



Conflict situations require measures appropriate to their particular circumstances. Some situations will defy simple solutions by the persons involved. The Advisor on Harassment is an impartial person available to help manage the resolution of these more difficult situations. Prior to taking formal steps, the Advisor will seek to resolve all conflicts promptly and in a non-confrontational way, while respecting the privacy of the people involved as much as possible.

RESOLVING A CONFLICT INFORMALLY: THE CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROCESS

The conflict resolution process is depicted in the annexed chart. The Department encourages you to make an effort to resolve harassment or conflict situations using this process. Whether you feel you have been harassed or someone has found your behaviour offensive, you may be able to settle the problem and prevent it from escalating. In doing so, it is important to respect the feelings and privacy of everyone involved. Conflict can increase and become more difficult to resolve informally when people believe they are being gossiped about or feel their privacy has been unfairly invaded. If all else fails, you can lodge a formal complaint.

If you feel you have been harassed:

Talk to the person who is causing you problems. Try explaining to that person that the behaviour is making you uncomfortable and why. He or she may not be aware of the impact of the behaviour, and once it is pointed out may see the need to stop his or her offensive or inappropriate behaviour. On the other hand, you could discover that you simply misread the behaviour. In this case, a frank talk can help clear the air. Using humour, common sense and good judgment will also help.

Write a letter. If you feel you cannot speak to the person concerned, try writing a letter. In the letter, clearly and in detail, outline the behaviour you want stopped. Describe your feelings about the incidents. And state what you want to happen next—for example, if you just want the behaviour to stop, state that. A letter that is descriptive, rather than judgmental, is more likely to get results. You could also consider sending such a letter if you do not get results after speaking to the person about his or her behaviour.

Keep records. It can greatly assist the process if both parties keep a record of incidents and how they were handled. Document dates and times, especially if there has been a pattern of conflict. Keep copies of letters and deliver them in person, through a co-worker, or by registered mail (remember to keep the receipt). This should not be viewed as “setting someone up” but rather as a legitimate way to ensure that your recollection of events is accurate over time.

If someone finds your behaviour offensive:

Stop the behaviour that the person finds offensive. This may mean toning down your voice, not swearing or not telling your favourite jokes around that person. You may feel a little unnatural, but good workplace relationships require accommodation from everyone.

Apologize. Even if you think there was a misunderstanding, it can help to apologize and then explain your point of view. Studies have shown that 90 per cent of harassment complaints are resolved through an apology. Even if the “victim” takes the complaint further, the fact that you apologized shows that you are trying to understand the other person’s position and to open up the lines of communication. Make it clear that your apology is a goodwill gesture and should not be mistaken for an admission of guilt.