Policy – Bullying

Introduction

Whittlesea U3A Inc. regards the dignity and autonomy of all people as a core value of the organisation. Bullying behaviour is based on the misuse of power in human relationships, and negates the dignity and autonomy of its victims.

Whittlesea U3A Inc. is fully committed to eliminating, as far as is possible, all forms of bullying in its operating environment and relationships, through a culture of openness, support, and accountability

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to outline Whittlesea U3A Inc.'s position on bullying and to document the process for responding to a report of bullying.

Policy

1. This policy deals with repeated unreasonable behaviour that constitutes bullying.
2. Unreasonable behaviour is behaviour that is offensive, humiliating, intimidating, degrading or threatening. It includes, but is not limited to:
    - verbal abuse
    - excluding or isolating another person/s
    - humiliation through sarcasm, or belittling someone's opinions
    - constant criticism or insults
    - spreading misinformation or malicious rumours
    - displaying written or pictorial material which may degrade or offend
    - deliberately setting work routines or procedures to inconvenience certain persons
    - disproportionate assignment of unpleasant or meaningless work to certain persons.
3. Bullying is *repeated*, unreasonable behaviour directed towards a person or group of persons. It includes behaviour that could be expected to intimidate, offend, degrade, humiliate, undermine or threaten.
4. Bullying can occur between two or more members and/or volunteers.
5. Bullying that directly inflicts physical pain or harm amounts to assault and will not be dealt with under this policy (*refer to clause 5 Procedure*).
6. There will be occasional differences of opinion, conflicts and problems. Only when the treatment of another person is repeated, unreasonable, offensive or harmful does bullying exist.
7. Formerly accepted behaviour may be found to be bullying when it continues after a request from the complainant for the behaviour to stop, or at the point it becomes intimidating, offensive or humiliating.
8. Whittlesea U3A Inc. has a duty of care to provide a safe environment and accepts and acts on its duty of care. Any allegations of bullying that are reported to the Committee of Management will be investigated promptly, thoroughly, and fairly.
9. Complaints will be treated in confidence, and where confidentiality cannot be guaranteed this will be clearly indicated to the complainant.
10. All parties will be treated with respect.

11. The person against whom the allegation is made has the right to natural justice – that is, the right to know what is alleged against them, the right to put their case in reply, and the right for any decision to be made by an impartial decision-maker.

Procedures

1. A person who believes that he/she is the subject of bullying should take firm, positive and prompt action. Where appropriate, the perceived bully/bullies should be made aware that their behaviour is offensive, unwelcome and unacceptable, and that it needs to stop immediately.
2. Where the behaviour continues, or the person who feels bullied feels unable to speak directly to the perceived bully, he/she should report the matter to Whittlesea U3A Inc.'s Secretary who will notify the President immediately.
3. The President or his/her delegate, will provide support to the complainant and ascertain the nature of the complaint and the wishes of the complainant. The complainant may opt to have the matter dealt with by formal investigation or by less formal means.
4. The complaint will be handled in accordance with Whittlesea U3A Inc.'s *Grievance Policy.*
5. Some forms of severe bullying, for example, physical attack or obscene phone calls, may constitute criminal conduct. While Whittlesea U3A Inc. is committed to treat most complaints about bullying at an organisational level as far as is possible, potentially criminal conduct is not suited to internal resolution and should be handled by the criminal justice system. Complainants will be advised of the option of police support or intervention. It is not the obligation or duty of Whittlesea U3A Inc. to report such matters to Victoria Police on behalf of the complainant.

Responsibilities

1. Whittlesea U3A Inc.'s Committee of Management is responsible for:
    - developing, adopting, implementing and publishing this policy
    - ensuring that all members, volunteers and employees are aware of this policy and of their obligations in relation to contributing to a U3A environment that discourages harassment and victimisation and set an example by their own behaviour
    - treating all complaints seriously and confidentially
    - taking immediate and appropriate corrective action if they become aware of any offensive action
    - investigating complaints about bullying
    - monitoring and revising this policy as and when the need arises
2. It is the responsibility of Whittlesea U3A Inc.'s Committee of Management to ensure that:
    - they understand and are committed to the right of all members and volunteers to attend U3A activities and venues without fear of being bullied in any way
    - all reasonable steps are taken to eliminate bullying
    - all members and volunteers are made aware of their obligations and responsibilities to foster a U3A environment that is free from bullying
    - they foster an environment that discourages bullying, and set an example by their own conduct
    - all complaints are treated promptly, seriously and confidentially
    - they are, as far as is practicable, aware of whether bullying is occurring, whether complaints are received or not, relying on such indices as:
        - sudden increases in absenteeism
        - sudden deterioration in participation
        - behavioural changes such as depression
    - they take corrective action when they become aware of any offensive action
    - guidance and education is provided subsequent to decisions relating to bullying
    - ongoing support and guidance is provided in relation to the prevention of bullying

3. It is the responsibility of all members and volunteers to ensure that:
    - they understand and are committed to the rights and entitlements of all members and volunteers to attend U3A premises and activities without fear of bullying
    - they help foster an environment that discourages bullying.
4. Whittlesea U3A Inc.'s Secretary is responsible for
    - receiving and responding to enquiries about this policy
    - receiving complaints about bullying and for bringing a complaint to the immediate attention of the President.
5. Whittlesea U3A Inc.'s President, or his/her delegate, is responsible for interviewing and supporting a complainant.
6. Whittlesea U3A Inc.'s President is responsible for ensuring that a bullying complaint is handled in accordance with Whittlesea U3A Inc.'s *Grievance Policy*

Authorisation

This Policy was reviewed by the Committee of Management of Whittlesea U3A Inc., and minuted as such, on the 11th of May 2026.

This policy will be published by the Committee of Management of Whittlesea U3A Inc. on its website within 4 weeks of the date of this authorisation.

Policy Review

This Policy will be reviewed at least annually or when circumstances change.

Related Policies

- *Whittlesea U3A Inc. Code of Conduct Policy*
- *Whittlesea U3A Inc. Grievance Policy*
- *Whittlesea U3A Inc. Discrimination Policy*
- *Whittlesea U3A Inc. Sexual Harassment Policy*