

Guidance on Civility and Violence

It is the policy of Northwestern University that all members of the University community, including faculty, staff and students, are expected to deal with each other with respect and consideration. When a community member's conduct varies from this standard, it is the responsibility of the manager, chair or dean who supervises the person engaging in the conduct to address it.

This policy covers a broad range of behavior, from rude or obnoxious behavior on one end of the spectrum, to threats of violence and violence on the other. The level of danger in the behavior determines the action that the supervisor should take.

Guidance on Handling Issues of Civility That Don't Involve Imminent Threats of Violence

Disagreement is common in professional relationships, particularly in an academic environment that encourages discussion and debate of ideas. In many instances, disagreement is voiced in a respectful manner, and in such instances, no action by the supervisor is necessary. In other instances, disagreement that begins as a respectful exchange of ideas can escalate into behavior that is disrespectful. Name-calling, raised voices and petty meanness are examples of this.

Any individual who believes he or she has been treated in a manner that is inconsistent with this policy should contact his or her supervisor. It is then the responsibility of the supervisor, whether a manager, chair or dean, to work with the individuals involved in addressing the situation, so that all members of the community can work together in a professional way.

The manager, chair or dean is obligated to contact someone with administrative authority if the conduct escalates to the point where a member of the community reasonably believes that physical harm might occur. Examples could include behavior lacking rational control, such as angry outbursts; intimidating comments or verbal abuse.

Sometimes, a threat to safety may not be apparent in the first encounter but may be noticeable after repetition or increased severity. Repeated behavior that initially appears merely obnoxious may show a pattern in which danger to safety is perceived if the behavior continues.

When administrative authority is needed, an individual may contact:

- Department of Human Resources, for staff members
- Vice President for Student Affairs, for students
- Office of the Provost, for faculty

The administrative authority will:

- Provide guidance on University policies and procedures, intervention strategies, counseling and prevention.
- Brief the administration and University Relations as needed for informing the public and coordinating broad emergency response as appropriate.
- Initiate steps for disciplinary action, as appropriate.

Guidance on Issues Involving Imminent Threats of Violence.

When faced with a threat of violence or violence, the individuals involved should immediately call for police assistance.

After police assistance has been sought, the individuals should notify the appropriate supervising or administrative authority. The administrative authority will:

- Call for additional emergency assistance if needed

- Notify the Office of General Counsel, as appropriate
- Coordinate crisis counseling through Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), or the Faculty and Staff Assistance Program (Perspectives, Ltd., phone 800-456-6327.)

A note on weapons

Northwestern University policy prohibits weapons on campus. Toys or other items that look like weapons can provoke fear or reactions as if they were real, and such items should be avoided. Stage props and parade weapons are permitted but should be used in those settings where their use will not be misunderstood.

Advice in the presence of a threat

A person who encounters a threatening situation may find the following suggestions helpful in coping with it:

- Ask the person to come back when he or she feels calmer.
- Acknowledge the person's feelings but do not argue. Avoid defensive statements.
- Move and speak slowly, quietly, and confidently to reduce the tension of the situation.
- Focus your attention on the other person to demonstrate your interest in what he or she has to say.
- Calmly excuse yourself from a situation which appears threatening, if possible
- Move away from any object, such as scissors or heavy objects, that could be used as a weapon.
- Calmly ask the person to place any weapons in a neutral location while you talk with him or her.
- Maintain a relaxed yet attentive posture, and position yourself at an angle rather than directly in front of the other person.

Advice for preventing violence

If you feel at risk or threatened by someone:

- Don't assume that you caused the situation; the other person's reaction may indeed be unreasonable.
- Tell someone, if only to check your own perception of the behavior.
- Get help as described above.
- Don't hesitate to take action.

Are you violating this policy?

Some of us are surprised to learn how others view our behavior. Here are some suggestions.

- Review your attitudes and actions toward others. Could your words or actions be interpreted as intimidating, threatening or violent?
- Consider the impact you have on others' attitudes toward their work, education and self-esteem.
- Examine how others respond to what you say and do.
- Do not assume that colleagues, peers, employees or students enjoy roughhousing or violence-oriented comments.
- Do not assume that others will tell you if they are uncomfortable or afraid of what you say.

If you think you may have offended or harassed someone:

- Apologize as soon as possible.
- Change your behavior toward this person
- Get advice from Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), or the Faculty and Staff Assistance Program (Perspectives, Ltd., phone 800-456-6327.)