

## METKA'S PRINCIPLES OF SAFER SPACE

### Introduction

The Principles of Safer Space provide guidance on practical steps to prevent discrimination, harassment and inappropriate behaviour. The Principles list choices that each of us must make to ensure safe participation for all.

The experience of safety is subjective and needs are individual. Designating a space as safer does not make it safe, but requires active engagement from all participants. Harassment is usually identified by the fact that it creates an atmosphere that is in some way degrading, humiliating, threatening, hostile or offensive. Everyone experiences harassment differently and there is no single way to define a person's experience. For example, one person may find a joke harmless and funny, while another may find it offensive to themselves or others. Therefore, the experiences and feelings of others should not be questioned.

Finnish alcohol culture is also sometimes visible in the context of METKA's events and activities. It can be oppressive, especially for people who do not drink alcohol. Decisions about alcohol consumption are always a personal choice and should not be questioned. However, personal choices about alcohol use should be examined, as excesses are more likely to occur under the influence of alcohol. Intoxication is not a reason for bad behaviour and does not remove the responsibility of the perpetrator in harassment situations.

Harassment may be more difficult to identify when it is not blatant. Harassment caused by unpleasant feelings and awareness of the situation may surface even after a long period of time. Long after the harassment has occurred. Those feelings and experiences are still relevant. If you are not sure whether the situation was inappropriate, or whether your own discomfort was justified, it is worth discussing it with the anti-harassment contact person.

METKA has two anti-harassment contact persons and all METKA events always have designated anti-harassment contact persons. The student unions cooperating with METKA also commit to organize trained harassment contact persons for their events.

Participants in METKA activities must commit to the principles of safer space.

### Principles of a safer space

#### *Address the issue*

- There are no such things as the obvious. Say the instructions out loud together so that everyone knows the same things.
- If you are unsure, ask. Answer other people's questions properly.

#### *Be open*

- Approach new subjects and people with an open mind, taking every encounter and situation as an opportunity to learn and develop.
- Avoid making assumptions about, for example, sexuality, gender, nationality, ethnicity, religion, values, socio-economic background, health or ability. We do not know the backgrounds of others.

- If you assume, assume diversity. We all have preconceptions and assumptions that we should try to identify in ourselves.

### **Respect**

- Respect others' boundaries - physical, mental and social. Consider your own boundaries too.
- Respect everyone's right to self-determination.
- Do not mock, ridicule, belittle, push aside or embarrass anyone by your words, behaviour or actions.
- Refrain from criticism, gossip and stereotyping.
- Give others space and the opportunity to participate in the discussion: do not bully others' opinions. Speak in a way that promotes equality.
- Respect the privacy of others and handle sensitive topics with respect.
- Be respectful on social media too.
- Don't touch without permission. Don't comment on other people's bodies or appearance. Don't interrupt by staring. Ask for permission to film or record and to publish recordings.

### **Take action if you notice harassment**

- Take responsibility for the experience of others, a good atmosphere is everyone's responsibility. Apologise if you have intentionally or unintentionally offended others. If you see discrimination or harassment, don't stand by. Get involved or contact an anti-harassment contact person.
- If you see inappropriate behaviour, intervene to help the person who is being harassed. You can also calmly interrupt the situation by saying to the perpetrator, for example, "What you are saying/doing seems offensive." or by questioning his/her behaviour, for example by asking a question: "Why are you doing that?"
- Listen, support and encourage. Make sure that the perpetrator is not alone in the situation.
- No means no. Stop or change your behaviour if the other person asks or otherwise communicates.
- Report the incident to staff or the anti-harassment contact person. In situations where physical safety is threatened, report the incident immediately to the stewards or, if necessary, call 112.
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### **Take action, if you experience harassment**

- You have the right to ask the perpetrator to stop his or her behaviour. Express your disapproval and ask them to stop. Write down what happened, when and where.
- If you wish, leave the situation. Everyone has the right to do so.
- If you can, ask for help from others present, staff or anti-harassment contact person.

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- Report it to the student union METKA or the student union's anti-harassment contact persons. Metropolia does not have a designated anti-harassment contact person for each degree. Further processing of harassment situations will only begin with the permission of the person who has experienced the harassment.
- If necessary, the anti-harassment contact person will contact the Head of Department if the harassment has occurred in the course of a study-related activity.
- In the follow-up of disruptive incidents, a joint effort is made to find a solution, agree on follow-up and possible further action.
- If you wish, you can contact the Student Welfare Services and/or the school counselors to help you sort out your thoughts and feelings and to get support. If you wish, the anti-harassment contact person can also provide you with information about other support services.

### **Learn from mistakes**

- Making mistakes and learning is allowed.
- Take responsibility for your mistakes by apologizing and, if necessary, changing your behaviour. We all make mistakes from time to time and may also unintentionally violate the principles of safer spaces.
- Everyone is entitled to their own individual limits. People react differently to different behaviour.

## **Forms of inappropriate behavior**

The boundary between appropriate and inappropriate behavior can sometimes be difficult to identify, because people experience things and situations differently and the boundary is ultimately defined by the individual who has experienced the inappropriate treatment. Therefore, one's own experience should be highlighted so that the other person can become aware of what was perceived as offensive in their behavior and thus change their behavior. Inappropriate treatment is defined as behavior that cannot be considered to be in accordance with common good practice. Examples of forms of mistreatment include:

### **Bullying**

Bullying is the repeated insulting, ill-treatment, unethical acts or behavior of another person. Bullying includes, for example, humiliation, insulting or undue criticism, social exclusion, spreading unfounded gossip, mental and physical abuse or threats of such abuse.

It does not constitute bullying if conflicts arise over decisions or interpretations relating to studies, if problems relating to studies are dealt with in the work or study community, if justified inappropriate behavior is addressed, or if justified disciplinary measures, such as a warning, are taken in accordance with the University of Applied Sciences Act.

### **Discrimination**

Discrimination requires that a person has been treated less favourably than others in a comparable situation because of one or more personal characteristics. No one may be discriminated against on grounds of

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national or ethnic origin, colour, language, sex, age, sexual orientation, health, disability, religion, trade union membership, belief, political activity, opinion or any other personal ground. Indirect discrimination means that a seemingly neutral provision or practice puts some people at a disadvantage compared to others.

## **Harassment**

Harassment is any unwanted conduct that, if it continues, may adversely affect the well-being of the person experiencing it. Harassment is the violation of the dignity and integrity of a person or group of people by creating an intimidating, degrading or offensive environment. Examples of harassment include racist jokes or calling a work or student colleague a name belonging to a sexual minority. Other forms of harassment include repeated threats, intimidation, malicious and suggestive messages, repeated derogatory and mocking language, repeated unjustified criticism and obstruction of studies, repeated questioning of reputation or status, or isolation from the study community.

Sexual harassment means verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that is unwanted. Sexual harassment includes, for example, innuendo, touching, ambiguous remarks, propositioning, sexually charged comments and messages. In addition, situations in which a person's sexual autonomy is violated are also sexual harassment. Speech and gestures that are intended to be romantic and that continue even when the other person has indicated that he or she does not want them are also sexual harassment. The most serious forms of illegal sexual harassment are rape and attempted rape.

Harassment in social media means threatening or spreading false information about a person or his or her work or study, or against a person or his or her close associates. It can also include undue criticism or denigration of a student's work or harassment on social media platforms based on gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or other personal characteristics.

Hate speech often aims to exclude certain people or groups of people from public debate. Hate speech distorts or selectively presents facts and creates images of the enemy and an 'us-versus-them' mindset. Hate speech is not reciprocal, nor is it intended to seek the truth or justify the claims made. Hate speech can also constitute harassment prohibited by the Equality and Non-Discrimination Act and may also constitute a criminal offence.

Targeting is systematic harassment at work. It is often a systematic act of denigrating the person being targeted in various ways with the intention of improperly influencing the target's behaviour.

Stalking refers to unwanted persistent contact, threats, surveillance, monitoring or similar harassment. Unlawful intimidation is the threatening of a person in such a way that he or she has reason to fear for his or her safety or the safety of his or her loved ones or property. Threats can be made by telephone, orally, by e-mail or in writing. It is essential that the threats are of a kind that cause a real fear of being carried out. Threats often involve intimidation through violence or damage or destruction of property.

## **Abuse of power**

To a certain extent, abuse of power is involved in all forms of improper treatment. Negative uses of power are based on existing structures that create inequalities. These include invisibility or ridicule, withholding

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information or providing incomplete or false information, creating shame and guilt, or attempting to exclude certain people from issues on false grounds.

## Sources

- [SAMOK Code of Conduct and Principles for a Safer Space](#)
- [OLL: Safer Space in higher education Sport](#)
- [Policy for situations of inappropriate treatment and harassment at Metropolia](#) (In Finnish)

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