



## Guidance Note W3

### Mental health and well-being in the workplace: Respect & Dignity policy template

Guidance for developing an organisational respect & dignity policy promoting a healthy working culture backstage

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ABTT Guidance Note W3, Respect and Dignity Policy Template, September 2025

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## Respect & Dignity at Work - Background

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Dignity is proclaimed as a common standard for all in Article 1 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Dignity at work is a simple extension of this fundamental right and should naturally exist at all times in our working lives. Showing kindness, respect and manners are natural traits taught by parents to children daily. How then, can it be so easily forgotten by some in the workplace?

Working backstage is a unique environment. We rarely deal with the same formalities that other sectors encounter, such as working in an office environment. Working in the creative arts sector often gives people licence to quote personal passion, increased dedication, and enthusiasm as explanations for discrimination. These traits can be used to excuse behaviours, ignore protocols, and absolve individuals, teams and organisations from adhering to basic working practices and legislation that protect employees (e.g. Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, Equalities Act 2010).

*“It’s ok that person X is using offensive language. They are passionate, creative and committed to getting the show up”.* Is not acceptable.

The backstage working world is a workplace. We are obliged to behave and conduct ourselves in a manner that is respectful and provides dignity for all. Dignity is carried individually within all of us, it’s only when we experience indignity that this basic common right is taken away from us. Continued exposure to indignity can lead to stress and poor mental health.

We spend on average much longer at work than people in other industries. (66% of our workforce work over the national weekly average of 37 hours).<sup>1</sup> It is well documented that people can thrive in a workplace where they are happy and healthy. Dignity can come from feeling like you’re a valued part of a team, working together on a common goal and being respected for the work you do. Working backstage has a unique team dynamic which should tick all those boxes, we should work towards a working culture that is unified in its aim to allow humanity in the workplace and cultivate respect and dignity in our behaviours and interactions at work.

Dignity at work benefits EVERYONE across ALL levels of the workforce hierarchy. It is the responsibility of EVERYONE to treat people with respect at work. It is the responsibility of the employer to adopt and promote the culture they will work towards and the line managers to set standards and make sure they are being followed.

This guidance note outlines 10 principals that we encourage you to adopt and use in your workplace. You could also use the content of this guidance to help develop your own respect & dignity policy. The aim is to produce a document where you outline the behaviour you expect each person to exhibit. So that everyone knows the behaviours expected, but more importantly what is not ok and won’t be tolerated. So that we can take back control of our creative working environment backstage and on shows and develop a better working culture for everyone.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.abtt.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/UK-BACKSTAGE-WELLBEING-SURVEY-REPORT-2021.pdf>

## Common types of indignity at work

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The Equality act 2010 defines indignity at work in 3 categories:

### **Harassment:**

Harassment is any unwanted behaviour that is made for the purpose of violating a person's dignity or to create an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual.

Harassment covers certain types of discrimination, bullying and victimisation. It includes insults, inappropriate jokes, unnecessary contact, threatening behaviour, ostracism and gossip.

### **Discrimination:**

Direct discrimination occurs when a person is treated less favourably because they possess a certain characteristic, whereas indirect discrimination occurs when a person is disadvantaged by unjustified criteria that are directed at people with certain characteristics.

The characteristics that a person can be discriminated for are age, sex, sexual orientation, disability, gender identity, race, religion, marriage and maternity.

### **Victimisation:**

Victimisation happens when an employee has made or supported a complaint and has been treated badly because of it.

Victimisation is often targeted behaviour. It can include such things as the exclusion of one particular person from work-related tasks or making an environment oppressive or penalising someone, all because they have made a complaint.

## Dignity and Respect Policy Template

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- It is in the interest of everyone at *“insert company / show name here”* to create a working environment that is dignified and respectful for all employees. In this dignity and respect policy we will outline how we expect everyone to behave at work, so that we can all work towards creating a better culture in our workplace
- This policy applies to all staff  
*“Include more details of your work place here; for example include Front of House and Back of House staff, contractors, visitors including visiting companies, participants and volunteers”*
- We will ensure that this policy is distributed and shared with everyone in our workplaces. Through regular publication and promotion we will reach all staff including new staff members in their induction  
*“Include in this section plans to share with visiting cast and crews from touring shows. If you are a touring show include that you will be sharing this with all touring venues”*
- Appropriate training and communication will take place to ensure all staff are knowledgeable and equipped to manage their own and colleagues’ adherence to this respect and dignity policy; and particularly line managers. The policy will be distributed alongside an actionable plan to communicate train and take questions from staff on how to adopt this policy. (See note on communication & dignity at work, consider the presentation, forum or meeting note to share policy info)
- We ask that everybody in the workplace adopts and adheres to the 10 commitments outlined in this policy
- Everybody has the authority to remind co-workers of this policy and to report behaviour counter to this policy if they witness, or are the object of indignity
- Reporting:  
**{insert information about how and who to report incidents to that cannot be resolved locally}**

## 10 Commitments to working with Respect & Dignity

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1. We will all consider our language, tone and delivery when communicating with one another
2. Foul or bad language directed at a person will not be tolerated
3. Bullying or harassment <sup>2</sup> will not be tolerated
4. A person's position of power does not give them the right to treat people badly or allow their language to be anything less than respectful and dignified  
*Those in positions of authority have a right and responsibility to discharge managerial duties. In doing so they may need to adopt a firm or assertive style, but they should take care not to demean, devalue, or intimidate colleagues*
5. It is not always possible to assume the emotional robustness of a colleague, everyone has a different frame of reference. As such it is best to side with caution. If you think it could offend or be perceived as rude don't say it
6. Everyone will work towards creating a working culture that allows humanity, kindness & consideration towards others
7. We ask everyone to treat each other with respect, dignity, and inclusion
8. If we witness anyone not adhering to these common goals, we will either inform a person of responsibility or politely challenge the person and remind them that we are working to the guidelines of this policy. (When challenging a colleague, we will do this in a respectful and dignified way, being mindful not to upset or cause distress to the person)  
*Refer to reporting signposting if you feel you need additional support in dealing with a situation*
9. We will always remember at any stage of the production process that we are in a place of work. As such we will conduct ourselves mindfully and respectfully of the people we are working with.
10. We are all human and at times may not adhere to the respect & dignity policy. We will be open to listening when at times we haven't been honouring this and will do all we can to apologise, correct and continue working to these common goals.

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<sup>2</sup> Bullying and harassment is behaviour that makes someone feel intimidated or offended. Harassment is unlawful under the Equality Act 2010. [gov.uk workplace bullying & harassment](https://www.gov.uk/workplace-bullying-and-harassment)

01

We will all **consider our language, tone and delivery** when communicating with one another

02

**Foul or bad language** directed at a person **will not be tolerated**

03

**Bullying or harassment will not be tolerated**

04

Those in **positions of authority** have a right and responsibility to discharge managerial duties. In doing so they may need to adopt a firm or assertive style, but they should take care **not to demean, devalue, or intimidate colleagues**

05

It is not always possible to assume the emotional robustness of a colleague, **everyone has a different frame of reference**. As such it is best to side with caution. **If you think it could offend or be perceived as rude don't say it**

06

Everyone will work towards creating a working culture that allows **humanity, kindness & consideration towards others**

07

We ask everyone to **treat each other with respect, dignity, and inclusion**

08

If we witness anyone not adhering to these common goals, we will either **inform a person of responsibility or politely challenge the person and remind them that we are working to the guidelines of this policy**. (When challenging a colleague, we will do this in a respectful and dignified way, being mindful not to upset or cause distress to the person) **Refer to reporting signposting if you feel you need additional support in dealing with a situation**

09

We will always remember at any stage of the production process that **we are in a place of work**. As such we will **conduct ourselves mindfully and respectfully** of the people we are working with.

10

**We are all human** and at times may not adhere to the respect & dignity policy. We will be open to listening when at times we haven't been honouring this and will do all we can to apologise, correct and continue working to these common goals.

# TEN

## COMMITMENTS TO WORKING WITH

# Respect & Dignity



The ABTT in association with  
RB Health and Safety Solutions

## Bystander intervention- Witnesses to Bullying

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### Support and advice on how to be proactive when witnessing bullying and harassment

As backstage workers our working world is unique and very different from the more traditional workplaces. We work long and very different hours from the normal in a creative environment with creative people. This environment can often give licence to changed approaches to how we act or behave at work. That being said, backstage in the entertainment industry is still a place of work, as such we should still adhere to communicating and behaving in a manner that is fit for a workplace.

In the 2021 UK Backstage Mental Health Evaluation (n=1234) <sup>1</sup> we gained valuable insights that 1 in 3 participants felt that bullying was a factor for their poor mental health. As such this W3 guidance note was produced in response. This additional section is a supplement to support with point 8 in the 10 commitments to working with respect and dignity:

“If we witness anyone not adhering to these common goals, we will either inform a person of responsibility or politely challenge the person and remind them that we are working to the guidelines of this policy”

The first step towards creating a safer more inclusive space for everyone to work backstage is working on a cultural change towards respect and dignity at work. A vital part of that cultural change is “teamwork”. Working as a community to challenge and call out bad behaviour. It’s not always easy to help someone experiencing bullying, especially when they are being bullied by someone in a position of authority (such as a director) or someone who has special privileges (such as a celebrity). Outlined below in the attached infographic introducing the 5 Ds to bystanders’ intervention. Offering a variety of different options on what we can do if we witness bad behaviour bullying or harassment, how we can support our colleagues and still be a part of the cultural change toward respect and dignity at work, even if it’s not aimed at us.

The 5 D’s of bystander’s intervention is taken from the Right to Be’s website with their consent. They also offer [free public training](#).

Below are some other links you may find useful to support this resource:

- [Key Takeaways and Questions on our 5Ds Animated Series](#)
- [Guide to the 5D's of Bystander Intervention](#)
- [I've Got Your Back: The Indispensable Guide to Stopping Harassment When You See It](#) by Emily May and Jorge Arteaga

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.abtt.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/UK-BACKSTAGE-WELLBEING-SURVEY-REPORT-2021.pdf>



# WITNESS TO BULLYING

The 5D's are based on the bystanders intervention from The Right to Be

## 01 DISTRACT

**Take an indirect approach to diffuse the situation**

- Ask a bully a question
- Call the bully over to an area away from the person directly impacted
- Start a conversation with the person directly impacted
- Create an excuse to remove the person directly impacted from the situation

## 02 DELEGATE

**You don't have to do this alone**

- Identify others who can more effectively intervene
- Identify other who can help you intervene, such as another bystander
- Maybe talk to a colleague, production manager, or company stage manager?

## 03 DELAY

**It may not be possible for you to intervene at the time**

- Check in afterwards with the person directly impacted
- Let them know you saw what happened
- Ask if you can support in anyway

## 04 DIRECT

**If safe, address the disrespectful behaviour when it happened**

- Tell the bully you are not comfortable with their behaviour and it's not acceptable
- Refer and highlight the ABTT's 10 principals of respect & dignity at work
- Speak in a non-judgemental, non-argumentative tone
- Exercise empathy – it can be effective
- Be aware that direct intervention can be dangerous, especially if alcohol or drugs are involved

## 05 DOCUMENT

**Keep a record of the situation**

- Take pictures on your phone
- Take notes of what you see happening and witness
- Make a list of potential witnesses
- Use any known reporting structures to report the incident



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