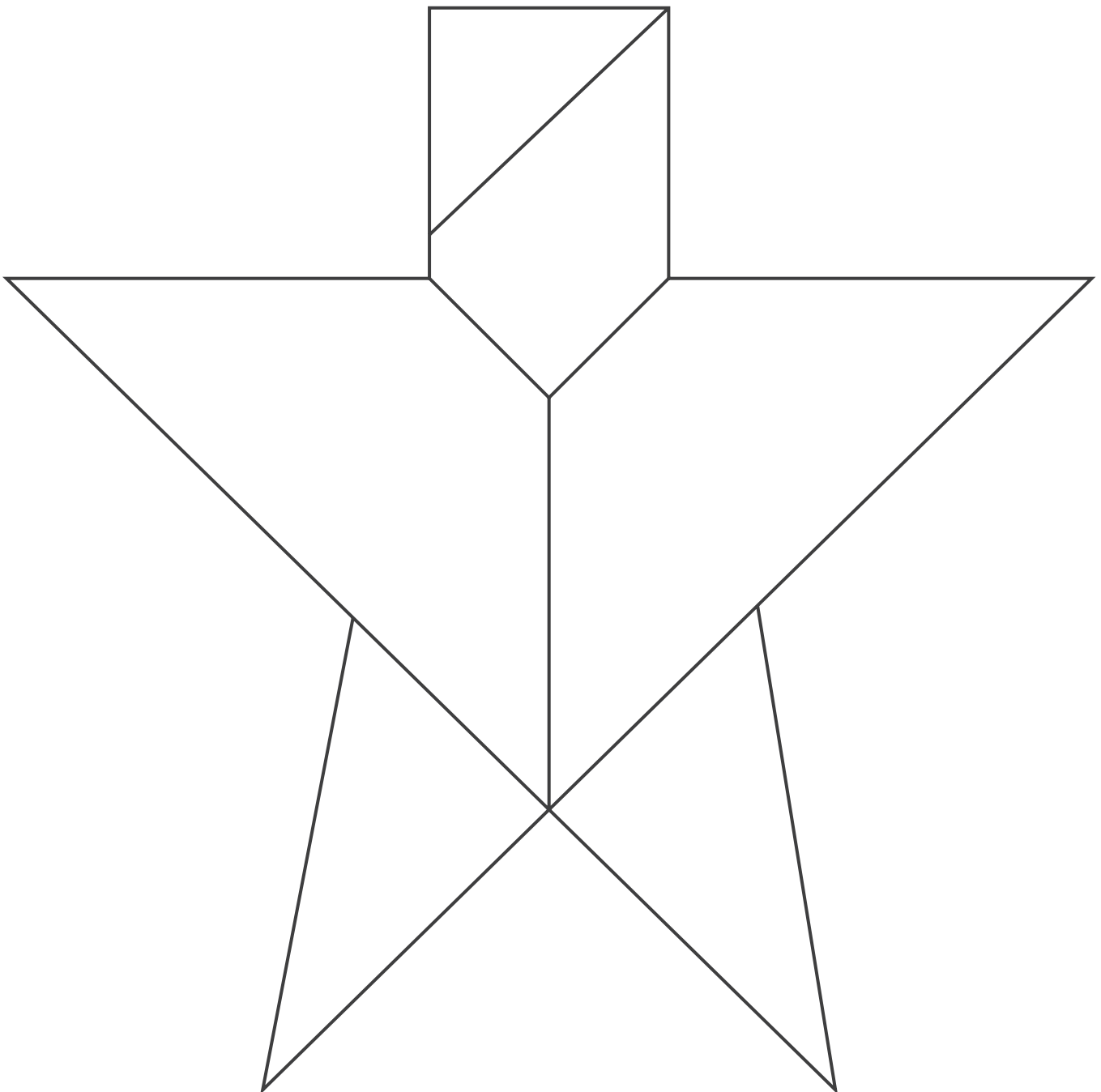


Preventing and dealing with abusive behaviour

Guidelines for staff and students of VIA University College



Colophon

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PREVENTING AND DEALING WITH ABUSIVE BEHAVIOUR

Foreword

At VIA, we treat each other with respect and orderliness. It is our joint – and everyday – responsibility, as staff, management and students, to actively and clearly prevent, identify and deal with abusive behaviour. It is also our joint duty to promote a culture that encourages an open and trusting dialogue, inclusion and mutual respect.

Abusive behaviour can be an act and it can be failure to act. It can be words; it can be a silence. Abusive behaviour is not clear-cut; it demands a common language to navigate around. Therefore, VIA has developed these guidelines as an aid to identify abusive behaviour and act against it.

As a student, staff member or manager, you have the right and duty to speak out if you yourself experience abusive behaviour or if you are aware of others experiencing it. Therefore, you have the right to speak out against abusive behaviour without it affecting your work or study life at VIA. This is how we ensure a safe everyday environment based on trust and respectful behaviour.

Yours faithfully

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VIA's guidelines

VIA University College distances itself from any kind of abusive behaviour and works actively to create security and respect in and around the work and study environments throughout VIA. Abusive behaviour is a collective term for behaviour that is perceived as abusive, including, but not limited to, bullying and sexual harassment. Abusive behaviour can be both doing something actively, but it can also be failing to act.

Examples of abusive behaviour include:

- Hurtful remarks
- Slander or exclusion from the social and professional community
- Being shouted at or ridiculed
- Unwanted sexual attention
- Physical assaults or threats thereof
- Hostility or silence in response to questions or attempts at conversation
- Abusive phone calls
- Abusive written messages, text messages, pictures and/or videos, including on social media
- Being put down or humiliated, e.g., due to age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religious beliefs, appearance, etc.

Everyone at VIA – management, staff, external teachers and students – have a shared responsibility to actively prevent and treat the above behaviour with respect.

The associate dean of an education programme is responsible for ensuring that the staff on the education programme know the “Code for dealing with unacceptable behaviour in” and know how inquiries regarding abusive behaviour committed by students are to be dealt with.

Both staff and students have the right and duty to speak out if they themselves experience abusive behaviour or are aware that others are experiencing it.

VIA has clear guidelines on how to react if abusive behaviour is experienced. Measures against abusive behaviour are divided

into three phases: 1) prevention, 2) management and 3) follow-up.

1) Preventing abusive behaviour

At VIA, we work actively to create a study and workplace culture in which we work against abusive behaviour with joint guidelines.

A healthy culture in which abusive behaviour does not take place is characterised by:

- Agreeing that abusive behaviour is unacceptable.
- A good mental work and study environment, a good tone, space for openness, smiles and mutual respect for each other.
- The experience that everyone has a joint duty to prevent abusive behaviour.
- Being aware to one's own and others' boundaries and the right to express those boundaries.
- Trust in the community, i.e. staff, colleagues and students, and trust that we can and have the right to speak out when others cross our boundaries.
- Discrepancies being dealt with in the run-up.

Management plays a special role in the prevention of abusive behaviour. Managers and others involved in asymmetric power relations have a particular responsibility to act professionally and objectively in all respects. It is management's responsibility to take on the management of the culture and tone in daily life, by, for instance:

- Clearly stating that abusive behaviour is unacceptable.
- Encouraging a good everyday tone and practise early and clear management and leadership in the event of signs of collaboration problems, conflicts, bad manners or abusive behaviour.
- Putting the issue on the agenda at regular intervals, for example, at departmental meetings, in local select committees and in TRIO, calling for openness and joint responsibility for the issue and ensuring that everyone knows about VIA's guidelines.

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- Taking responsibility for being equipped for the managerial duty of preventing and dealing with abusive behaviour with relevant knowledge and tools.

In preventing abusive behaviour, staff and students are expected to take joint responsibility for a culture in which there is respect for each other's boundaries. At VIA, everyone has the right and duty to speak out against abusive behaviour, and we maintain a good tone – even when we disagree.

2) Dealing with abusive behaviour

A person's experience of having been subjected to abusive behaviour must always be taken seriously.

The people involved in an abusive act can often experience the situation differently. Therefore, it is vital not to draw hasty conclusions and to listen to the statements of all parties involved.

If, in a work or educational context, you experience acts punishable by law, such as rape, attempted rape, violence, racism or such like, VIA strongly encourages the person in question, in addition to involving the management, to also report the matter to the police.

You can read more about your role as a manager, staff member or colleague in dealing with abusive behaviour in the overview "How VIA acts against abusive behaviour". A similar overview for students can be found on Studienet.

How should you, as a manager, deal with reports and incidents of abusive behaviour?

As a manager, you have a duty to deal with reports and instances of abusive behaviour immediately. Contact HR, who can give you advice and help you further. This applies both to if you are contacted by a member of staff/student and if someone makes you aware of abusive behaviour. It is a matter of putting an end to the inappropriate behaviour as soon as possible with the greatest possible care for the parties involved.

A guide has been prepared for managers, which describes in more detail how management should deal with abusive behaviour. The guide can be found on Medarbejderportalen. See too "Code for dealing with unacceptable behaviour in students", which can be found on Medarbejderportalen and on Studienet.

What can you do, as a member of staff/colleague, if you experience abusive behaviour?

If, as a member of staff, you experience being subjected to abusive behaviour, you should – depending on the severity of the case – first try to resolve the situation yourself by speaking out and making the other person aware that you feel abused. If this does not resolve the situation, or if the violation is serious, you should contact management or your union/work environment representative immediately. You are encouraged to contact your immediate manager, but you can also choose to contact their manager or HR, depending on the situation.

Management is obliged to help you and deal with the situation in collaboration with you. Openness around the episode and those involved gives the manager the best possibility for action. Therefore, we encourage you to be as open and honest as possible and to enter into a dialogue with your manager about finding a solution that ensures that the unwanted behaviour ceases.

A report of abusive behaviour will always be treated with respect and with the greatest possible confidentiality. However, you must be aware that if management is to have the opportunity to act formally on your experience, it will be necessary to inform and hear the alleged abuser about the instance/episode. If you do not wish to do so, management can instead act by, for example, placing a general focus on abusive behaviour in the department and paying special attention to the situation(s) described. However, in cases of particularly serious abusive behaviour, management may be obliged to act regardless of your desire for confidentiality. It is management's responsibility to see that the case is dealt with so that the necessary considerations regarding both you and the abuser are taken into account in the process.

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If, as a colleague, you become aware of abusive behaviour, you must first take care of the vulnerable colleague by caring, listening and helping the person further to the right help and support (see above).

The abused person can always turn to a colleague in confidence.

What can you do, as a student, if you experience abusive behaviour?

If you experience being abused by a fellow student or member of staff at VIA, you have the right to speak out. If you experience situations that you perceive as abusive, it is recommended that you talk to other students or your teacher about it. You can also contact the student counsellor or the student psychologist. See more on VIA's contact page: [Help in case of abusive behaviour](#).

If you experience being abused by a member of staff at VIA, management and HR should be involved, e.g., contact the associate dean of your education programme. Management is obliged to help you and deal with the situation in collaboration with you.

A report of abusive behaviour will always be treated with respect and with the strictest confidentiality possibly. However, you need to be aware that if management is to have the opportunity to act formally on your experience, it will be necessary to inform and talk to the alleged abuser about the incident/episode.

Fellow students or others who are knowledgeable on abusive acts are encouraged to respond by showing care and support to the student who has experienced the abuse. You should help the person further to the right help and support (see above).

What should you do as a teacher/student counsellor if you are informed of abusive behaviour?

If, as a teacher, you experience abusive behaviour in a teaching situation, you have a duty to intervene and put an end to the abusive behaviour, for example, by stating that abusive behaviour is unacceptable at VIA. This also applies to external teachers.

If, as a teacher or student counsellor, you receive reports of abusive behaviour from a student, you must respond to the student's experience by showing care and support and ensuring that relevant measures are implemented to put an end to the unwanted behaviour. Please note that you have a duty to contact management if the report concerns a staff member at VIA, or if the incident is of a particularly serious nature.

3) Following up on abusive behaviour

Once a case of abusive behaviour has been dealt with, the manager and the parties involved should look back and consider what lessons can be learned to prevent it from happening again.

Management must follow up regularly on the collaboration and communication in the department, and consider any measures to prevent further episodes. Advice can always be found at HR in relation to this.

See more about your role as a manager, member of staff and colleague in the overview "[How VIA acts against abusive behaviour](#)".