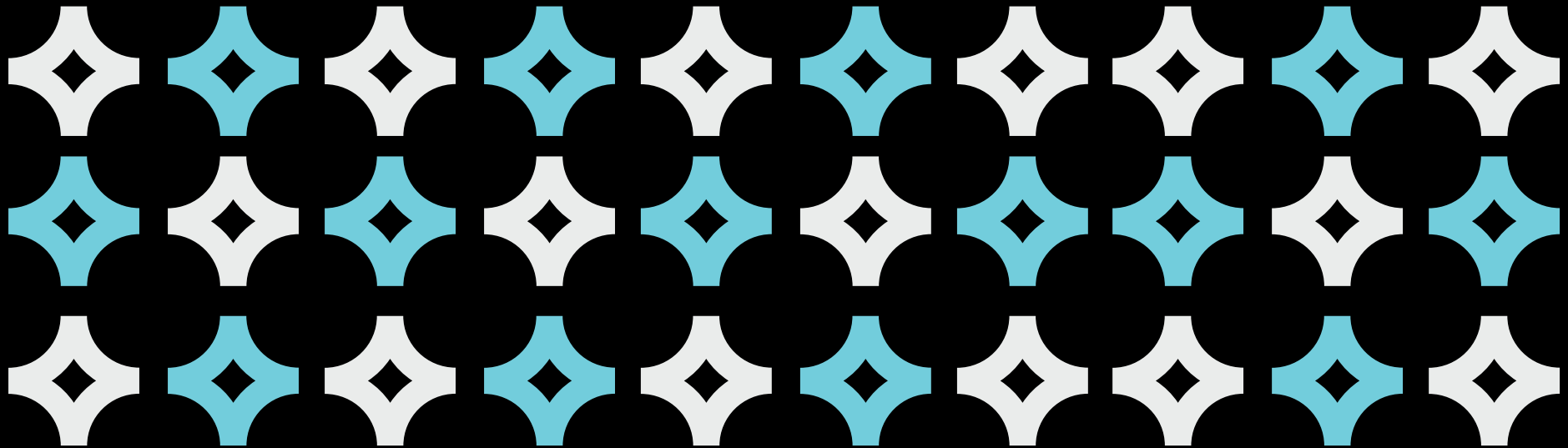


Preventing and intervening in harassment situations - Guide for associations



aalto-yliopiston ylioppilaskunta
aalto-universitetets studentkår
aalto university student union

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Foreword and Trigger Warning

This guide was written because associations contacted AYY to request training and common guidelines for reacting to harassment and other difficult situations. Associations wanted to hear more about what they can do ensure participants at their events felt safe and to have well-trained harassment contact persons (HCPs). The Aalto community has spoken, loud and clear: Everyone should be able to be themselves and enjoy their time at Aalto without having to fear harassment.

The information, examples, and cases in this guide are a result of close work with associations at Aalto. Best practices were identified in a workshop where participants discussed common situations occurring

in association events, and actions taken to ensure the safety at events and other activities. The guide contains practical guidelines for event organizers and case studies to practice with.

A word of warning: As harassment contact persons, you are likely to encounter cases that can make you very uncomfortable. This guide's case studies are quite reflective of that reality, and you might find them disturbing. In the worst case, they may retraumatize you if you've experienced psychological or physical violence in the past. Please make sure you've cleared the skeletons out of your own closet before you take on this important community role.

Safer space principles

Building a safer space

Safer space principles typically describe a space where people can participate in activities / a group:

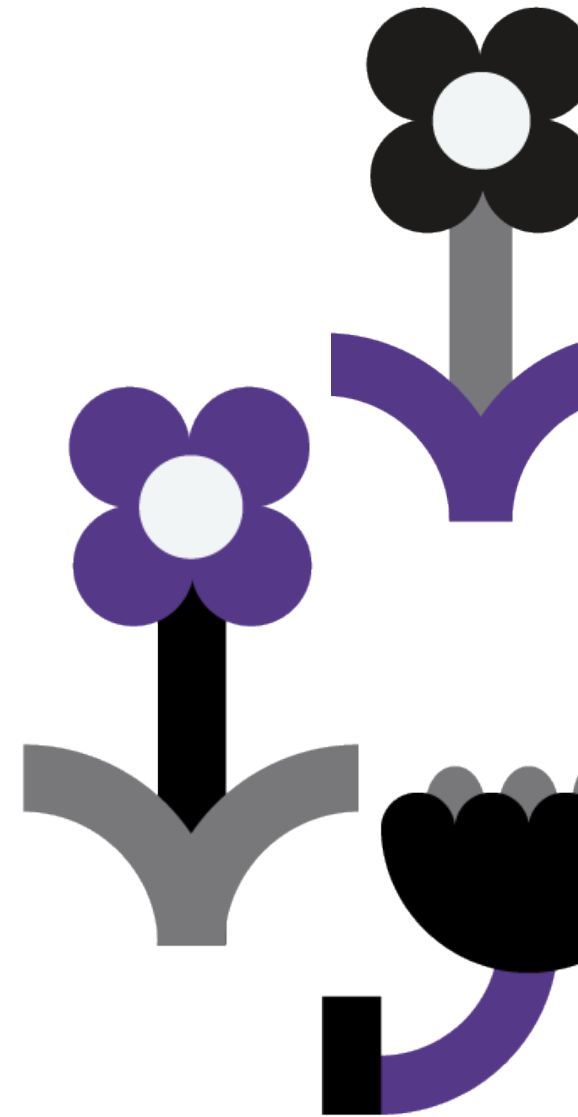
- as themselves, regardless of association with any kind of identity or minority group
- as equals
- without fear of judgement / persecution
- and take responsibility for their own mistakes
- and disagree safely

How this looks in practice depends on community needs.

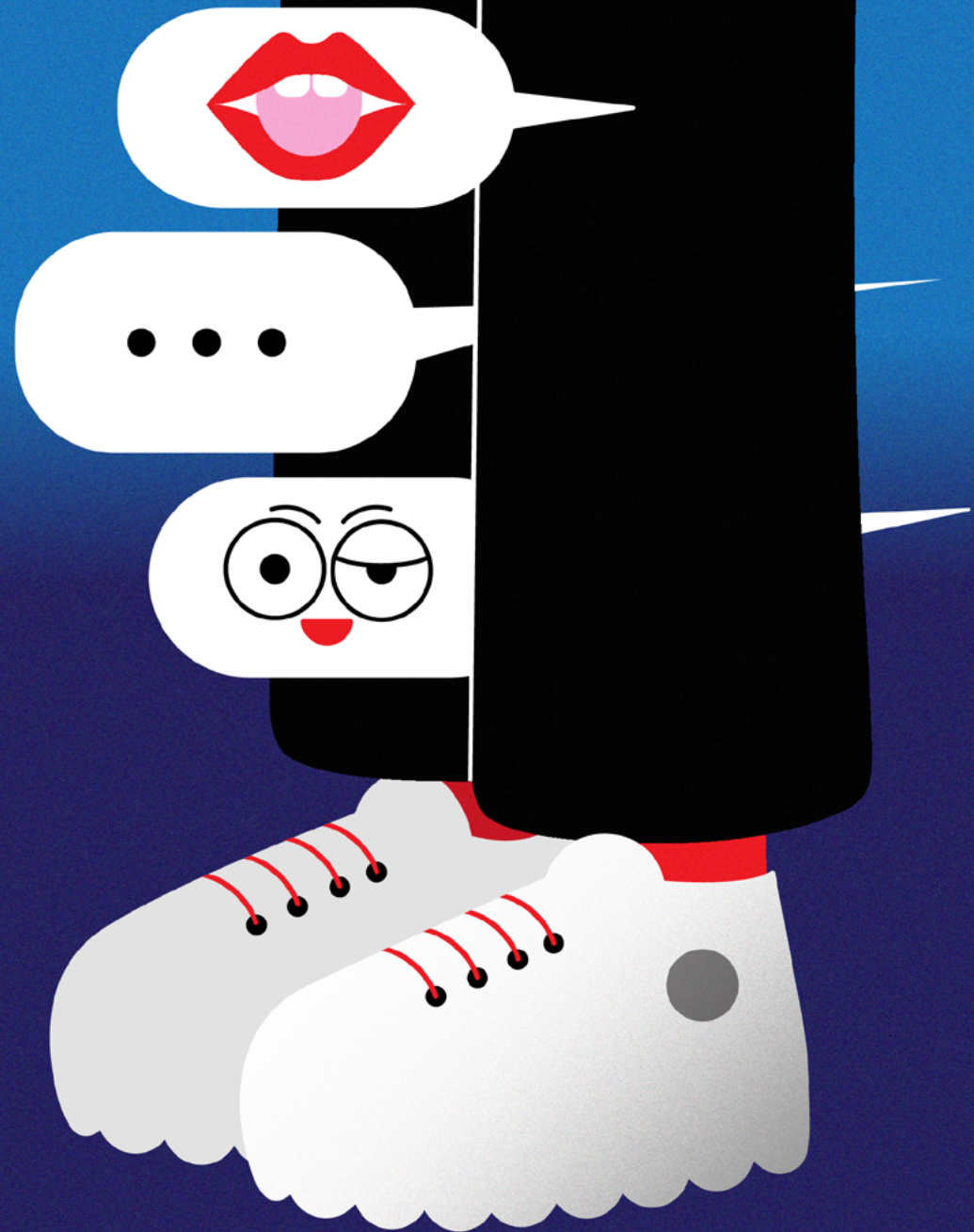
How do we write one to suit our needs?

Discuss with your community:

- What are some concrete things you need to feel safe? These can be fairly practical, e.g., "no jokes about race or sexuality"
- What are some things that decrease your sense of safety? e.g. "when I am singled out and told to say something"
- What are some principles that we, as a group, can agree to together?



Inappropriate conduct within the Aalto community



Common issues

AYY collected data on types of issues harassment contact people were contacted about between April 2021 – July 2022. There were a total of 55 times AYY's equity officeres were contacted due to issues related to harassment. The following issues are most often reported to AYY:

Sexual harrassment (15)

Undefined (13)

Offensive jokes (6)

Hate speech (5)

Marginalization (4)

Physical violence (4)

Stalking (3)

Intimidation, pressuring (3)

Offensive images (2)

Those contacting AYY considered the prevalent factor in the cases to be:

Intoxication (10)

Gender (9)

Undefined (9)

Revenge / jealousy (7)

Mental or physical disability (4)

Ethnic background (3)

Association with an LGBTQI+ minority (3)

Nationality (2)

Other personal trait (2)

Religion was never framed as a prevalent factor

In some cases, AYY was simply contacted to for advice (6)

Sexual harassment

The most commonly reported form of harassment - in AYY's data, it is almost exclusively male to female harassment.

Sexual harassment can take the form of

- unwanted attention
- sexist / sexual jokes
- sexually suggestive language
- pressure to have sex
- non-consensual physical contact

Under Finnish law, sexual assault is defined as any kind of physical contact that interferes with a person's right of sexual self-determination. This may include many forms of unwanted sexual contact.

Non-physical sexual assault, on the other hand, is covered by the equality act, which deems that any kind of speech or action that places another person, in a compromised

position based on any personal trait (i.e., sex, gender-identity) is a crime.

When in doubt, report! It's the job of law enforcement officers, not yours, to identify and investigate sexual harassment.

Offensive jokes

Offensive jokes reveal power asymmetries between groups, and normalize the features and customs of those with more power whilst mocking, dehumanizing and/or exoticizing those with less power.

E.g.

- white people exoticize racialized people through humour
- CIS-gendered men make demeaning jokes about trans-women
- able-bodied people mock the mentally and physically disabled

Hate speech

A close relative to offensive jokes – hate speech reveals power asymmetries between groups. However, the manifestation is not typically humorous. It is also typically very public, aimed to vilify a group of people or shake their sense of safety.

Offensive images

Very similar to offensive jokes. This typically takes the form of stickers, memes and photos shared on digital forums and/or public spaces.

Marginalization

A person may be marginalized when they

- are left out of or denied entry into a group
- do not have fair and equal access to goods, services and/or social networks
- feel uncomfortable participating in groups or events without concealing or altering aspects of their identity
- feel discriminated against on the basis of a personal trait, such as gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious and/or political beliefs

In Aalto, marginalization often takes the form of

- being left or kicked out of group chats
- not being invited to social events
- not being fast enough to get tickets to social events
- being left out of discussions and having limited access to information due to not understanding the language
- cliques & groups that engage in-group jargon and customs that are not explained to those considered outsiders

Physical violence

Physical violence can take the form of hitting, kicking, pushing, and other forms of using force. Physical violence can happen through objects, too, such as knives, bottles, rocks, planks of wood, flower pots, doors, etc.

Stalking

Stalking is unwanted contact or attention directed towards one person in a way that makes that person feel nervous, afraid or in danger. It causes the person to change their behaviour in order to avoid contact with the stalker.

This often takes the form of repeated unwanted calls, text messages, and/or frequent "chance" encounters.

Intimidation / pressuring

When a person feels that they have to say something or perform an action against their will in order to avoid consequences of some kind, they are being intimidated or pressured.

Very often, in the Aalto setting, this takes the form of pressure to consume alcohol or to accept certain views against the risk of social exclusion.

Examples of harassment situations

- The board of an association is on a cottage trip and one member gets too close to another person. They are told to stop but won't.
- In a party a participant touches another participant inappropriately without consent. They are very drunk.
- An active member of your association tells you that a board member keeps telling jokes that they find hurtful. The board member thinks the jokes are funny.

It is crucial to understand that harassment can take place in many different situations and in different forms!

Contacting the police

When to contact the police

A recurring concern when considering whether to contact the police are questions such as

- "Did a crime actually happen?"
- "Will the police actually do anything?"

Our answer to this are as follows:

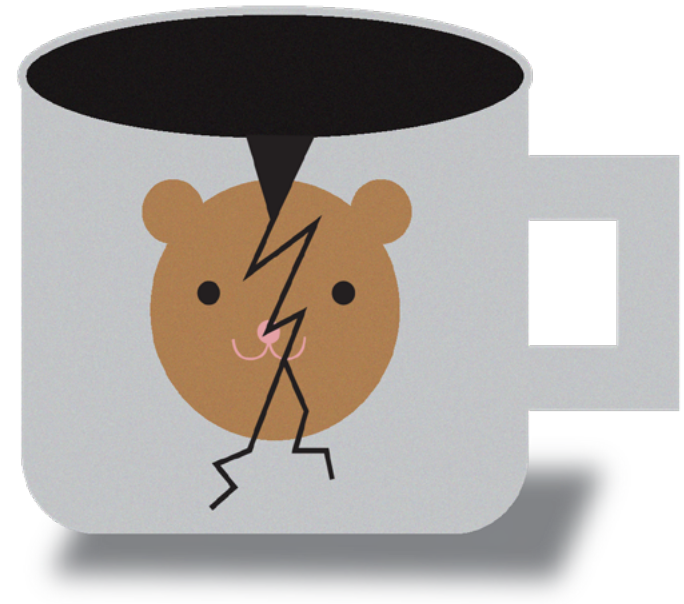
- It's the police's job, not yours, to find out if a crime happened
- Even if it turns out nothing can be done, just by reporting a crime, you are adding to statistical knowledge of issues and thus affecting how resources will be directed in the future

How to contact the police

- The police have a duty to investigate all reports they receive.
- It is possible to file a criminal report online at <https://asiointi.poliisi.fi/en/yksityis/rikos>
- Police helpline: +358 (0)295 419 800
- Use the police app: <https://112.fi/en/112-suomi-application>
- In an emergency, call 112. You can do this in any language, as the police will recruit emergency interpreters and / or be able to locate you based on your telephone signal

Questions: Misunderstandings

- What kinds of things can be considered a misunderstanding?
- When do you think a misunderstanding / accident excuses the act?
- When does it not?
- How can the matter be discussed in a constructive manner?



Being a harassment contact person



The role of the harassment contact person

Harassment contact persons can:

- listen impartially
- refer people to more suitable services if needed
- brainstorm ways to resolve the issues with conflicting parties
- mediate discussions between community members
- help identify and name inappropriate conduct when there is uncertainty
- support those who wish to report a crime to the police

Harassment contact persons should not:

- take sides or represent the views of either side of a conflict
- “punish” anyone
- demand and analyze evidence
- publicly discuss the cases or tell others about it without permission

An HCP's area of responsibility is social events. The university can help in academic processes, although an HCP can certainly be a support person in academic disputes.

When rules and procedures have been agreed upon and in advance, HCPs can enforce penalties as described in event rules.

HCPs typically mediate between two parties to resolve community disputes and harassment cases.

Support for harassment contact person

You are not alone!

It's important to speak about difficult things with someone such as

- A psychological professional
- A support group consisting of all the harassment contact persons
 - Sensitive matters can (and should) be discussed anonymously
- AYY's harassment contact person
- Wellbeing ambassadors and Aalto services (Starting Point of Wellbeing, etc.)

If a matter feels too personal to you it's more than okay to ask another harassment contact person to take care of that situation!

**You are
not alone!**



Questions: Support for harassment contact person

- What kinds of support mechanisms are in place for you as the HCP?
- If there are none, is it possible to set up or join a group?
- What are some situations where you feel you may react in a biased manner? Reflect upon these.
- What will you do if a matter feels too personal to you?

Preventative measures

Before an event

During an event

After an event

In everyday life



Before an event

Communicate clearly to participants on who the harassment contact people are

- Names + contact information in event description / sign-up
- Post to FB event / Instagram a picture presenting the harassment contact people

Have people agree on acting according to safer space principles in the sign-up

- This can just be a toggle 'I have read these and understood that if I don't obey these I will be kicked out of the event'

Figure out a safe and empty space that can be used when debriefing harassment situations

During an event

- Introduce the harassment contact people at the early stages of the event
- Have harassment contact people wear something that they can be recognized from such as an arm band
- Keep a form open for people to report harassment
- Posters with QR codes and/or bitly links in bathrooms and elsewhere

Act responsible

- Don't get wasted
- Don't joke about harassment issues
- Take all reported issues seriously and debrief them
- Write down everything you are told during the conversation!

After an event

If possible, gather feedback from the participants

- Did they witness or face harassment in any form? If so, what was the situation?
- Did they feel safe and welcome at the event?

You may need to continue processing situations that took place and contact other people, such as AYY or the police if necessary

In everyday life

- Make sure everyone knows who the harassment contact people are and what they do
- If using a web page, then list them there
- Have a form with the possibility to anonymously report open at all times
- Gather feedback from actives and board members throughout the year
- Ensure that the traditions continue when onboarding new members

**Building trust
in the process –
self reflection**



Obstacles and overcoming them

Obstacle: People don't know who to report to

- Ensure that everyone knows who the harassment contact people are

Obstacle: People are ashamed of reporting

- Emphasize that there's nothing to be ashamed of
- Give the opportunity to report anonymously

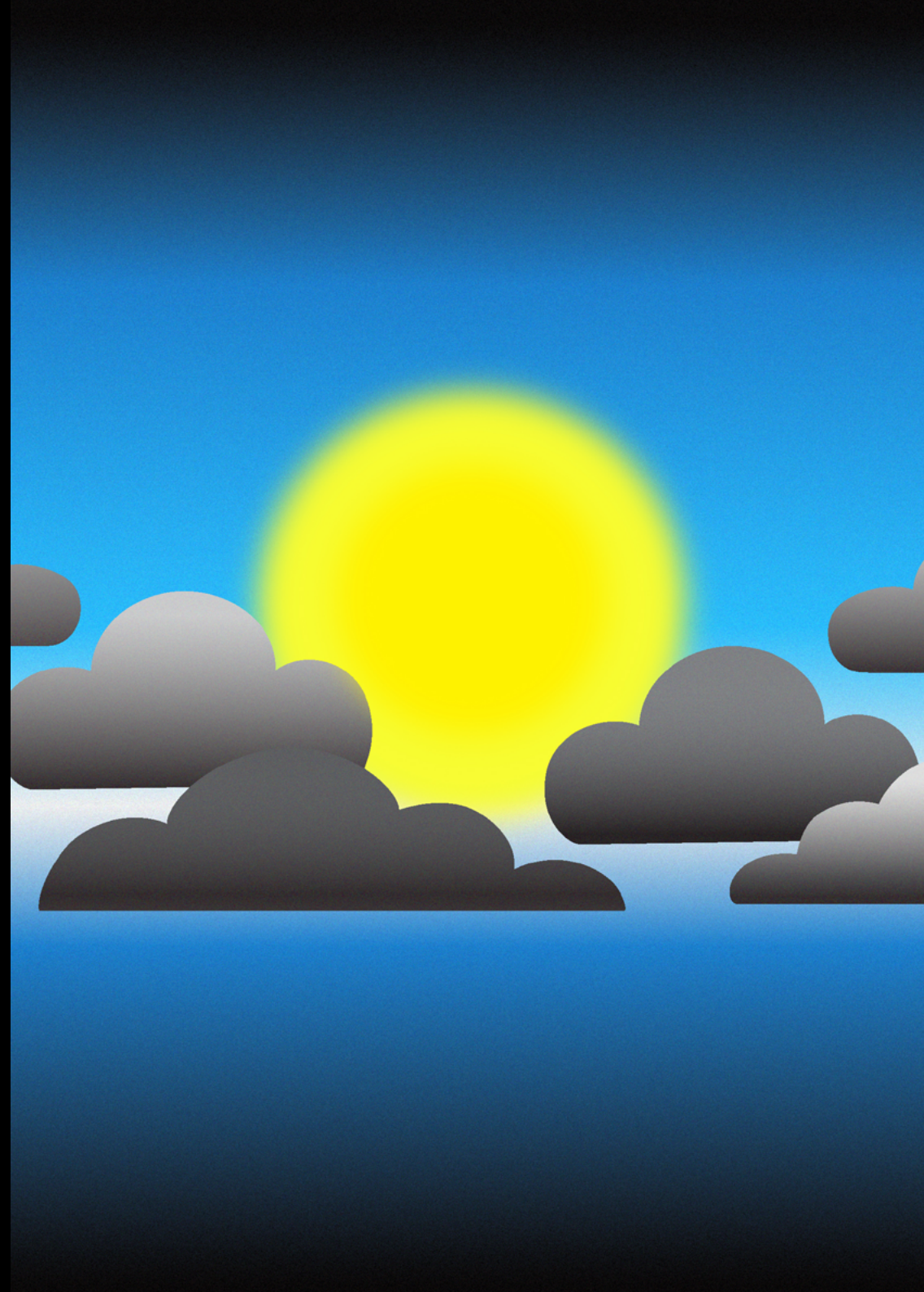
Obstacle: People don't feel comfortable talking to the harassment contact people

- Have harassment contact people that represent different demographics
(for example, have a man and a woman rather than two women or two men)

Questions for discussion and reflection: Obstacles and overcoming them within your own association

- How would you ensure that everyone knows who the harassment contact people are?
- What might increase willingness to report cases of inappropriate conduct?
- How might the size and structure of your association and the activities it organizes impact the way your own harassment contact persons will have to work?

Resolution of incidents



What is a conflict?

Any time two people or groups of people (parties) interpret an event in a different manner, or disagree over what is right and wrong, there is the potential for a conflict.

Quite often, parties to a conflict will resolve a disagreement spontaneously simply by:

- being asked what they think happened
- reflecting on how it may have affected the otherparty, and
- being given the opportunity to take responsibility for their own actions

Cornering, accusing or punishing often escalates a conflict.

What is conflict resolution?

Resolving a conflict through mediation involves the following steps

- Understanding the points of view of those involved
- Describing the conflict
- Making a plan to resolve the conflict
- Committing to that plan
- Writing down a concrete plan is often helpful. In some cases it is even good to have parties sign the plan and agree on a schedule for follow-up

Who should resolve the conflict?

Don't steal another person's conflict!

It is important that the people who are at the centre of the conflict also own their conflict and are able to take steps to resolve it.

As the HCP, it may be tempting to resolve cases quickly, but more often than not, this means a solution is being imposed upon the parties in a conflict based on your own interpretation of events.

Instead, allow the parties to the conflict to express how they understand events and express how they would like the conflict resolved.

When should you ask for help?

As HCP, it is important to remain calm and neutral. Therefore, do ask for help if / when:

- You notice you are on one party's side
- The case is evoking strong feelings in you
- You are not sure what to do
- You feel threatened
- You assume what either one or both of the parties must be feeling without them having explicitly told you

When/where should a conflict be resolved?

Place

Make sure the place you discuss the conflict

- is safe
- is quiet
- is comfortable
- doesn't introduce power dynamics (e.g. you are not separated from the parties by a desk)

Time

- Typically, the sooner a conflict is resolved, the better. Over time, people's interpretation of the event becomes hard reality, and it can be more difficult to process what has happened.
- However, in cases where someone is clearly in shock, it can be important to give a little bit of space to process events.

What should I do before resolving a conflict?

Before beginning, make sure both parties

- know you are impartial
- understand your role is to facilitate reaching a solution
- commit to listening to the other party and can wait their turn patiently
- speak about their experience of events, and won't engage in debate over what objectively happened or did not happen (that kind of discussion is the domain of a court of law)

If either of the parties have a support person, please make sure that person understands they probably won't be given a turn to speak.

What are some good questions to ask in a conflict situation?

There is no objectively correct way a conflict resolution should go, but below are some example questions to move you forward.

To understand the conflict:

"How do you understand what happened?"

"What do you think occurred?"

To process the conflict:

"You heard how X interpreted events. How does that make you feel?"

"What kinds of thoughts / feelings did those words evoke in you?"

To brainstorm solutions:

"What would you need to feel better about this situation?"

"What are some concrete things that could be done to make you feel better?"

Case Studies

Warning: Contents may be triggering to some readers

Case I:

Turtle Enthusiasts of Otaniemi are organizing a sitz event at Smökki. There's about 150 participants and everything has gone well during the sitz. Once the afterparty starts, people are very drunk and dance with their friends.

Suddenly Anh, a board member of Turtle Enthusiasts, notices a tall and strong looking man dragging a smaller woman outside by her hand. Anh knows that they have been dating for a month or so. It looks like the woman is crying but the man just keeps on pulling her forward even though she is clearly resisting. People are eyeing them but no one is really doing anything.

Anh doesn't know where the chairperson is and Turtle Enthusiasts don't yet have harassment contact people within their association. However, she knows that some other association's harassment contact person is present but Anh isn't sure about how drunk he is.

What should Anh do right now? What should Turtle Enthusiasts do to ensure this doesn't happen again?





Case 2:

Aadit is the chairperson of Aalto FI club. He is holding one-on-one conversations for each board member in April to hear their thoughts about being a part of their club. One board member, Anna, is quiet during their conversation and Aadit doesn't really get any answers from her. However, in the next interview when Aadit asks another board member, Laura, if she has anything he should know about, Laura starts to tell him about an incident. She says that in their first cottage trip as a board in January, Riku raped Anna. Aadit is shocked to find out about this, especially since Riku is one of his closest friends. There's no way that Riku could've done something like that, he thinks. A few days later, Aadit has one-on-one conversation with Riku and decides to ask him about what Laura said because that's all he has been able to think about for the past days. Riku is greatly insulted by Aadit's accusation and tells Aadit that nothing even remotely like that has happened. He admits that he has had feelings for Anna but insists that he's never acted on those feelings.

What should Aadit do?

Case 3:

Liam is an exchange student in Aalto for a semester. He's from the USA. An association – KY International – asked him to come and tell about his experiences to one of their non-alcoholic events. He gladly agreed and spent hours perfecting his presentation.

During his presentation he wants to give the audience a chance to ask or comment the presentation. He sets up a Mentimeter in which people can send messages anonymously and they show up on the screen. About 10 minutes into his presentation, the feed starts to fill with insulting remarks about Liam being trans.

Liam starts to feel extremely anxious and it's hard for him to keep going. He looks desperately into the audience and finds the chairperson of KY International, Erika. She has clearly noticed that something is going on and seems to be shocked about the turn of events. In addition, she is the person who invited Liam to hold the presentation and the person who is responsible for the event.

What should Erika do?



Case 4:



The weekly meeting of Travelers of Espoo takes place every Thursday. Sammy is a one of the harassment contact people of the association. After one of their weekly meetings, an active member, Sofia, asks Sammy to stay for a while. Everyone else leaves and Sofia tells Sammy about how she feels insulted that a board member ,Teemu, is constantly telling jokes about her appearance.

Sammy has also noticed this but has found the jokes funny rather than insulting and thinks that everyone else in the association agrees with him. Sofia says that the jokes are too personal and make her feel truly uncomfortable. She doesn't want to hang out with Teemu anymore and insists that Teemu should be kicked out of Travelers of Espoo.

The association doesn't have any specific rules about how to act in situations like this. They have never kicked someone out, though. Still, Sofia seems truly hurt and is crying. Sammy also notes to himself that kicking out a board member requires a new general association meeting.

What should Sammy do?

Case 5:

Eero is a part of a Telegram group that was created for selling secondhand items to other students. The admin, Hanna, oversees the conversation and if necessary, gives out warnings and kicks people out.

Since he's moving to a new place, Eero decides to sell some of his stuff. He posts pictures and descriptions of those items to the group. One of the things he's selling is his old TV. He has given the details of the model in his 'for sale' announcement. A member of the Telegram group, Lara, asks "What kind of game consoles is it possible to connect to the TV?" Eero doesn't really know since he isn't that into gaming and feels frustrated that the person couldn't figure it out herself. Therefore, he answers "why don't you google it yourself." Lara doesn't answer Eero's message. After half an hour Eero gets a notification that he's been kicked out of the group by Hanna. He doesn't understand why and asks Hanna for clarification. Hanna explains to him that his message is considered bullying and it upset Lara, also it doesn't follow the groups rules. Eero tries to look for the rules but can't find them anywhere. He feels like he's being shut out of the community unfairly.

How should the situation be resolved?

