

Responding to Subtle and Overt ACTS OF INCIVILITY

Subtle and overt acts of incivility in the workplace are typically verbal, behavioral, or environmental actions (intentional or unintentional) that undermine respect and dignity. These actions may divide, single out, dismiss, or minimize someone, and can include expressions of bias, stereotyping, exclusion, or hostility. Anyone can experience an act of incivility.

TYPES OF INCIVILITY

VERBAL: Comments, questions, jokes, or statements that diminish, stereotype, exclude, or invalidate a person or group. Ex.: Interrupting or talking over someone repeatedly in meetings.

BEHAVIORAL: Actions or patterns of behavior that signal disrespect, exclusion, or differential treatment. Ex.: Using body language (eye rolling, sighing, turning away) to show dismissal or contempt.

ENVIRONMENTAL: Workplace norms, assumptions, or physical and social cues that make individuals or groups feel invisible, devalued, or unwelcome. Example: Workplace traditions or communication styles that leave some employees feeling like outsiders.

WHAT TO DO

- To respond to an act of incivility in the moment, see Possible Responses below.
- Speak to your supervisor about the incident(s) and ask for support. If you do not feel comfortable speaking to your supervisor, please reach out to your HR Generalist.
- Prepare an incident log. Now that you know what acts of incivility are, it will be easier to keep track of the incidents and have documentation so you can communicate specific concerns to your supervisor or HR Generalist if needed.



If it is brought to your attention that you were, intentionally or unintentionally, part of an act of incivility, do this: resist feeling defensive, apologize, say thank you, be curious about what you can learn, and consider the feelings and impact on the other person. It is important to be empathetic, compassionate, and validating when an individual experiences an act of incivility or if you witness one. We all experience situations differently, so don't assume your experience is the same as everyone else's. Be open to accepting someone's experience as their own.

WHEN RESPONDING to an act of incivility, consider these possibilities:

RESTATE OR PARAPHRASE

"I think I heard you saying _____ (paraphrase their comments). How accurate is that?"

ASK FOR CLARIFICATION/MORE INFORMATION

"Could you say more about what you mean by that?" or "How have you come to think that?"

SEPARATE INTENT FROM IMPACT

"I know you didn't realize this, but when you _____ (comment or behavior), it was hurtful/offensive because _____."

SHARE YOUR OWN PROCESS

"I noticed that you _____ (comment or behavior). I used to do/say that too, but then I learned _____."

PRETEND YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND

"I don't get it. Why is that funny?" As people try to explain their comments, they often realize how silly they sound.

EXPRESS YOUR FEELINGS

"When you _____ (comment or behavior), I felt _____ (feeling) and I would like you to _____."

USE HUMOR

Exaggerate comment, use gentle sarcasm. "She plays like a girl? You mean she plays like Serena Williams?"

PROMOTE EMPATHY

Ask how they would feel if someone said something like that about their group, friend, partner, child, or loved one.