

I Am Being Accused of Harassment / Discrimination . . . What Can I do?

Take it Seriously

If someone tells you that your actions or comments are unwanted, offensive, harassing or discriminatory, pay attention. Intent to discriminate or harass is not a requirement for a finding of harassment/discrimination. It is the impact or effect that is important.

Listen & Keep Calm

If someone approaches you about your behaviour, just remain calm and listen to them. It may be upsetting to be accused of harassment/discrimination, but anger will only complicate this situation. Listen to what the person accusing has to say about your behavior and remain serious. Remember it is not an easy conversation for either party. Let the individual speak their mind and consider what they are saying before you respond.

Ask yourself: How is the other person feeling? What did I do that caused that feeling? Could I have done something differently?

Respond

If you believe the allegations against you could be true, you may wish to acknowledge and apologize for the behaviour whether the behaviour is intentional or not.

A thoughtful and genuine apology includes . . .

Part 1: Share how you feel

- Be genuine and sincere in what you say. Elaborate on your remorse.

Part 2: Admit your mistake AND the negative impact it had

- Be specific. Speak specifically about what you did that was wrong, why it was offensive and recognize the negative impact of such behaviour.

Part 3: Make things Right

- Outline the steps you have taken / or will take to change behaviour. Ask if there is anything you can do to help repair the harm done to that individual specifically. Follow-through with steps stated.

A thoughtful and genuine apology does not include rational for your behaviours.

Whether, you believe the allegations to be true or not, you should state the behavior will not continue and takes appropriate steps to ensure this. I.e. connect with the [Employee Family Assistance Program](#) or [Human Rights & Equity Services](#) for supports and/or coaching if needed

Embrace change

Even if the harassment claims stem from a misunderstanding, chances are you'll need to adjust your behaviour and change your style of communication to avoid a similar situation in the future. Stay open to all the constructive feedback you receive and be prepared to change your behaviour at the workplace.

Don't Confront the Individual who made the Complaint

If concerns are brought forward from a third party, never confront the individual who laid the complaint. Such behaviour is considered harassment under the [personal harassment policy](#) and can cause further harm to all parties involved. It may even strengthen allegations made against you.

Make sure to only discuss the case with appropriate supports (these can be outlined in consultation with a HRES advisor). Gossip between colleagues might even spur more allegations against you.

Avoid Retaliation

Retaliation is prohibited by Dalhousie University's [Personal Harassment Policy](#) and is considered harassment under this policy

Cooperate

If a formal complaint has been filed, talk to your supervisor and [Human Rights and Equity Services](#) immediately. You will have the opportunity to discuss with a Human Rights and Equity Services Advisor how the investigation will proceed and what is needed from you each step of the way. You must cooperate fully whether the allegations are false or true. All parties are able to bring an advocate/support to all meetings.

Review your Rights and Seek Advice

You may contact [Human Rights and Equity Services](#) for information and / or advice. HRES can also help refer you to the appropriate advocacy service options available i.e. (Student) [DSAS](#), [Ombudsperson](#), [Student Services](#), (Staff) [Union Representation](#).

Respondents have the right:

- To receive fair treatment.
- To be informed of the formal complaint.
- To respond to the complaint verbally or in writing.
- If there is an investigation you will have a chance to tell your side of the story.
- To have a person of their choice accompany them during the process.
- To consult with HRES as well as other support/advocacy services on campus.
- To be provided with an opportunity to respond to the information provided by a witness.