their own, the complainant(s) should notify their manager(s). If the employee's manager is the subject of the incident or complaint, the complaint should be sent to a more senior manager or a manager in Human Resources. The manager(s) will make inquiries into the issue, and will attempt to remedy the situation within a reasonable time period.
3. In the event that the matter is still not resolved, the complainant(s) may exercise their right to lodge a formal complaint with their manager(s) or Human Resources, which must be submitted in writing.

The procedures outlined below are to be used to deal with incidents of incivility, including workplace harassment involving all employees as well as community members. However, they may be superseded by applicable collective agreements or existing policies or procedures.

**If you ever have an immediate fear for your safety,
call Security and Emergency Services at “80” or 416-979-5040.**

Incivility investigation

Normally Managers with the support of Human Resources are accountable for identifying and addressing issues, such as harassment, in an appropriate manner. Managers may seek advice and assistance at any time from their supervisor, Human Resources Consultant or other appropriate stakeholders when broader consultation is required. Managers must act in a confidential manner, and involve only those who need to know, either to respond or to effectively address complaints.

Managers, in consultation with Human Resources, must determine whether or not the employee's concerns should be addressed under the *Workplace Civility and Respect Policy* and guide, or whether another policy/procedure is appropriate, e.g. *Discrimination and Harassment Prevention or the Sexual Violence policy*. If the concerns do not fall under this guide, employees must be informed regarding how the matter should/will be addressed.

Following is an outline of steps to be taken to deal with cases of incivility involving employees. Where more than one manager is involved, this is a joint responsibility.

Step 1: Intake

1. Speak with the complainant to understand his or her perspective.
2. Determine whether complaint involves the kind of behaviour that can be dealt with a simple intervention between the parties. Consider the seriousness of the allegation. If the allegation is serious, relates to prolonged behaviour, the complaint should be investigated.

3. Assess whether the matter should be investigated under another policy. Harassment allegations related to personal characteristics protected by the Ontario *Human Rights Code* should be referred to the Discrimination and Harassment Prevention Office for investigation.
4. Assess whether any behaviours that may indicate a risk of workplace violence must be reported. Managers must report such behaviours and seek assistance in managing the risk of violence from a Human Resources Consultant (regarding employees whose behaviours may indicate a risk of workplace violence) or the Student Conduct Officer (regarding students whose behaviours may indicate a risk of workplace violence).

Step 2: Making inquiries and fact finding

1. Investigate to understand complainant's perspective on the situation.
2. Investigate to understand respondent's perspective on the situation.
 - a. If the respondent is a member of a union or association, inform them they may have a steward present.
 - b. If the employee declines union representation, have them sign a waiver.
3. Understand any witness' perspective on the situation (if applicable).
4. Make notes of conversations, including specific details of what was discussed: who, what, when, where, why.
5. Assess whether you have gathered all relevant information (including emails, etc.). Before concluding the investigation, assess whether the respondent or complainant have been given fair chance to consider and give input on the other party's position and evidence.

Step 3: Review and analysis

1. Review all information gathered (including emails, etc.)
2. Seek advice from an HR Consultant on the validity of your conclusions.
3. Draw conclusions about what happened and how it happened. Draw conclusions about whether the complaint is substantiated i.e., whether the respondent was uncivil and/or whether the respondent engaged in harassment.

Step 4: Develop response

1. Review relevant collective agreement provisions and disciplinary history. Decide how the complaint will be resolved.

2. In situations involving employees from more than one area, managers from each of the areas should discuss the situation and collectively determine appropriate action.
3. Generally, if a complaint is found to be substantiated it will result in some level of corrective action involving the respondent. The type of corrective action taken will depend on all the circumstances, including what happened and how, the respondent's job responsibilities and disciplinary history and the respondent's reaction to the investigation.
4. The usual practice of the university is to deal with instances of inappropriate and unacceptable behaviour through progressive action. Therefore, you need to determine appropriate options for addressing the situation which may include but are not limited to:
 - a. Communication of standards and expectations concerning performance, conduct and/or behaviour.
 - b. Coaching
 - c. Letter of counsel (written documentation of above);
 - d. Verbal reprimand, if appropriate;
 - e. Written reprimand, if appropriate;
 - f. Suspension(s) without pay or other financial sanctions;
 - g. Termination

Seek advice from an HR Consultant in determining the appropriate action.

5. Manager's need to communicate to the respondent that if expectations are not met, progressive action will be taken up to and including dismissal. They also need to let the complainant know about the expectations placed on the respondent and action they have taken.
6. Managers will monitor the situation, and follow up with the complainant to ensure that uncivil behaviours have ceased, and to ensure there is no escalation.

In cases of gross misconduct, significant disciplinary steps may be taken without proceeding through all of the progressive steps. It is important to note that the provisions of the respondent's collective agreement and/or University policies will guide decision makers with respect to the imposition of discipline and/or sanctions.

Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the process. In accordance with the Occupational Health and Safety Act, the information obtained about an incident or complaint of workplace harassment including identifying information about any individuals involved, will not be disclosed unless the information is necessary for the purpose of investigating the incident or complaint; or for taking corrective action; or as required by law

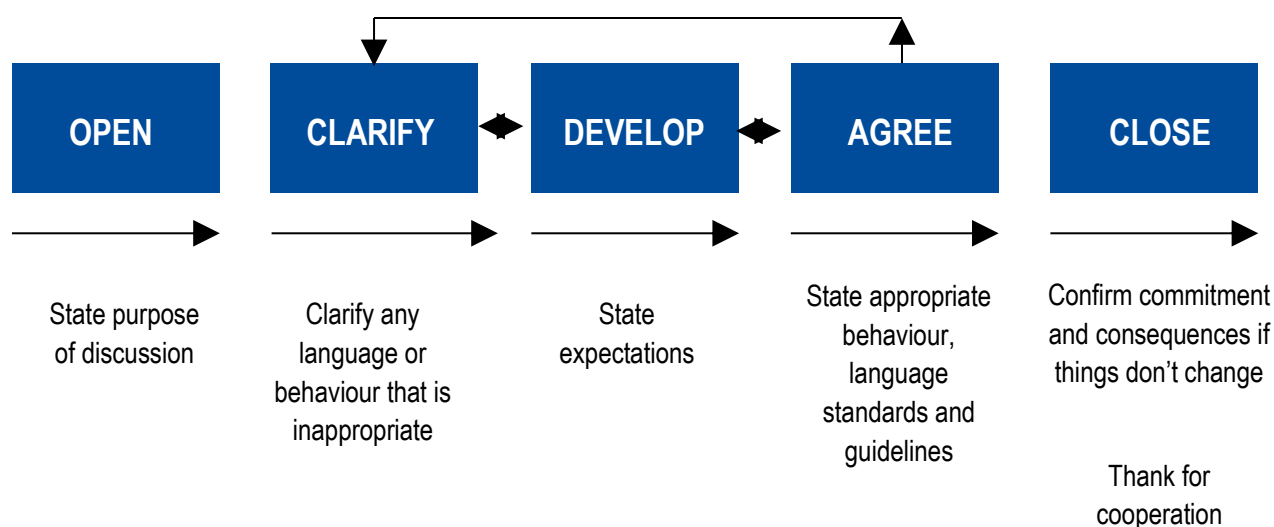
In accordance with the Occupational Health and Safety Act, employees who allege they have experienced workplace harassment and employees who are respondents will be provided with

appropriate communication in writing of the results of the investigation and any corrective action that has or will be taken.

Structuring a conversation about incivility

The Workplace Civility and Respect Policy states that the first step, whenever possible, is to approach the person whose conduct is at issue. That person may not be aware of how his/her behaviour is affecting you or others and should be given an early opportunity to change their behaviour.

Approaching someone regarding a civility issue can be difficult. Employees may seek advice and assistance at any time from their manager, Human Resources Consultant, their unions or associations. The following model outlines a basic coaching model, and can be used as a tool to help you structure a conversation about incivility in a positive and productive manner that respects both parties, and helps you to come to a resolution. We have also provided some sample statements to help get you started.



Step 1: Open - State purpose of discussion.

- I've asked for this meeting to talk about...
- I appreciate you giving me the opportunity to discuss this problem with you.
- Can I see you for a minute? I'd like to talk about...

Step 2: Clarify - Identify issues and concerns; clarify any language or behaviour that is inappropriate.

- What exactly was said/done?
- Has this behaviour happened before?
- Who else has been affected?
- Can you tell me more about what happened?
- Do you think what you said/did is consistent with our *Workplace Civility and Respect Policy*?

Step 3: Develop - Explore needs and discuss ideas; state expectations.

- How can we resolve this situation?
- Are you comfortable addressing the person directly?
- You may not think it's serious, but it's important to be respectful of each other.
- What can I do to help?
- What can you do to help?
- What would you like to see done differently?

Step 4: Agree - Discuss and agree on specific actions. State appropriate behaviour, language standards and guidelines. Sometimes, you may have to go back and re-clarify specific details or courses of action, to ensure both parties have a clear understanding.

- In the future I need you to...
- Here's what we talked about...
- Here are the next steps we agreed on, including my role...
- Regardless of ____, we need to act with civility and respect towards each other.

Step 5: Close – Confirm commitment. Confirm consequences if things don't change; thank for co-operation.

- Thanks for bringing this to my attention.
- Thanks for having this discussion with me.

Tips for talking about your own behaviour

We know that civility can often be unintentional, and there may be times when you may not have intended to offend another person. These conversations may be difficult, especially if you feel you have done nothing wrong. The following are some tips you can follow to help ensure the conversation remains positive and productive. Remember, at the end of the day, you are trying to have productive, cooperative and collaborative relationships with the people you work with.

- Try not to become defensive.
- Listen without interrupting.

- Really listen – do not plan your response until the person is finished talking.
- Reflect back what you are hearing.
- Ask clarifying questions.
- If you do not understand what they would like you to change, ask.
- Try to imagine their perspective, and how it is affecting their work and life.
- Remember, if they have come to you, it is serious to them.
- If you feel your behaviour has been misunderstood, explain.
- Try to agree on future interactions.

Incivility by others towards employees

In cases where an employee makes a formal complaint about incivility by someone who is not an employee, e.g. student, volunteer, visitor, contractor, etc., the manager of the complainant must investigate and determine appropriate action in consultation with the appropriate University representative. For example, in cases involving incivility by students, this would normally be the Student Conduct Officer. In cases involving incivility by contractors, consultation would take place with the University representative responsible for the contract.

Depending on the circumstances, appropriate actions may include banning an individual from the campus, establishing agreements where the complainant and respondent do not contact each other, or terminating a contract or volunteer assignment.

Incivility by employees towards others

In cases where a complaint of incivility is made about an employee by someone who is not an employee, e.g. student, volunteer, visitor, contractor, etc., the manager of the respondent must investigate and determine appropriate action in consultation with the appropriate University representative, if any. In cases involving incivility towards contractors, consultation would take place with the University representative responsible for the contract.

Progressive action may be taken against the employee on the same basis as outlined above for cases where the complainant is an employee.