

SITUATIONS OF CONFLICT, INCIVILITY, VIOLENCE, OR HARASSMENT

The Role of the Person Providing Assistance—Personal Reflection Tool



The role of the person providing assistance

Union representatives may be called on to play different roles with those involved in situations of conflict, incivility, violence, or harassment. Union representatives may need to intervene

- with one of the parties in an interpersonal conflict;
- with an individual who is experiencing a situation of incivility, violence, or harassment;
- with the person being reported for such a situation; or
- with a witness to such a situation.

The role of the person providing assistance from the union is based on one basic principle that applies to everyone involved: neutrality. This means that the person providing assistance

- does not take sides;
- refers those involved to resources that or individuals who can help them;
- ensures that the rights of all those directly involved (the person reporting the situation and the person being reported) are preserved; and
- ensures that the physical and psychological well-being of those involved is preserved.

In short, the person providing assistance from the union conducts the initial meeting with individuals and guides them through the process in which they are involved.

In situations that involve two members of the same union, we strongly recommend, to maintain objectivity and neutrality, that the person reporting the situation and the person being reported not receive assistance from the same union representative.

It is important, when a person approaches the union about a situation of conflict, incivility, violence, or harassment, that the first meeting is as positive as possible and that it contributes to fostering a climate of trust. The next sections will address appropriate and recommended behaviour.



Required knowledge

For those providing assistance to be able to carry out their roles in the best way possible, they must be able to

- know and understand the violence and harassment prevention policy, as well as the procedures implemented by the employer;
- know and understand the provisions of the Act respecting labour standards or those of the *Canada Labour Code* on psychological and sexual harassment at work; and
- know and understand the differences between the concepts of interpersonal conflict, violence, harassment, incivility, and the enforcement of management rights.



Appropriate expertise

You must behave appropriately and act in a certain way while taking into account the situation being reported to you.

- Greet those involved in a caring, compassionate, and reassuring manner, by showing that you recognize the emotional nature of the situation, which will favour the building of trust in you.
- Plan for a meeting location that is out of sight and out of the range of prying ears, which will allow for some privacy and encourage those involved to tell their story in complete confidence.
- Use the available information sheets based on what was experienced. These sheets can be useful for those involved in terms of what will be proposed to them as the next steps.
- Provide straight answers to questions; tell the truth in the simplest way possible.
- If the person is a victim of a situation of violence or harassment at work, make sure that you meet the person's safety needs in the short term.
- If the person is a witness of a situation that seems to involve violence or harassment at work and the person is hesitating to take the next step, remind the person of the “duty” to report what is unacceptable and tell the person that you will need to contact the person who is experiencing the situation, given that you have now been informed of a potential situation of violence or harassment and that the union must contribute to preventing and putting a stop to such situations.
- If the person is the subject of a complaint or allegation of violence or harassment, provide the person with the necessary support, without judgment, so that the person can build trust in you and in the union.

In all circumstances, keep your personal opinions to yourself, because they can adversely affect you or undermine the trust those involved have in you and in the union.

**Interpersonal skills**

Listen more than you speak and remind yourself that the person you are meeting with needs to confide in someone and be heard.

- Do not make arguments; it is too early for that.
- Be empathetic and welcoming; do not judge.
- Stay calm in order to contribute to reassuring the person being met with.
- Do not forget to remain neutral and do not take sides. You can reassure the person, show that you understand the person's perspective, and listen and ask questions without taking sides.
- Keep in mind that the problematic situation may have various origins and that it may not constitute workplace violence or harassment.