



COMPLAINT HANDLING GUIDELINES

1. Meet with the individual and thank them for coming to you.

Let them know that you take the matter seriously.

- **Provide the person with information about [University Policy 1025: Policy on Harassment, Discrimination, and Sexual Assault](#) and contact information for the Office for Equity and Accessibility.**
 - Let him/her know where to pursue a formal complaint, even if the person says he/she does not wish to do so. Inform the individual that you're neither encouraging or discouraging a formal complaint, but that you want the person to have the information.
- **Explain that you will keep the matter private, but do not promise confidentiality, even if the person requests it. Tell the person that if any information needs to be shared, it will be on a need-to-know basis only.**
 - Be sure to respect your promise. While it is important to respect the privacy of the individuals involved, it may not be possible to keep certain information confidential and appropriately address the matter.
- **Guard against retaliation.**
 - Assure the complainant that retaliation is prohibited under the policy and warn the respondent of this same principle. Neither party should be penalized or discouraged from using any of the resources available to them, such as:
 - ▶ Bringing a complaint or grievance
 - ▶ Consulting with other offices
 - ▶ Contacting the police
 - ▶ Consulting a lawyer or filing a lawsuit

2. Contact the Office for Equity and Accessibility to discuss the matter.

To help ensure consistent handling of harassment and discrimination matters throughout the university, you should contact the Office for Equity and Accessibility immediately with harassment and discrimination concerns, even for cases that may seem trivial.

You should not offer any comments, guesses, or opinions about possible outcomes or on the subject of the complaint.

Administrators, supervisors, and human resources staff should err on the side of safety, and contact the Office for Equity and Accessibility to discuss the situation even if they are not sure whether a situation is really harassment or discrimination. The Office for Equity and Accessibility is available to help determine what response is necessary for a given situation and what disposition is consistent with institutional practice.

If at all possible, people who are handling these situations should use the phone or schedule an in person meeting. It is best to avoid discussing confidential and or sensitive matters via email.

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3. **Doing nothing is always the wrong thing, and time is of the essence.**

Treat all complaints seriously, no matter how improbable or trivial an allegation may seem to be, or what motivation may have prompted the claim.

4. **Actively protect the safety and well-being of both parties.**

As a rule, parties on all sides experience great distress in harassment matters. It is advisable routinely to provide both parties with information about Virginia Tech support services for employees and students.

■ **Employee resources**

- [Employee Assistance Program](#), available to employees who have health insurance plans through Virginia Tech
- [Women's Center at Virginia Tech](#)

■ **Student resources**

- [Cook Counseling Center](#)
- [Women's Center at Virginia Tech](#)

If the situation might involve a criminal matter such as an assault or a hate crime, be sure to advise either party that he or she has a right to contact [Virginia Tech Police Department](#) or local police agencies. If you are a responsible employee, and the matter is covered under Title IX, report it to the Title IX coordinator. If you are a campus security authority and there is a potential Clery-reportable crime, report it to the Virginia Tech Police Department. Additionally, if there are safety concerns outside of Title IX or the Clery Act, take the initiative to speak to someone with the Virginia Tech Police Department or the Office for Equity and Accessibility.

Consult with the [Department of Human Resources](#) about the appropriateness of using measures such as leave for either or both parties if doing so might be indicated.

Both parties should be given information about [available resources](#), including a copy of [University Policy 1025: Policy on Harassment, Discrimination, and Sexual Assault](#).

5. **Carefully document all actions and communications.**

Keep detailed documentation, taking careful notes about communications and other events.

6. **Corrective action must be appropriate.**

The possible range of resolutions is broad, and includes actions such as:

- ▶ Coaching/support of subordinates in addressing the behavior themselves
- ▶ General education or training
- ▶ Mediation, if appropriate
- ▶ Reprimand
- ▶ Discipline, up to and including termination