

**PRACTICAL GUIDE
TO SOCIAL SAFETY AT
THE UNIVERSITY OF OSTRAVA**



**UNIVERSITY
OF OSTRAVA**



CONTENT



1. The essentials of social safety at the University of Ostrava 6

2. The most frequent types of social safety violations 6

2.1	Sexual harassment	7
2.2	Bullying	16
2.2.1	Mobbing	17
2.2.2	Bossing	22
2.2.3	Staffing	29
2.2.4	Discrimination	31
2.3	Gender stereotypes	32
2.4	Gender sensitive communication and forms of address	36

3. Situations associated with risk to social safety in academic settings 39

3.1	Examinations and consultations	39
3.2	Instruction and examinations outside the premises	41
3.3	Off-site events	43
3.4	Touching in the workplace or during instruction	45
3.5	Informal and coercive communication	47

4. How to deal with a conflict? Who can you turn to for help or advice? 52

4.1	Social safety at the University of Ostrava	52
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5. Literature and sources 56

1. The essentials of social safety at the University of Ostrava

The aim of this guide is to provide **students, teachers and other academic and non-academic staff** at the University of Ostrava with essential information and practical instructions on how to deal with issues related to social safety in the context of university environment. The guide describes **the most frequent types of social safety violations** and offers definitions of the typical forms of inappropriate or risky behaviour, including discrimination and sexual harassment. At the same time, the guide includes **specific examples** of situations which may be encountered in university life. Based on an analysis of these situations, the guide attempts to propose the right way forward. The goal is not to merely describe these situations but to actively explain and teach readers how to recognise social danger, resist it, or ideally prevent its occurrence in the first place.

Another, and not insignificant, goal of this guide is to define the expectations for the conduct and communication of all members of the academic community as well as non-academic staff so that they comply with the high standards set out by the **Code of Ethics** of the University of Ostrava, and perhaps to forewarn those whose conduct or communication fail to meet these standards.

Views of teachers/superiors and students/subordinates:

This guide is to serve all students, teachers and university employees at all levels. Its aim is to improve mutual understanding among all these groups at the university, as part of the effort to create a safe environment for open communication where different competence and generational views do not create barriers between the stakeholders, but become the vehicle of better understanding of the other side, without negative connotations and stereotypes.

University environment is international, multicultural and multidisciplinary, and encompasses three generations - from students to junior academic and non-academic staff to prominent scientists and specialists with huge experience. This creates a very interesting reaction mixture where equilibrium can only be achieved through observance of clearly defined rules, good communication and mutual respect. Although the public tends to view universities as places where some higher ethical standards apply,

certain situations and certain conduct which may amount to a social safety violation may be encountered also here, such as: **a) sexual harassment, b) bullying, mobbing and bossing, c) unequal treatment and discrimination, d) gender stereotypes and bias**. These are the areas on which the following chapters will focus in detail, especially in connection with certain specific risk situations, such as examinations taken without the presence of another person, off-site consultations, field trips, excursions and other stays outside university premises.

2.1 Sexual harassment

What is sexual harassment?

Sexual harassment is any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical behaviour of sexual nature the purpose or effect of which is violation of a person's dignity, especially when such behaviour creates intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for the person. It may take any form, such as sexually coloured remarks, deliberate touching, suggestive looks, inappropriate jokes and communication, pressuring someone into having sexual contact, or sexual assault.

It is necessary to emphasise that anyone can commit sexual harassment against anyone. Thus the victim may be a person in any position, i.e. a subordinate employee, a student or someone in university management. Sexual harassment can be viewed as gender-based discrimination.

How to recognise sexual harassment?

Sexual and sexist (i.e. applying gender stereotypes) harassment is a complex phenomenon. It can take on many forms, ranging from "mere" jokes about women's, men's or other gender's abilities, to unwelcome attention with sexual overtones, to open sexual extortion (or "sextortion"). The following types of behaviour are typical of sexual and gender-based harassment:

- repeated unwanted sexual advances
- inappropriate comments about an individual or about a group of people based on generalisations regarding their sex, gender or sexuality
- unwanted, sexually motivated communication (emails, sharing of photographs, telephone calls)
- obscene behaviour accompanied with, for instance, indecent exposure
- unwanted touching



- sexual coercion or requesting sexual favours in exchange for better conditions such as a better mark, higher salary and the like (“sexual bribery”)
- sexual violence or attempted sexual violence (including rape)

Sexual harassment often coincides with further negative phenomena for which the following is typical:

- submission to such conduct has become either an explicit or implicit condition of the victim’s employment or admission to study
- submission to, or rejection of, such conduct has influenced the decisions on the victim’s employment or admission to study
- the intent behind, or effect of, such conduct was to interfere with the victim’s work or study performance or create an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment

Anna is a first year student at a university. Petr is one of her classmates in a seminar she attends. Peter starts to behave in a weird way towards Anna from the first week of the term. Peter harasses Anna with sexually coloured remarks or comments which are inappropriate and unpleasant. For instance, Peter repeatedly asks about her intimate life, makes comments about her appearance and offers that they meet outside of school. Anna feels uncomfortable and ashamed but does not know how to respond to the situation. This is an example of sexual harassment. Peter’s unwelcome comments with sexual overtones and his behaviour creates an environment which is unpleasant for Anna who should feel safe and respected at school.

Impacts of sexual harassment

From the viewpoint of individual students or employees, sexual harassment has negative emotional, physical, interpersonal and career effects. In particular, victims may experience:

- feelings of anxiety, guilt, helplessness, trust issues, loss of self-confidence or difficulty concentrating
- headaches, sleep disorders, lethargy, nightmares, phobias
- isolation, fear of unknown people or situations, difficulty starting an intimate relationship
- having to change their studies or professional career, dropping out of university / leaving a job, poor study or work performance due to stress
- worse school attendance or excessive absenteeism at work
- losing confidence in the teacher/superior, and consequently

- automatically rejecting the teacher’s instruction, or rejecting to work on tasks assigned by the superior
- conflicts with other students / colleagues at work
- fragmentation of the group / team, deteriorating social climate in the group / team which leads to poorer cooperation among students/colleagues and hence lower quality of instruction / work
- feelings of personal failure resulting from the inability to deal with the situation

The situation may also impact the institution, due to higher fluctuation of both students and teachers and poor external reputation or image of the institution

Views of teachers or superiors

Persons in senior positions (teachers or superiors) may be both the harassers and the harassed. If by his or her conduct, a person in a senior position is trying to coerce a person in a subordinate position (a subordinate or a student) to engage in unwanted personal contact, such behaviour is not only indecorous and unethical, it is criminal and in this sense also punishable. At the same time, in certain specific situations, such conduct may be unintentional and caused by generational differences or differences in upbringing, or it may result from unwittingly reproducing gender-based stereotypes or other types of bias. But it is still inappropriate, especially if the respect or admiration a student or subordinate accords to the person in senior position is mistaken for an expression of romantic feelings. **Persons in senior positions should always maintain a professional approach to those in subordinate positions** and avoid any doubts about their conduct because sexual harassment is still a lapse, even if it is committed unintentionally. Still, understanding the context is important, especially with a view to prevention and systemic change inside a university. The person in senior position may also be the victim who perceives the subordinate person’s conduct as unsolicited and unpleasant interest involving the encroachment of personal space (inappropriate physical touching) and advances with sexual innuendo (invitation to an intimate meeting).

Sexual harassment may take on many other forms, such as:

- sexual coercion and extortion which may involve obtaining advantages or, on the other hand, avoiding penalties (“gaining something in exchange for something else”)
- creating a hostile environment for women or men as a group, or for a specific person, due to their gender identity
- applying gender stereotypes



Views of students or subordinates

As with teachers and superiors, students and subordinates may also be the harassers or the harassed. If they are the person targeted by the harasser, they often observe that those around them downplay the incidents, saying for instance:

- his is only harmless flirting
- fortunately, when it comes to sex, people in the Czech Republic are more liberal than those in the USA or elsewhere, compliments and speaking about attraction to a man or a woman in not against good manners, it is a natural expression of gallantry
- students at universities are adults and are able to cope with such problems on their own

The absence of respectful manners is not acceptable, no matter what reasons are used to justify the conduct! Gender stereotypes do not belong to good manners and they certainly do not create a socially safe environment. Speaking up against sexual harassment is often difficult, not least because of the fact that it is often downplayed. **The ability to speak up against sexual harassment and to effectively protect its victims are skills characterising ethically mature societies, and universities must strive to create such ethically mature environment.**

Events or environments associated with higher risk

Harassing conduct occurs more frequently in connection with certain specific situations which entail less formal educational activities, or which fall outside the scope of educational activities, such as research fellowships or study visits, field trips, social functions or arts and sports events, celebrations and the like, which typically take place outside university premises, regardless of whether the event is organised by the school, or is an extracurricular activity.

It is easier to engage on a less formal level at these events. Generally, it is impossible to state unequivocally that informal relationships between teachers and students / superiors and subordinates are inappropriate. They may sometimes lead to better cooperation and better relations within a team. However, when crossing the borders of a formal relationship, it is necessary to keep in mind that even though the teacher and the student / the superior and the subordinate meet outside the formal premises of the university, or even though they are on first name terms with each other, respectful conduct and relations need to be maintained so that further cooperation in the classroom or at the workplace is possible, and the informal conduct does not lead to conduct that is harassing.

What if it's consensual? Love will always have its way

A specific problem to do with sexual harassment is when **a relationship develops between a teacher/superior and a student/subordinate**. These relationships are consensual and both of the partners, regardless of their positions, engage in them voluntarily, so we cannot speak about sexual harassment here. But they definitely represent crossing the borders of a professional relationship, and as such, the issue needs attention. The main thing is to understand that it is the consensuality of the relationship that is problematic as the relationship develops between partners who are not quite on an equal footing.

By definition, the relationship between a teacher and a student, or a superior and a subordinate is asymmetric and this in fact may be one of the reasons why the individual parties actually initiate the relationship. The subordinate, for instance, may be afraid to express their disagreement with their superior, or to reject their superior; or the subordinate admires the person as a role model and feels flattered by their attention, and the like. The key problem here is the conflict between the asymmetry of the professional relationship and the desirable symmetry of a romantic relationship, and sooner or later, this may lead to problems. If there is a relationship, there is a conflict of interest, both on the part of the teacher/superior who either teaches or assesses the work performance of the person with whom they are in an intimate relationship, or assigns tasks to such person and evaluates their performance, and likewise on the part of the student or subordinate.

At the same time, a romantic relationship like this may have a negative impact on the other members of the team and the whole atmosphere in it. **A student/subordinate in a relationship with their teacher/superior is in a totally different position within the study group or workplace** because they have (or are assumed to have) more detailed information about the teacher/superior, or the whole school or workplace.

They may also reveal information about the teacher's/superior's personal life, or about the lives of his/her colleagues, through which the student/subordinate may gain prestige, but concurrently, there may be permanent suspicion that they have better conditions compared to the other members of the group/team. A dilemma arises for the student/subordinate: Should they reveal certain information about their relationship? How can they prove that the conditions for them are the same as those for the others? How can they substantiate to the rest of the group/ team that it is their knowledge and skills that matter?



If the student has good results, or the subordinate has good evaluation and/or bonuses, or has access to better work opportunities, the group or team may express doubts that these may not be justified.

Consensual relationships, whether overt or covert, may have a number of negative impacts, as they may lead to:

- bad work or study environment
- exclusion of the student who is the object of the teacher's attention from the study group, or breakup of the whole group
- exclusion of the employee from the team, or toxic environment in the workplace, both of which negatively affect the team

In other words, these consensual relationships may be the source of many problems for the student/subordinate because:

- they lead to a situation in which one person has power over the other
- there is a conflict of interest (the question whether evaluation of a partner's study or work performance by the other partner in the consensual relationship may be objective)
- there is high risk that private information will be used/abused for the unjustified benefit of an individual, putting the other members of the team at a disadvantage
- the general atmosphere in the study group is affected and this may have negative consequences for the other students/members of the team

Recommendations for teachers/superiors

A consensual romantic or sexual relationship between a superior/teacher and a person in a subordinate position/a student may be viewed as a violation of professional ethics, and specific rules may apply to these relationships at some workplaces. It is the role of managers to explain the rules and the related expectations to their subordinates, and then to request adherence. But even in workplaces without any written rules, it is necessary to keep in mind that if teachers or superiors strive for an intimate connection with a student/subordinate, they knowingly risk the infringement of their ethical and professional responsibility. The situation when things are the other way around is described below.

What to do if you are considering a relationship, or it has already started? If it is the former case and you are still considering the relationship, you can wait with starting the relationship until you are not in a direct line of superiority or in the direct teacher-student

relationship, and the power imbalance is rectified. In the latter case, let your superior know about your consensual relationship and adopt all the necessary measures to prevent conflict of interest. Do not teach courses attended by your partner, give up the position of his/her tutor or supervisor, do not participate in committees which take decisions related to the evaluation of your partner, and always report any potential conflict of interest. Make sure that the interests of your partner who is in a subordinate position to you take precedence over your interests. In other words, your relationship should not have a detrimental effect on your partner's study results or career opportunities

Recommendations for students/subordinates

You should be extremely careful when it comes to engaging in an intimate relationship with your teacher or superior. As a student or subordinate, you may admire your teacher/superior or feel respect towards him/her and mistake it for affection and sexual attraction, but this is not a sensible starting point for a good-quality relationship. Even though your relationship may not be a case in point, always remember that the relationship will be accompanied by a change in your perspective. Your objectivity and ability of self-reflection will be weaker, and your position in the team, and opinions about your study or work results, may change. And this may have fatal consequences for the success of your studies or for your professional career.

What to do if you are considering a relationship, or it has already started? If the former is the case, wait with starting the relationship until you are not in a directly subordinated position and the power imbalance is rectified. If the relationship has already started, strive to avoid the conflict of interest which arises as a result of your relationship. Try to make sure that your study results or future career are not jeopardized and that your personal relationship is strictly separated from your relationship at school or work.



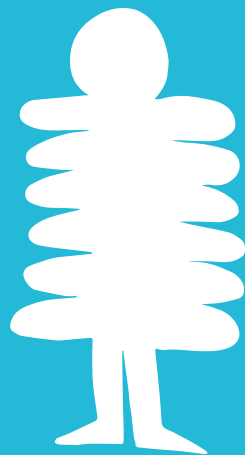
Petr works as a specialist at a university. Marketa is his boss and her decisions can significantly influence Petr's career progress. Her behaviour towards Petr is inappropriate, Petr has been sexually harassed at work by Marketa for several months. Marketa excessively praises Petr's appearance and she sometimes makes sexually coloured remarks. She also tries to get close to Petr physically, she touches his shoulder or even tries to embrace him. Petr feels threatened and uncomfortable, but at the same time, he realizes he might lose his job if he raises the matter. This situation is an example of sexual harassment at a workplace (workplace harassment). Marketa's inappropriate and sexualised conduct creates an unpleasant and degrading environment for Petr who has the right to feel respected and safe at work.



2.2 Bullying

Bullying can be divided into mobbing, bossing and staffing. Although the two latter terms, bossing and staffing, are not used by native speakers of English to describe the corresponding phenomena and on the internet, it is possible to come across terms like vertical mobbing (ascending for staffing and descending for bossing) to refer to these types of bullying in English¹, in Czech, and perhaps in some other European languages, too, these two English expressions take on the meanings as they are described in this guide, and for practical reasons, a decision was made to retain them also in the translation of this guide into English. And as we are discussing these issues within an academic institution, besides workplace bullying, we will also mention bullying among students.

Although there is no statutory definition of bullying, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic defined the issues related to bullying in its methodological guideline no. 21291/2010-28 in which bullying is described as **a not necessarily repeated conduct consisting in a knowing, deliberate, intentional and usually covert effort to harm someone physically, emotionally and/or socially, characterised by an imbalance in power, the victim's helplessness, the embarrassing nature of the attack for the victim and the fact that the aggression is an end in itself. Teasing and bantering, or aggression**, in a situation where there is no power imbalance and the victim can pay back the teaser/aggressor in the same degree **cannot be considered to amount to bullying**.



2.2.1 Mobbing

Jan is a 2nd year student at a university and a member of a student club. Jan cooperates with Alice, a higher year student, in that club. Over time, Jan notices that Alice treats him differently from the way she treats the other members, and he feels unpleasant. Alice withholds information from Jan, delays the processing of his requests and deliberately ignores his opinions, or makes derisive comments about them. Alice also spreads gossip about Jan among club members, creating a hostile environment towards Jan, and the other members of the club start to treat him in a similar manner. Jan feels extremely stressed and is scared of meeting Alice or the other club members.

This is an example of mobbing. Alice's repeated, intentional, manipulative and discriminating attitude is taken over by other club members and leads to the creation of a toxic and unsupportive environment for Jan.

Kate works at a university as an administrative worker. Lucas is her colleague in a more senior position who has been working at the university since before Kate came. Lucas has influence at the workplace and is respected by his colleagues. He has adopted an arrogant and hostile attitude to Kate ever since she assumed the position at the university. Lucas repeatedly and openly humiliates her in front of colleagues by ignoring her proposals and opinions, does not let her finish speaking and withholds important information which she needs to know to be able to perform her work. He repeatedly overlooks and belittles her views. The result of this permanent pressure and hostile behaviour on the part of Lucas is that Kate feels exhausted, suffers from anxiety and loses motivation for work. Her performance at work and her dejection become the target of gossip and inappropriate "pranks" of her colleagues and unfortunately, Kate's line manager also comments the situation. The manager reprimands Kate for unsatisfactory performance and unprofessional conduct in her performance review interview. The manager mentions Lucas as an example of a hard worker and someone who is also popular with colleagues. Kate does not see a way out of this situation and leaves her job to work for another employer.

This is an example of workplace mobbing. Lucas's repeated and targeted disrespectful attitude creates unfavourable and destructive workplace environment for Kate. Lucas will probably resort to this behaviour in the future again which will impact the staff, and the performance of the whole workplace.



What is mobbing?

Mobbing is one of the forms of workplace bullying which can also be described as (psychological) abuse, psycho-terror, psychic violence, and the like. It can be found in many forms and levels of intensity, such as humiliation, blaming, mocking, underrating, scapegoating and other types of distressing and wrongful behaviour. The ways in which mobbing manifests include gossip, ridiculing, belittling, ignoring, shaming, intimidation, injustices, financial harm and the like. It can be described as a collective campaign by co-workers/fellow students to exclude, punish, and humiliate a targeted worker or student. The pressure is long-term and systematic, and involves hostile and unethical communication regardless of what type of activity the targeted worker/student performs or how he or she behaves at the workplace or at school. The individual attacks of mobbing may outwardly appear to be harmless and random, but a complex view reveals a deliberate and health-threatening phenomenon.

How to recognise mobbing?

We can speak about mobbing if certain criteria are met:

- The behaviour is regular and goes on for a period of time. It is not a single incident or a simple conflict, mobbing is characterised by targeted long-term attacks committed by an individual or a group against another individual. So it is not an occasional conflict but a repeated and intentional process of ruining the victim's career, or life generally.
- It is covert and sophisticated. Workplace bullies often use intrigue, defamation, snitching or grassing against their colleagues, or spreading rumours among colleagues. These techniques may look like harmless pranks, banter or practical jokes - the victim knows, however, that they are neither sporadic nor random, but a regular part of their work or study.

The following are also examples of mobbing: every day, your colleague or a fellow student does not respond to your greetings, and only gives you a disdainful look, regularly maligns, criticises and vilifies you to your superiors, and moreover does things just to spite you, for instance switching the lights off in a room where you are, or locking you inside a toilet.

Mobbing stages

Conflict (Incident) – mobbing is always preceded by a conflict which was not settled correctly. It is often over something very trivial and petty. Sometimes, the conflict is even accidental.

Systematic psycho-terror – an individual becomes the target of systematic and purposeful attacks. At first, the attacks may not be strong or frequent but they are the bullies' masterly way of exploring how far they can go. If there ever was a reason for the situation, it is unimportant at this stage, pushed into the background or forgotten already, and the harassed fully assumes the role of the victim. The victim becomes more and more vulnerable and the situation starts to affect both their physical and psychic condition – translating into lower self-esteem, poorer work/study performance, anxiety and the first symptoms of psychosomatic disorders. All of this may seem to be just small conflicts, innocent banter or practical jokes to bystanders. Victims are gradually pushed out from the team, and under pressure, they start to make mistakes – something the bully planned from the very beginning. By becoming a problematic person, the previous criticism directed towards the victim is in fact validated.

Manager's intervention – psycho-terror becomes official, attacks occur more and more often, and are more cruel and insidious. The crisis intensifies, mobbing escalates and the bully applies techniques which are ever more brutal. At this stage, the perpetrator may also be joined by other – previously uninvolved – members of the team, and if they are not stopped, the situation may soon develop into an “all against one” scenario. The targeted victim realises that the attacks are purposeful and the distress they inflict on the victim is overwhelming. As the aggressiveness of the attacks intensifies, the situation cannot be overlooked any more and the management has to respond. The victim is under great stress at work so it is logical that they make mistakes more often and this may be sufficient evidence for those around them that the problem really is on their side. They are often “carpeted”, given various ultimata, reprimanded for lack of effort or insufficient motivation. They often hear: **“this isn't the right job for you”, “I think this is not a good fit for you”, or “you are better suited for ...”**

Thus, the manager is sometimes an accomplice, and may even become the bully themselves. Nobody looks for the root causes, and uncovering the fact that the victim was forcibly manipulated into the

situation is highly improbable. Due to the victim's deteriorating performance at work and frequent sick leaves, a superficial inspection of the situation is sufficient for those witnessing it from the outside. The situation is wrongly interpreted and only the victim is scrutinised as the source of all problems. And of course, it is much easier for the superior to solve the “problem” by dismissing the victim.

Exclusion – official exclusion from the team is the last stage of this process, such as transfer to another department/school, assignment of substandard work tasks, or limitation of the worker's powers. All of this is done in an effort to force the worker to quit the job / the student to leave the study group.

The stages of mobbing are distinct. What may differ is how long the individual stages last, depending on the victim's personality, the force of the attack, mobbing techniques applied, and the like.

However, if stopped at an early stage, the victim does not necessarily have to go through all of the stages.

Superiors play the key role in stopping mobbing, but the victim's co-workers' role may also be significant as at a certain stage, they may start to make sense of what has been going on, or possibly, what game they have been manipulated into. If co-workers are able to not merely discern the problem but draw attention to the situation, and help the victim describe the problem to their superior, mobbing may be stopped.

Impacts of mobbing

The subordinate / the student who is harassed by colleagues at the workplace / by fellow students may be afraid to deal with the situation. He or she may feel that discussing the problem with their superior/the teacher is unfeasible. But if the conflict is not dealt with right from the beginning, it will develop and escalate. The harassed will feel bitterness and disappointment in the first stage. Psychic terror is employed in the second stage with targeted attacks against the victim. The psychic pressure intensifies and the subordinate or student becomes more and more vulnerable.

The psychological symptoms may include restlessness, nervousness, anxiety, difficulties with concentration, problems with personal (d)evaluation, self-doubt and low self-esteem. Permanent stress and uncertainty lead to sleep disorders and fatigue. The harassed may seek an escape and mobbing may consequently



lead to higher consumption of psychotropic substances – for instance, many of those who are harassed use alcohol to forget. The victim's productivity decreases due to low self-confidence and combined with permanent psychological stress, this has the potential of turning the abused into a problematic personality. The victim feels dejection, gloom, a persistent low mood, pessimism or loss of energy and enjoyment of life. If these problems persist, they may result into a diagnosis of depression. Some victims may even think about suicide in this desperate situation. And these psychic problems are soon coupled with psychosomatic difficulties. The permanent feeling of tension may cause constricted breathing, headaches, neck, upper back or back pain, or chronic digestive problems. Chronically high stress hormone levels in blood cause high blood pressure which sharply increases the risk of developing a cardiovascular disease.

A weakened immune system may lead to a higher risk of oncological diseases. There is no doubt that mobbing interferes with the victim's privacy because besides creating a toxic work environment for the victim, it leads to disruption of all of the victim's relationships. The victim lives in constant social stress and uncertainty. His or her social needs are chronically frustrated.

Every day, she comes back from work exhausted, humiliated, broken, and even a weekend of rest does not help her. She can't stop thinking about the situation at work / school, and she tends to self-isolate from those around her. This disrupts her relationships not only at work or school, but also with family and friends.

Mobbing entails economic losses because a mobbing victim will understandably be underperforming. The victims' performance and motivation sink while their sickness rate and disability increase. Many of the victims are so called "quiet quitters". Although they are physically present at the workplace / school, their performance lags far behind their potential. The victims' frequent absences are not only the sign of their psychical and physical health problems, at the same time, they are an escape from an unbearable environment. The impact of mobbing can also be felt by other members of the team and by the bully himself/herself. The negative consequences affect the whole workplace or study group. It is not just the victim whose work performance deteriorates, the same is true for the perpetrator who spends their time thinking about new schemes and attacks – so both the harassed and the harasser fail to use the time at work / the time for study effectively. The atmosphere at the

workplace / in the study group changes, too. The team disintegrates, colleagues are less willing to help, endless debates are held, and motivation declines.

All of the above affects the morale of the whole team and, sooner or later, its productivity. **Mobbing is a huge problem for a university.** It causes harm both when the victim stays (the costs of long-term or repeated sick leaves and other absences) and when he or she leaves. The victim quits his or her job/drops out with bad experience, or starts working for the competition / studying at a different university. Both of this may mean bad publicity for the university. But the problem does not stop here. Other talented employees / students who find the toxic atmosphere at the workplace/school unpalatable may leave together with the victim. The highly competent are thus replaced by average performers at the workplace/school. Not to mention that the related high staff turnover means money has to be spent on hiring and induction of new workers and financial costs are also related to students' failure and drop-out rates.

How can mobbing be resisted?

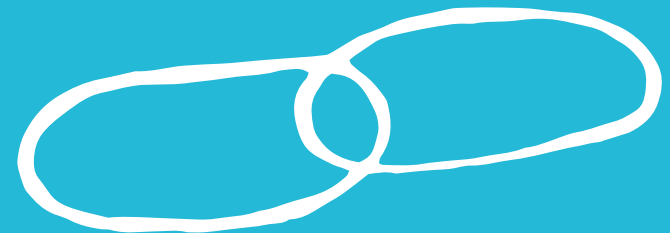
Prevention is generally considered to be the best and most effective form of defence! Evaluation of all employees is conducted regularly by the university and this makes room for voicing concerns or dissatisfaction at an early stage. The university builds its internal culture on solid moral foundations, cooperativeness, and on competent and responsible managers and teachers who are sensitive to the situation at their workplace or among students. The role of superiors is to arrange for smooth and successful integration of newcomers to the team, to develop positive relationships, listen to their subordinates, prevent gossip and intrigue, pick out signs of problems such as restlessness or deteriorating workplace atmosphere, and deal with conflicts or tense relationships timely. Likewise, teachers must notice the atmosphere and related signals in their classes. **For these purposes, the university has built a system offering many possibilities how to deal with these problems early on.** There are also other – and less formal – ways of tackling these issues. Primarily, it is necessary to resist the pressure and make sure that individuals cannot manipulate the whole work team or study group. Do not turn a blind eye to what is going on in the office or the classroom. **Teachers/educational advisers or, in the case of employees, the personnel department and the line manager, need to be notified of bullying** because it is a very dangerous matter which may even have fatal consequences for the victim.



It is a policy of the university that employees or students must report workplace bullying or bullying among students.

One of the ways how to do this is via the Social Safety System of the University of Ostrava.

When it comes to prevention, instead of being passive bystanders, we should be “upstanders”. If you witness bullying or another form of socially dangerous behaviour, you may confront the perpetrator in a nonaggressive way and speak out against the problematic conduct. Comment the situation from your perspective. For instance, you may say that a teacher’s conduct does not seem to be ok. You may also respond to a past event, again by confronting the perpetrator about the problematic conduct he or she committed, for instance at a Christmas party a month earlier, or at a lecture the previous week. Another possibility is to approach the victim after an incident and offer support, and reassure him or her that the conduct was not normal. This active approach allows you to draw attention to situations of harassment, to speak out against aggressors and at the same time, to offer support to victims.



2.2.2 Bossing

Adam is a first-year student at a university attending a course taught by a respected professor. Right from the beginning of the term, the professor has been using Adam as an example of a student with poor results for the other students. He exaggerates Adam's failures. When Adam's answers are correct, he never receives any praise from the professor, and Adam's partial success is always attributed to other influences, such as a lucky chance or copying. Adam is never called on when he raises his hand but when there are no volunteers to answer the professor's questions about the topic covered, Adam is always asked for an answer so that he can "prove" what he knows. The professor does this all with humour and hyperbole but, despite trying to appear unconcerned, Adam feels uncomfortable under the professor's constant pressure.

This situation is a less severe example of **bossing between a student and a teacher at a university**. The professor abuses his position and authority to repeatedly humiliate, ignore and discriminate against Adam. Even though the professor attempts to give the impression that he is doing it for fun, or in an effort to provide constructive feedback, if the professor's conduct repeatedly portrays Adam in a negative way, in a way that is disparaging for Adam, this is still considered to amount to bossing.

Martin is a young scientist at a university working on a research project under the guidance of his superior, a professor. The professor abuses her authority and the position of a superior to humiliate and harass Martin. Her ungrounded criticism of Martin's work is constant and she denies him recognition for his successes. She tries to isolate Martin from other colleagues by excluding him from important decisions and meetings. The professor overtaxes Martin with excessive workload and unreasonable timelines which are often unrelated to his area of activity and Martin cannot comply with these timelines effectively. She also frequently contacts him outside the working hours with constant queries and instructions. This relentless pressure and humiliation takes a toll – Martin feels exhausted, frustrated and helpless.

This is an example of **bossing in the workplace**. The professor abuses her position of a superior to repeatedly humiliate and isolate Martin, and to overload him with work.

What is bossing?

In many aspects, bossing is related to mobbing, as described hereinabove, and can be defined as bullying or rough treatment towards a subordinate by a superior. At a university, this unequal position may also translate into problems between a tutor/teacher and a student, and the like. Bossing is the conduct of a person in superior position aimed at discrediting a person in subordinate position amongst other teachers or students, making it hard or even impossible for the target to continue working or studying, and the effort intensifies with time. The root causes may for instance include negative character traits of the person in superior position, fear of losing their job, and often jealousy against a competent, educated subordinate whom the bully perceives as a threat to their position at work.

How to recognise bossing?

The nature of the relationship between a boss and a subordinate makes it obvious that not all conduct which the subordinate considers to be unfavourable or negative towards them can be termed as bossing. Superiors exercise their authority towards subordinates as those with wider competencies, and their decisions may often be unpopular with subordinates. If there is a rational reason behind the superior's unfavourable conduct towards the subordinate, it is highly probable that it is not a case of bossing.

The fact that the conduct in question is regular and goes on for some time is among the preconditions which have to be met if we are to speak about bossing. There have to be targeted and long-term attacks, so a solitary event or a simple conflict are not considered to amount to bossing. However, intensity of the conduct is always a factor, too. Unfavourable conduct of higher intensity goes hand in hand with shorter duration and less frequent intervals.

The following are examples of bossing:

- negative approach, arrogant conduct, verbal attacks, ridiculing the subordinate in front of colleagues/students, humiliation, sneering or laughing at the subordinate, ironic comments, undervaluing efforts, avoiding communication, ignoring, defaming, discrediting the reputation of the subordinate including that of their family members, victimisation, blaming
- underappreciation, unfair criticism, disproportionate punishment and unjustified disciplinary action, highlighting even trivial mistakes which are overlooked in other employees, constant cutting across the subordinate in conversation, lack of possibility to express opinions or make proposals on the part of the subordinate

- creating obstacles to work performance, blocking access to information from for instance the superiors which leads to lack of knowledge, creating social exclusion, deliberately sabotaging or impeding the subordinate's work performance
- taking credit for the subordinate's work / passing someone's work off as your own
- setting the target up to fail by unachievable tasks, giving the target menial tasks, giving too challenging tasks (for which the subordinate lacks sufficient qualification or which are technically unattainable, or are impossible to complete within the timeframe provided), assigning tasks outside of working hours and during rest time
- monitoring the subordinate without his or her knowledge with malicious intent, excessive supervision of performance or attendance, too much overtime
- spitefulness (taking away office supplies), denying annual leave
- making threats, threatening dismissal/the award of a failing grade/denying to award credit points without cause, threatening with physical violence, sexual harassment

Impacts of bossing

The subordinate who is the target of the bullying may be afraid to deal with the situation. They may feel that speaking to the superior about the problem and the superior's conduct is not possible. If the conflict is not dealt with early on, it will intensify. The harassed will feel bitterness and disappointment in the first stage and the superior will be even more critical and aggressive. Psychic terror will be employed in the second stage with targeted attacks against the subordinate. The psychic pressure will intensify and the subordinate will become more and more vulnerable. This will impact the subordinate's health condition, his or her self-confidence and productivity at work will decrease, and on the other hand, his or her absences, stress, error rate and injury rate will increase, he or she may feel anxiety, irritation, aggressiveness and this may be accompanied by poor sleep quality, loss of appetite and the first symptoms of psychosomatic disorders. The most serious effect of the situation may be suicidal thoughts. People around the subordinate may start to treat him or her negatively at this stage because they do not understand the changes in the subordinate's personality. Most victims deal with the situation by quitting the job / leaving the school.

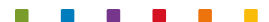
How to resist bossing?

Attention should be paid to the first symptoms of bossing already. If you deal with the situation early on, it is possible to rely on less formal, i.e. more personal solutions. The damage caused by bossing at this early stage is still limited and easier to remedy. The relations between the target and the harasser are affected but not irreversibly destroyed. If direct negotiation is impossible due to the dysfunctional relationship, opt for written communication and direct your grievance to the line manager of the person who commits the bossing, or to the personnel department, or use the **Social Safety System of the University of Ostrava**. Before doing so (in person or in writing), it is necessary to collect any specific and substantiated information that you have about the incidents which you believe are a form of bossing. You may also include description of your personal feelings and name possible witnesses of the incidents. Bullying in the workplace or within university studies is not always as inconspicuous as the instigator thinks. So if you are a victim of bossing, people in your vicinity may have already noticed that. Try to find someone like minded among them and you can explain to them what is happening to you. Finding support and understanding from others will bring tremendous psychological relief to you, and these people may even support you in your grievance. Once you start discussing the incidents, do not scold or blame the harasser, be candid, calm and keep to the facts.

2.2.3 Staffing

What is staffing?

Staffing is another form of workplace bullying and it is committed by subordinates against their superiors. At a university, staffing can also mean bullying committed by students against their teachers. The most frequent signs of staffing include deliberate refusal to work out tasks, spreading malicious rumours, or withholding key information. In the classroom, students' challenging behaviour most frequently consists in being disruptive during instructional time so that the teacher's presentation is impossible, ridiculing the teacher, playing inappropriate pranks, but also using vulgar or offensive language and making threats.



Impacts of staffing, and how to resist them

These impacts are very similar to those seen in other types of bullying in the workplace or in academic environment. Probably the most significant consequence is that performance of the whole team/study group may deteriorate. There is chaos in the workplace/classroom, communication is less effective, workers cannot focus on their work and students on their study and the quality, quantity and error rate of their work suffers. The superiors/teachers face enormous pressure which affects their psychical and physical health.

In a way, this description might seem to suggest that staffing is a form of workplace bullying which is easiest to deal with, but this is not the case. Those harassed may fear that their superiors might see them as incompetent if they ask for support. Just like any other measures introduced by them, the measures adopted by the target against the bullying in their team (study group) are ignored or deprecated, and thus ineffective. The psychological pressure may cause that the victim ends up in a vicious circle - the harassers are ever more aggressive and the harassed is less and less able to fight back. It is necessary to confront staffing from the moment its first signs are spotted. Superiors / teachers should not dismiss these first signs, such as mockery behind their backs, spreading of malicious rumours, or sabotage of the tasks assigned by them. It is necessary to intervene already at this stage so that the situation does not get out of hand.

Speak out unequivocally against toxic conduct committed by subordinates or students and, on the other hand, try to create an atmosphere of mutual cooperation, support and trust. Speak openly with your subordinates / students. **Describe the things you do not like and will not tolerate.** If you want to speak specifically about somebody's inappropriate conduct, discuss it with him or her within a private, one-on-one interview. Prepare well (you may also consult a coach or mentor) and demand a change in their conduct. If you are in doubt about your subordinates', or students', conduct, consider making a survey using a satisfaction questionnaire, this is a good way to obtain feedback about sentiments in the team and problems which need to be identified, and which you can then deal with in concert.

2.2.4 Discrimination

If we look at discrimination from the perspective of Czech anti-discrimination legislation, we can see that all of the conduct described above amounts to discrimination as such. The right to equal treatment enshrines your right to freedom from discrimination based on protected characteristics stipulated by law, and abuse, sexual harassment, victimisation, instruction to discriminate and instigation to discrimination are all considered to be forms of discrimination.

Generally, discrimination can be understood as conduct which consists in treating individual people differently, in the positive sense or in the negative sense. It generally applies that it is unlawful to discriminate based, in particular, on the protected characteristics of race, ethnic or national origin, sex, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, belief or worldview. **The protected characteristics of sex is understood as also covering discrimination based on the characteristics of being pregnant or a mother/father, and based on the characteristics of gender identification.**



2.3 Gender stereotypes

Gender stereotypes are generalisations or biases about specific attributes, characteristics or social roles which are, or are supposed to be, characteristic of men or women. Part of these stereotypes is their strictly binary perception (femininity vs masculinity). But they may also relate to other genders.

Examples of gender stereotypes:

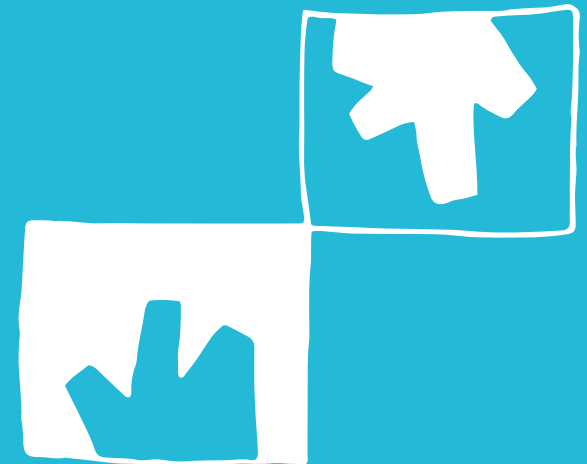
- men are strong and aggressive, while women are gentle and sensitive/empathetic
- men are better in technical and mathematical disciplines, while women are better in the area of caregiving and communication
- men are endowed with natural leadership ability and are dominant, while women are more likely passive and submissive
- men should be responsible for financial stability of the family, while women should be responsible for the household and child care
- men are more active and play more sports, while women should be nurturing/caring; women's typical interests are fashion and cosmetics

These stereotypes affect our perception of gender roles and may negatively impact gender equality, and the self-esteem and possibilities of individuals. The important thing is to be aware of these stereotypes and to challenge them in order to achieve equality and the same opportunities for all regardless of their gender. Gender stereotypes are dangerous, they may lead to discrimination, limiting men and women in the development of their personal talents and skills, in the choice of their career and in their freedom to make decisions about their life.

Gender stereotypes are unlawful if they lead to violations of human rights and freedoms. Although they affect all genders, women are perceived as those whom stereotyping hurts more. Typically, we can see this in the different pay women and men get for the same work (the so called gender pay gap), lower representation of women in leadership position (the glass ceiling phenomenon, i.e. invisible barriers which officially do not exist, but which abuse gender or racial bias to prevent women's career advancement or their promotion to top leadership or social positions, or promote the division of responsibilities in the area of childcare and household labour). In men, on the other hand, gender stereotypes support the pressure to align with typically "manly" behaviours and roles which are perceived through the optics of stereotyped masculinity (e.g. man – the breadwinner, "be a man").

A university organises a presentation of student career opportunities for its students. The speaker who represents an employer describes various technical and engineering jobs as suitable primarily for men. The attributes highlighted by the speaker are "tough", "strong" and "with technical prowess", portrayed as typically masculine. By contrast, careers in caregiving professions such as in the area of healthcare and social work are presented as primarily suitable for women, with emphasis on "perceptiveness", "empathy" and "nurturance", viewed as typically feminine by the speaker.

This approach only strengthens the gender stereotype that men are better in technical disciplines and women in caregiving professions, restricting students' choices and supporting the traditional division of professional roles between men and women. The students who are present and perhaps do not suit the preconceptions of this stereotype might feel ashamed and this may also affect their choice of the line of studies they will follow.



Why are gender stereotypes harmful and how can they be prevented?

In our educational system and in our workplaces, gender biases are usually encountered in fields which are traditionally associated with one of the sexes (for instance, technical disciplines are presented as unsuitable for women, and it is suggested, or women are openly told, that they do not stand a chance against men because they do not possess the necessary talents for mathematics, and the like). This and similar attitudes lead to the formation of artificially gender-homogeneous environments which are openly or covertly discriminatory or hostile to the other gender. Members of the discriminated gender may choose to “preventively” avoid these disciplines or fields. This environment of gender inequality thus continues to grow and has become engrained in our society, which leads to negative consequences for the whole society and for our economy. Similar gender-based assumptions may also be encountered by men, for instance those studying in the programme General Nurse. Although gender stereotypes are formally condemned, they are not seen as a significant issue and for this reason, they are often overlooked by our society. If they are used by a teacher, the discriminated student may feel humiliated and powerless as their abilities are only viewed through the lens of their gender. Moreover, generational barriers exist in this area, as the older generation often perceives these stereotypes as some sort of tradition (unconscious preconception), while the younger generation views them as an encroachment of their internal integrity – something which they indeed are.

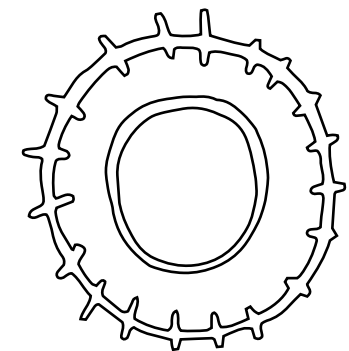
A responsible teacher should consciously challenge and counter gender stereotypes and the related biases, which is not always easy. As gender stereotypes are deeply entrenched in society (and ourselves), it is complicated to even recognise them because we are inundated with them on a virtually daily basis in pop-culture, the media, advertisements and literature. They may be concealed as comments passed off as banter or other seemingly “innocuous” or “flattering” comments, often within contexts which do not seem to be problematic, something that is typical particularly for a gender-homogeneous environment.

However, they may also come in the form of openly hostile verbal behaviours, or sexist, “unwanted or unconscious” behaviours originating from socially engrained assumptions about the behaviour and preferences of the individual sexes, which are also projected into communication. During instruction, and generally within any communication, it is a good idea to avoid the seemingly “innocent”

phrases and idioms containing gender stereotypes, such as:

- be a man
- man up, stop being such a girl
- manly / effeminate and similar expressions which reflect gender stereotypes (masculine – strong, courageous vs. feminine-weak, cowardly)
- prima donna
- (to be) such a drama queen

Generally, fostering a gender diverse environment is a good prevention of gender stereotyping as it naturally steers us towards using inclusive or gender neutral language. Both teachers and students should strive to create an inclusive, equal and friendly environment for all.



2.4 Gender sensitive communication and forms of address

Gender sensitive or inclusive forms of address

In a lecture, a psychology professor speaks about the importance of leadership roles in corporate settings. When describing successful managers, the professor solely uses masculine pronouns, such as “his management style”, “his courageous leadership” or “his ground-breaking contribution”, overlooking examples of women managers and their contribution in the area of business.

In this way, women are excluded or marginalised by the use of language as it encourages the idea that only men can aspire to leadership positions. This may have a negative impact on female students who could get the feeling that they cannot aim for prominent leadership and management roles.

It is important that universities and their teachers are sensitive to gender issues and use inclusive language that is welcoming for all students regardless of their gender. This means using general expressions (e.g. „chairperson” instead of “chairman“), providing examples involving both genders, and actively supporting equality and equal opportunities for all students.

Gender-sensitive/inclusive forms of address

The term inclusive language may be understood as an effort to promote social inclusion and gender equality. In practice, we may also come across terms like gender neutral, gender-balanced and gender-blind language, or non-gendered language. Inclusive language should be non-sexist, sensitive, neutral and gender-balanced. It is characterised by the use of expressions which are not discriminatory, humiliating, pejorative or offensive. **Use of gender-neutral words is preferred**, such as chair, chairperson, teammates, etc. The aim of using this language is to emphasise equality. It is necessary to respect the ways in which people prefer to be addressed. You may easily “misgender” a person (i.e. use the wrong pronoun or form of address). If you are not sure, you can simply ask which pronouns the person prefers. You can ask this question privately, or you can ask the whole group directly, or using a questionnaire. You can then note down the preferred pronouns into the attendance list.

Another gender-neutral form of address is using gender neutral pronouns like “they” or “ze” instead of “he” or “she”. Inclusive language is also characterised by excluding derogatory names for nationalities (such as Gringos for the Americans, Limeys for the English or Frogs for the French), promoting racial equality (using Roma instead

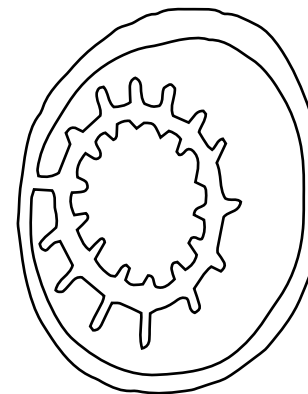
of Gypsy), avoiding so called “ageism” (stereotypes and discrimination against individuals or groups on the basis of their age) and so called “ableism” (discrimination and social prejudice against disabled people): instead of “wheelchair bound” use “wheelchair user”, instead of “the handicapped/the disabled” use “disabled people” or “disabled”.

Implementation and mechanisms

To implement the aforementioned principles, gender-balanced and inclusive language should be used at all levels of communication – in internal and external, formal and informal communication, in emails, social networks as well as web pages.

Impacts of gender-insensitive forms of address

Language is a living organism which changes together with society and reflects its values and way of thinking, i.e. its attitudes, behaviours and perceptions of reality. The use of gender-balanced and inclusive language is not only a matter of so called political correctness, it promotes equality and mutual respect. If an individual's wish to be addressed with a specific gender expression is disrespected, this may reinforce so called gender dysphoria (in this context, this means discomfort in connection with their body and their social perception), especially in non-binary and trans people.





3.1 Examinations and consultations

Description of the situation

Examinations and consultations of topics covered in instruction belong to the basic instruments of education. Primarily individual (one-on-one) examinations or consultations are associated with risk. Their monitoring, or their impartial evaluation by an independent observer, is difficult. Problematic behaviour or conduct can occur on both sides, for instance a student's level of knowledge may be ridiculed (even a primary school pupil would know this), gender stereotypes may be used against a student (a woman's place is in the kitchen, not a science lab) or emotional blackmail may be used by those examined (I didn't have enough time to prepare because ...). Especially teachers should standardise their conduct during examinations and consultations as it is their behaviour that will shape the future moral standards and conduct adopted by students. If a teacher treats students without the sufficient degree of respect, it is highly probable that in the future, the students will consider this to be the common and acceptable approach.

Standard (i.e. expected and socially safe) conduct

Examinations: Both the teacher and the student(s) behave professionally and focus solely and exclusively on the purpose of the examination, i.e. on verification of the student's level of knowledge. Professional approach does not necessarily mean that the conduct needs to be overly formal. Students often appreciate friendly and collegial atmosphere, however, it is imperative **that crossing the border of social safety as it is defined in Chapter 2 above is prevented.**

This specifically means that:

The teacher:

- provides examination dates and timetables which always make participation of more students possible
- observes the predefined form of examination which remains the same or very similar for all students with the exception of adjustments for special needs students
- prefers written form of examination which enables more objective assessment of the student's performance (i.e. it is not discriminatory) and is safer (there is a lower risk of abuse, harassment, manipulation and the like)

- in oral examinations, the teacher prefers an arrangement where besides the examined student, there is also another student, or another examiner and the like, present
- if only one student registers for a specific date and time, the teacher asks another person to be present at the examination
- if presence of at least one other independent person cannot be arranged, the examination does not take place behind closed doors
- sticks to the topics which are to be covered by the examination
- communicates respectfully with the student (including non-verbal communication), observes the examination timetable, dress code, and the like
- provides assessment of the student's performance both in the form of a grade (or as per the requirements specified for the subject in the information system of the university), and also in the form of formative assessment, i.e. the teacher provides a transparent justification of his or her assessment

The student:

- behaves respectfully towards the teacher at the examination, this finds expression not only in the student's respectful communication, but in the fact that they arrive on time for the examination, are adequately prepared, observe the dress code, are not under the influence of intoxicating or psychotropic substances, including alcohol, avoid using vulgar language, and the like
- focuses solely on areas related to the topics of the examination
- does not exert any pressure on the teacher to change the date or time of the examination, or to change the question they are to answer in the exam, or the student's assessment or grade
- complies with examination rules
- respects the teacher's personal space and avoids doing things which might give rise to a risk situation

Consultations: With any necessary modifications, the above rules for examinations may also be used for consultations. For better predictability, students should receive information about organisation of consultations in advance from their teacher who should also inform students about the regular consultation times and location. Teachers should not offer consultations outside of university premises (offices or classrooms) and outside the teacher's working hours at all. Institutional emails and online platforms of the university should always be used by both teachers and students for the arrangement of a consultation. Students should only use consultations for discussing

issues to do with understanding and practicing the specific topics which are taught by the concerned teacher. Students should be able to clearly formulate their requests and stick to the subject matter

How to recognise unsuitable behaviour

- communication takes place unofficially and through other than the university communication platforms
- the offered or selected place and time of the consultation or examination are unsuitable
- questions venturing into (often personal) areas other than the subject matter of the consultation / examination are asked
- there are efforts to leave no trace or retrievable record of the consultation
- nobody else but the direct participants are informed about the consultation / examination

3.2 Instruction and examinations outside the premises of the University of Ostrava

Petra is a university student at a skiing course organised off-site. The doctor teaching at the course who is on first name terms with Petra from the start of the course, a thing which was ok at the beginning, is becoming overfamiliar with Petra and her conduct crosses the line of a professional relationship. She addresses Petra with nicknames which are unpleasant for Petra. Under the pretext of correcting her body position during skiing lessons, the doctor starts to touch Petra unduly on her back, shoulders, or hips. The doctor also makes inappropriate comments about Petra's appearance and asks questions about Petra's personal life. Petra feels awkward. She did not expect things would turn out like this at the course but at the same time, she is unsure if maybe this is the customary way, and fears that if she objects, she might be ostracised by other students or the doctor. This is an example of harassing conduct committed by a teacher against a student at a skiing course outside school premises. The doctor has crossed the line of a professional relationship, and the result is a situation which is unpleasant and humiliating for Petra.



Description of the situation

Theoretically, any educational activities which take place outside the instructional premises of the university may be considered as associated with more risk, as they are less formal than traditional on-site instruction. Still, these activities belong to important, and often irreplaceable, forms of instruction, so their elimination is not the solution. On the other hand, individual consultations and other forms of individual instruction should not take place outside the school. If this is not possible, the teacher should carefully consider what form is suitable for the specific type of consultation or instruction, and offer the form that is acceptable for the student(s). The possibility to meet online should primarily be considered. Group instruction is less problematic but the right choice of a setting that is acceptable for the students is still necessary.

Teachers should keep in mind that the desired standard of instruction and respectful treatment of students should be maintained also in case individual or group instruction takes place outside university premises. In turn, students should understand that this form of study is also part of their duties and that the same degree of participation in these educational activities and respectful conduct towards other students and teachers as is usual in standard instruction is expected. The forms of off-site instruction which are associated with perhaps the highest risk are multi-day stays and trips. Besides educational activities, these forms also involve other activities and free time which teachers often spend together with their students. With regard to this, it is necessary to point out to all participants that even in their free time, they should not cross the line of a teacher-student relationship

Prevention and recommendations

There are no rules or documents of the University of Ostrava specifying the organisation of off-site consultations. However, at minimum, the following rules should be observed:

- attempt to organise consultations so as to avoid holding any consultation activities outside the university
- generally, teachers' and students' conduct must comply with the Code of Ethics of the University of Ostrava and with general ethical standards
- when organising events at which students are staying outside university premises, teachers' interaction with students takes place in public areas and never individually, i.e. with one student in a private space

- if its not possible to avoid holding the consultation outside university premises or at an irregular hour outside the office hours, the teacher takes up full responsibility for the course of the consultation, including the possibility that the situation will be misused against the teacher; if an off-site consultation cannot be avoided, the official channels of communication used by the university are the recommended platforms (such as the official email, MS Teams, ...) if possible.

3.3 Off-site events

Lucy, an employee of the university, takes part in an off-site conference. A party is organised for the participants as part of the conference. At the party, Lucy's superior is very friendly with her, hovering in her vicinity all the time. Lucy feels flattered at first because her superior does not pay so much attention to her at work. When Lucy starts to speak with other people at the party, he always tries to stay close and attract her attention, and this makes Lucy feel uncomfortable. The superior touches Lucy all the time, embraces her without her consent and tries to get her attention. When she tries to avoid this unwanted attention, he follows her the whole time and tries to isolate her from other colleagues by cutting across her conversations or asking her for a dance repeatedly. He also makes improper comments about Lucy's appearance. This unsuitable behaviour makes Lucy feel uncomfortable and threatened as she cannot move and communicate with others freely and feels obliged to spend time with her superior even though she would rather spend the evening with other colleagues.

Description of the situation

The informal setting of off-site induction courses, excursions, work meetings and parties may lead some participants to think that different rules apply here. However, participation in a field trip, induction course or off-site work meeting does not mean that teachers, students or employees can disregard the rules set out by the Code of Ethics of the University of Ostrava and other binding documents of the university. Both groups should do their best to maintain moral integrity and avoid situations which lead to social safety violations. The conduct of teachers and other persons in charge of courses or off-site work meetings should be informed by the fact that they are obliged by the internal regulations of The University of Ostrava. Students and employees are likewise obliged to act in compliance with these internal regulations of the university. Departing from the above principles may give rise to a situation of social safety violation.



Situations associated with risk

- consuming alcohol and addictive substances
- inappropriate physical contact (touching someone without justified reason or without prior indication; for more details, refer to the section “**Touching**”)
- personal / intimate topics of conversation (questions about partners, sexual orientation, ...)
- presence of a teacher and a student / a superior and a subordinate in a private space (bedroom, bathroom, and the like)
- selection of unsuitable activities given the composition of participants attending the event (activities excluding some participants due to for instance the physical demands, choice of topics which may hurt some participants, sauna, ...)

Recommendations

- Avoid consumption of alcohol and addictive substances. Teachers and managers should understand that even if alcohol and substance consumption takes place after working hours, they still have a moral responsibility to act in compliance with social safety rules, and they still are the responsible person in charge.
- If physical contact is necessary between a teacher and a student / a superior and their subordinate or mutually between teachers / mutually between students, it is always necessary to announce and explain in advance the need for such contact. Everyone should have the possibility to refuse touches that are not absolutely necessary.
- Any intimate topics, sexualised overtones and innuendo, sharing of sexualised content (photographs, videos), questions about political views, religious beliefs and the like are considered unsuitable.
- If staying alone with a student is necessary, or cannot be avoided, the teacher assumes full responsibility for how things will develop, and understands that the situation may be misused against themselves. The same applies to superiors and subordinates.
- All activities should be planned respecting the participants' physical limitations. In case difficult or sensitive topics are to be discussed within the event, it is a good idea to notify of the topic in advance and excuse those who might perceive it as too painful or personal from attending the discussion.

3.4 Touching in the workplace or during instruction

Karel is a student of violin and attends lessons of violin technique. During one of the lessons, the teacher slightly corrects the position of Karel's right hand and shows him the correct bow hold. The teacher places his hand on Karel's right hand to show him the correct bow hold and pressure. This touch is uncomfortable for Karel who perceives it as improper. However, this touch is justifiable in the circumstances as it is part of violin instruction and serves the purpose of perfecting violin technique. The teacher is trying to help the student improve his skills and performance.

Students should have the possibility to express their feelings and fears about the touching in these situations. Teachers should respect, and be sensitive to, the boundaries that students have and their comfort. The student should openly discuss with the teacher how he feels about the touches and together with the teacher, they should find a solution that respects both the student's need to feel comfortable, and the need for effective instruction.

The Touching must never venture into students', or employees', intimate space, and must not be “abused” in any way. We should keep in mind that even if we do not cross the line of socially acceptable conduct (e.g. a handshake), or encroach on someone's personal space, there may be students or employees in whom even this type of contact arouses negative feelings. For this reason, if it is necessary to approach a student or an employee because we need to touch them, we have to inform them in advance where we are going to touch them, and possibly also ask for their consent. Touching should be limited to places which are requisite for instruction-related or work-related purposes, and should not last longer than necessary.

It is useful to bear in mind that students/subordinates may not recognise whether the touching is necessary and whether it is performed appropriately, and may feel awkward and perceive the touching as a form of harassment. Or they can even admit that the touching is necessary and they have to suffer it, but this may still be a source of unpleasant feelings for them.

Why is “usual” touching perceived by some as unpleasant:

- a handshake (which is a social act and should not last longer than 3 seconds) is longer than usual (and often accompanied with unpleasant staring in the eye)
- the cordial “slap” on the back or shoulder is not usual or appropriate between a teacher and a student / a superior and a subordinate



- even though there are areas of the body where social touching is “allowed”, there may be people who find even this touching (a handshake) unacceptable and inappropriate
- we should bear in mind that there are people who like contact (they frequently touch others in their non-verbal communication and often violate people’s intimate zones) and there are people who prefer to keep a distance and protect their personal space and that of other people around them; when these two types meet, conflict may ensue
- another thing to keep in mind is that students or employees may come from different cultures and that we need to accept these cultural differences, i.e. what is allowed in this country does not have to be acceptable in another culture, and the other way round

How can you deal with unwanted touching?

Trying to deal with the situation informally may act as the first line of defence. This is a good way of setting the boundaries in case the touching is part of the educational process repeatedly, i.e. the touching is justified but you still feel uncomfortable about it. Even if the touching is not part of instructional activities (i.e. takes place between students, for instance), you can still first warn the perpetrator informally how uncomfortable you feel about it.

When dealing with the situation informally:

- it is important to deal with the first signs of unwanted touching right away as the other person might not even be aware that what they consider as “normal” is unpleasant for you
- the easiest way is to explain how you feel to the concerned person directly, i.e. in person; if you are afraid of personal contact, you may opt for written form and describe in writing the specific situations which occurred and which you perceive as unpleasant or inappropriate
- you may also ask your fellow students/colleagues about their perception of the situation but keep in mind that even though the touching was unpleasant for you, others may think of it as “normal”; even if you are the only one with this negative perception, go ahead and deal with the situation
- if the person whom you informed about the situation did not accept your request or attempted to belittle the situation, it is important to deal with it using the formal procedure and to contact the person’s superior, you can also use the tools of the **Social Safety System of the University of Ostrava (i.e. proceed via contact persons or the ombudsperson)**

3.5 Informal and coercive communication

Thomas is a university student who came to sit for an examination. The associate professor teaching the course starts to communicate informally with Thomas during the exam, being overfamiliar and putting on the airs of superiority. While Thomas addresses her “Mrs. associate professor”, she addresses him “Tommy”. The professor also makes some jokes about Thomas’s last examination, which he failed, and her behaviour makes him feel unsure of himself and humiliated. The situation is embarrassing for Thomas as he is aware that the associate professor violates professional standards and fails in creating a fair environment for the examination.

It is important to understand that every student is entitled to just and respectful treatment. Overfamiliar communication on the part of teachers may make students feel insecure and this may also affect their examination outcomes.

3.5.1 Informal communication (form, time)

Catherine is a university student. When she was working on a seminar paper, she communicated informally via social networks with the teacher when consulting him about the paper. Catherine perceived as unpleasant that the teacher sent messages also on weekends and at night, but she thought this would end once she hands in her seminar paper. However, the teacher’s communication continued even after she completed the course and he started to send private messages which contained inappropriate and personal information and invitations to various events unrelated to her studies.

Catherine feels awkward and uncertain because she is not sure how to refuse such inappropriate communication without getting pulled into a conflict with the teacher. She does not want to cause trouble at school but at the same time, she knows that this communication is inappropriate and unprofessional.

Is informal communication a necessity?

Informal communication is communication which:

- is not regulated by predetermined rules adherence to which is generally expected
- usually does not take place on official communication platforms of the university (email, MS Teams, Moodle) and instead, telephone and online channels are preferred (such as SMS, Messenger, WhatsApp, and the like)
- typically takes place outside standard working hours / instructional times
- frequently concerns things or topics unrelated to instruction or work

It is true that the university relies on informal communication means to disseminate useful information to employees / students and contribute to good relations at the university. But if an individual starts to use it to deal with specific work-related or study-related issues, informal communication may very often become an inappropriate, if not harassing, form of communication which may not be easy to bring to an end and which may give rise to unpleasant consequences.

Informal communication may be conducted in various directions. Teachers/superiors may communicate informally with their students/subordinates, but it may also be the other way round. Informal communication naturally takes place between employees and between students, and this is where this form is expected, but still, one of the communication parties may perceive informal communication as harassing, and the degree of formality and intimacy of the communication is always of importance.

How to cope with informal communication

If a teacher/student or a superior/subordinate:

- asks for your private telephone number or social network profile, you have all the right to refuse the request assertively and, ideally, to offer another communication alternative relying on official communication platforms of the university
- asks you for friendship via a social network, you have the right to refuse the request, you may for instance say that you only use social networks for private purposes and offer communication via MS Teams
- sends you information that is not related to your work or study, use the official communication platforms of the university to ask him to stop this activity and keep further communication limited solely to professional or academic matters
- sends you information which is of very personal or intimate nature, notify your superior about this situation and ask them for help, or use the **Social Safety System of the University of Ostrava** and ask for assistance from contact persons or the ombudsperson

3.5.2 Coercive communication

Martin works as a project manager. His superior decides that he wants Martin to take over management of yet another project which is very demanding for Martin and exceeds his capacities. The superior wants Martin to accept responsibility for management of the project but this is something Martin does not want to do.

The superior uses coercion and manipulation to convince Martin. He regularly convenes meetings with Martin and other colleagues and pressures Martin into taking over the project. He uses manipulative tactics to induce a feeling of guilt in Martin, saying for instance that the employer is going to lose a lot of money if Martin does not take it over. The superior also speaks of the advantages which Martin could gain and creates the impression that Martin's career progress could be faster if he grasped the opportunity. The tactics used by the superior include instigating fear of negative consequences for Martin, such as receiving negative work assessment or lower bonus payments. Martin knows that taking over this project is way beyond his current possibilities. He feels exploited and fears that his professional reputation and goodwill with superiors may be lost.

What is coercive communication and how to recognise it?

Coercive communication may be considered a form of manipulation, i.e. an effort to influence another person's thinking through hostile tactics. Manipulators try to convince their targets to consider as right certain ideas, opinions, or actions which are not an expression of the manipulated person's will and which the manipulated would not otherwise adopt or take in the specific situation. At the beginning, most manipulators put an effort into becoming friends and gaining the trust of their victims. Manipulators often rely on their charisma and knowledge of vulnerabilities in their target's communication. Victims often do not realise they are being manipulated.

Manipulation falls into two basic categories:

- direct (coercive) – the manipulator tries to force their will on you using coercion; this type of manipulation is mostly used by individuals who may act from a position of power (superiors)
- indirect (tactical) – the manipulator uses various methods to get around another's mind and will, and devises methods to get what they want from others

Coercive communication may in fact occur at any time – during instruction, examinations, consultations, (off-site) meetings, field trips, excursions, induction courses, or events organised as an extracurricular activity, and the like.



The manipulator may resort to coercion at a moment when they are unable to find a better motivating element than force or intimidation, or when they conclude that manipulation is the most effective solution. Manipulators think of coercion as something that falls within their powers. Even though their behaviour is intimidating, they find excuses for it, saying, for instance, that they are only summing up the objective impacts of a situation and the decision is solely up to the other person. This is also asserted by them in case that retrospectively, the manipulated person decides not to accept the concerned obligation, or in case the manipulated person fails to discharge it. Manipulation can also be characterised by pressure for quick decisions so that the manipulator can take the manipulated person by surprise and give them very little time to think things up, despite time not being of essence for the solution. The manipulated person is often caught off guard by the manipulating conduct and loses the ability to accurately assess the situation and thus avoid possible problems inherent in the obligation. **Looking back, the manipulated usually realises that they are being manipulated, and they may lose faith in themselves (“they always get me where they want me”).** They may end up being overloaded with work on a long-term basis which may affect their physical and mental health.

The warning signs of manipulative communication include:

Coercion: The manipulator may use pressure and extortion to achieve their aims. They may for instance use threats to force you to do something you do not want to do.

Ambiguity: The manipulator may use confusing and misleading information to convince you to do something that is not in line with your values or interests.

Flattery: The manipulator may use compliments and positive feedback to win your trust and loyalty.

Exaggerated emotions: The manipulator may exaggerate their emotions to force you to do something you don't want to do. Crying, fury or fits of anger can be employed by them to get you where they want you.

Gaslighting: Gaslighting is a form of psychological manipulation and emotional abuse through which the manipulator tries to sow seeds of doubt in individuals or groups of people being their target, making them doubt their own memory, perceptions of reality and even their sanity.

Prevention

In their communication, people frequently try to achieve their goals, sometimes even pushing the boundaries to beyond what is ethical, i.e. by consciously employing manipulative techniques. Knowing

that such techniques exist and having at least some theoretical knowledge about these techniques can do a lot to improve our ability to recognise such conduct and protect ourselves against it. Adopting the principles and techniques of non-aggressive but at the same time assertive communication is another useful tool.

Reveal as little as possible about yourself to the manipulator.

The less you tell them, the less can be weaponised against you.

Do not respond to requests which are not formulated clearly.

Manipulators communicate their wishes, needs and requests using vague and unclear formulations.

Take notes. Write down any important statements and positions directed at you by the manipulator, and anything that you have agreed. You will have specific arguments you can use once the manipulator starts to retract or change their opinion, or if they say this is something they never said. Take minutes of your meetings which both parties should verify.

Refuse communication mediated by another person. If the manipulator does not want to participate in something, they try to keep a distance. When they need you or some information, they use a go-between.

Be wary of flattery. What does the flatterer mean? Is it just pretence? Well, this is something you can only find out with time. The manipulator's aim is to make a good impression on everybody, to appear likeable and friendly, and be full of praise.

Team up with others. Unity means power in some cases and may be especially useful if you are not sure about the situation. Together with your colleagues, you may even be able to disprove the manipulator's claim that they are acting in common interest. Knowing you are not alone in it will lift a lot of weight off your shoulders.

Stand up for yourself. One of the most important interpersonal skills is to be assertive and stand up for yourself without being aggressive. When you speak with a manipulator, ask him/her clearly, “Does this have anything to do with what we are discussing here?”, or, “Your question has nothing to do with the subject of this meeting. Could we stick to the agenda?” Staying calm and expressing your surprise, perhaps with a smile, is often enough: “I'm sorry, I don't understand - why are you telling me this?”, and so is ignoring the manipulation and sticking to what you want to say.

Don't be afraid to say 'no'. If you sometimes turn down someone's request and refuse to do something, this just means that you are setting your boundaries. It does not mean that you reject the other person entirely.



The key to creating a socially safe environment is prevention, education and assertion of healthy communication and respectful conduct at the university. Observing the basic rules set out in the Code of Ethics of the university, respect to every person's boundaries, perceptiveness, transparent communication and consensus are the stepping stones to achieving this goal. Social safety is an area emphasised by the University of Ostrava. The university created a system for dealing with issues to do with social safety and every student or employee of the university may turn to competent staff with their problems, confidentiality of such communication is guaranteed. The term social safety expresses an ideal condition of the university environment in which the conduct and actions of all stakeholders are naturally guided by the principles of collegiality, integrity, equality, respect, openness and responsiveness to others, and in which any form of inappropriate behaviour, threats, aggression, bullying, harassment or discrimination are considered unacceptable, regardless of whether they are directed against a student or an employee.

4.1 Social safety at the University of Ostrava

Some specific recommendations on how to formally or informally deal with social safety issues at the university are provided directly in the individual chapters of this guide. Below, you can find the general procedure to be followed when dealing with these issues or with ambiguities and related inquiries formally, and this procedure is available to all students and employees.

Write a letter to the harasser

We recommend addressing the harasser using institutional email as the first step to take when dealing with inappropriate conduct of any person at the university. Explain how what they are doing affects you and why you consider their behaviour to be inappropriate. It is also possible to use a formalised letter for these purposes. The contact persons can help you draft one. In your letter, or at a personal meeting, inform the other person of the following:

- provide a factual description of what happened
- describe how this affected you
- suggest what should be done

If this does not lead to resolving the situation, turn to your line manager/superior and consult with them what other steps you can take.

Use the electronic communication system of the University of Ostrava (“Nenech to být - NNTB”)

If communication with the concerned person did not lead to the expected result and an employee/ a student is not sure what the right procedure to follow is, or if, in fact, it is really necessary to deal with the situation in any way, anyone at the university may inquire with

contact persons at the individual faculties or ombudspersons at the individual faculties or the ombudsperson of the University of Ostrava

and do so either anonymously or in their name. Use the QR code or the link below to enter the “**Nenech to být - NNTB**” electronic communication system of the University of Ostrava for whistleblowing. For your information, the meaning of the Czech expression used in the link is “**Don’t let it be.**” This system makes it possible to deal with any social safety area confidentially. It is available to all students, and academic and non-academic employees of the university, including participants of lifelong learning courses, applicants for the state comprehensives (Rigorosum) examination or foreign exchange students. You can communicate both anonymously and in your name in this system.



Contact the Counselling and Career Centre

Counselling and Career Centre of the University of Ostrava offers psychological and other counselling services for both students and employees. You can seek assistance of the centre if you need to consult the concerned issue and its resolution. Rector's Order: Social safety at the University of Ostrava.

Ombudswoman of the University of Ostrava and ombudspersons at the individual faculties

The ombudswoman acts across all components of the university within areas to do with social safety of academic and non-academic employees and students. Ombudspersons' activities (and activities of the other social safety instruments of the university) are characterised by:

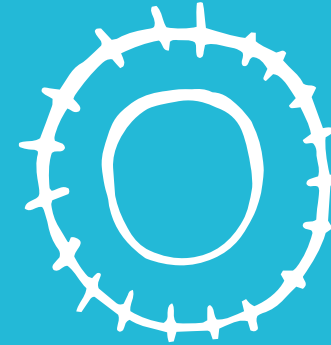
independence, i.e. nobody can assign tasks or propose solutions to the ombudsperson within an ongoing investigation

impartiality, i.e. the ombudsperson must inquire into any and all cases submitted for assessment and treat all parties of the conflict with the same respect and empathy

ombudspersons have the powers to request cooperation from all students and employees of the university when dealing with cases

ombudspersons have the obligation to issue recommendations for resolution of the individual cases, and to verify their implementation by individual the parties

Within the University of Ostrava, there is an ombudswoman at the Medical Faculty for students and employees of the Medical Faculty, and there are ombudspersons at the Faculty of Arts who offer assistance solely to students of the Faculty of Arts.



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