

Suffolk Guild of Ringers Policy on Bullying and Harassment

All ringers should be treated with dignity and respect. Bullying and harassment of any kind are in no-one's interest and should not be tolerated in the tower. This policy applies to all officers and members.

Ringers, especially new ringers, need to understand that ringing takes place in an environment where noise levels require a raised voice for instructions to be understood, and where instructions need to be followed quickly to maintain standards of ringing or safety. Shouted instructions will not therefore usually be indications of bullying or harassment, even if frequent and directed at one individual, but they can be. Legitimate, constructive and fair criticism of a ringer's performance or behaviour is not usually of itself bullying, but it can be.

Why do we need to take action?

Bullying and harassment are not only unacceptable on moral grounds but may, if unchecked or badly handled, create serious problems:

Poor morale and poor band relations;
Loss of respect for the tower captain;
Poor striking;
Trippiness;
Absence;
Resignations;
Damage to the band's reputation.

What are Bullying and Harassment?

Harassment, in general terms is unwanted conduct affecting the dignity of ringers in the tower, where actions or comments are viewed as demeaning and unacceptable to the recipient.

It may be related to age, gender, race, disability, religion, belief, sexuality, nationality or any personal characteristic of the individual, and may be persistent or an isolated incident.

Bullying is offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through means intended to undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient.

Bullying or harassment may be by an individual against an individual or involve groups of people. It may be obvious or it may be insidious. It may be face to face or in written communications, emails, or by phone. Whatever form it takes, it is unwarranted and unwelcome to the individual. It may take place in private or in public.

Examples of bullying/harassing behaviour include:

- spreading malicious rumours, or insulting someone by word or behaviour (particularly on the grounds of race, sex, age, disability, sexual orientation and religion or belief);
- copying emails that are critical about someone to others who do not need to know;
- ridiculing or demeaning someone - picking on them or setting them up to fail;
- exclusion or victimisation;
- unfair treatment;
- overbearing supervision or other misuse of power or position;
- unwelcome sexual advances - touching, standing too close, the display of offensive materials;

- deliberately undermining a ringer by constant criticism;
- preventing individuals progressing by intentionally blocking ringing opportunities.

How can bullying and harassment be recognised?

Behaviour that is considered bullying by one person may be considered firm management by another. Most people will agree on extreme cases of bullying and harassment but it is sometimes the “grey” areas that cause most problems.

Bullying and harassment can often be hard to recognise – they may not be obvious to others, and may be insidious. The recipient may think “perhaps this is normal behaviour for this tower”. They may be anxious that others will consider them weak if they find the actions of others intimidating. They may be accused of “overreacting” and worry that they won’t be believed if they do report incidents.

People being bullied or harassed may sometimes appear to overreact to something that seems relatively trivial but which may be the “last straw” following a series of incidents. There is often fear of retribution if they make a complaint. Other ringers may be reluctant to come forward as witnesses, as they too may fear the consequences to themselves. They may be so relieved not to be the target of the bully that they collude with the bully as a way of avoiding attention.

Bullying and harassment makes someone feel anxious and humiliated. Feelings of anger and frustration at being unable to cope may be triggered. Some people may try to retaliate in some way. Others may become frightened and demotivated. Stress, loss of self confidence and self-esteem caused by harassment or bullying can lead to illness, absence from the tower, and even resignation. Almost always ringing performance is affected and relations in the tower suffer.

Procedure

Complaints of bullying and/or harassment, or information from other ringers relating to such complaints, must be dealt with fairly and confidentially and sensitively.

Complaints must be taken seriously and investigated promptly, objectively and independently. Decisions can then be made as to what action needs to be taken.

See the accompanying explanatory notes for the procedure for raising matters of concern.

If appropriate, the matter will be dealt with informally; sometimes people are not aware that their behaviour is unwelcome and an informal discussion can lead to greater understanding and an agreement that the behaviour will cease.

More serious cases of bullying or harassment may need the involvement of the Priest in Charge, if it takes place in a church context, or a similar person of authority in other cases. The Guild Chairman should be informed as to what is taking place.

Counselling or mediation may be considered, particularly where investigation shows no cause for action, or where it may be useful to help resolve the issue or help support the person accused as well as the complainant.

No action should be taken against a ringer lodging a complaint that proves to be unfounded unless there is evidence of malicious intent. If a ringer knowingly or maliciously makes an untrue allegation, that may constitute a failure to conform to the Objects and Rules of the Guild, rendering the member liable to expulsion.