

GUIDE

# WORK RELATED SOCIAL EVENTS – A GUIDE FOR MANAGERS



THE DIVERSITY PROJECT

# **WORK RELATED SOCIAL EVENTS – A GUIDE FOR MANAGERS**

The festive season has already begun and it's time to celebrate the year's achievements with colleagues, over a few drinks in a bar or at the office Christmas party. Everyone wants to have fun and work-related social events can be a great opportunity for staff to mingle and enjoy themselves. While good cheer should be the main feature at all such events, unfortunately poor behaviour can also arise, causing distress and difficulty for those concerned.

It can be difficult to know where the line stands for acceptable behaviour. Whether the party is in or out of the office it should be treated as an extension of the workplace and staff are owed a duty of care. Work-related social events are related to the company – it's not just a night out with friends.

It is also prudent to remember that anything taking place at a work-related event can be posted on social media.

Employers should take reasonable steps to ensure employees are provided an environment free from harassment and discrimination, inappropriate or exclusionary behaviour, or actions that may harm people or property.

The Diversity Project would like to share some easy-to-follow guidance, including a check list to help you and your managers navigate work-related social events.

## CONDUCT AND BEHAVIOURS

Remember that the usual policies governing conduct, such as bullying and harassment still apply at work-related social events.

Make sure these policies are easily accessible and digestible and remind employees and managers of them before events, so that individuals are refreshed on expected behaviours and conduct. Ensure managers make their teams aware and don't wait for the reminders from HR.

Take the lead, be a role model and pay attention to what happens at these events.

## EXAMPLES OF POTENTIAL INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR

Be alert for any inappropriate behaviour from anyone attending the event (this includes guests) such as the following;

- Offensive comments;
- Unwelcome sexual advances;
- Gossiping and spreading rumours;
- Property damage;
- Substance abuse; and
- Displays of aggression or fighting.

Provide supervision to prevent inappropriate behaviour and excessive drinking. It's a good idea to nominate specific senior staff to stay to the end of a party to ensure there is someone in charge. Intoxicated employees should be asked tactfully to stop drinking and if necessary, to leave the function with safe transport arranged to ensure they do not drive.

## DON'T TURN A BLIND EYE

At times behaviours around us might make us feel uncomfortable. We might witness things like discrimination, harassment, banter or bullying. When this happens, we can choose to say or do something, be an active bystander, or to simply let it go.

Unacceptable behaviour and conduct at work related social events may be explicit or more subtle and hidden. It could be an individual incident or a continuation of behaviour that surfaces at an event. It may be related to a protected characteristic such as age, disability, race, religion, sex, gender identity or sexual orientation. The following summarises what can be done:

**Stage 1: Notice** the event/behaviour

**Stage 2: Interpret** the situation

**Stage 3: Feel** empowered to take responsibility for dealing with it

**Stage 4: Understand** the steps to deal with the behaviour

If it is safe to do so, intervene and make sure that you report the incident after the event. This creates a culture of safety and trust if done well.

## INTERVENTIONS EXAMPLES

Intervening is the best way to be an active bystander should you witness inappropriate behaviour. If you feel comfortable to do so, below are some suggested interventions:

- Remove the individual(s) being impacted from the situation and move them to a safe space;

- Arrange for the removal of the perpetrator(s) from the venue if necessary;
- In the event of violence or substance abuse, contact the relevant authorities.

## **REPORT (AFTER THE EVENT)**

Any inappropriate behaviour reported after the event should be investigated and handled following the appropriate procedure for your firm. Please ensure that the subject of any inappropriate behaviours is safe and not retaliated against. Please provide support and refer to the EAP and/or the police, if appropriate.

Alternatively, you could also report via [Safe Space](#) or [safespace@diversityproject.com](mailto:safespace@diversityproject.com), which is a confidential additional route for help.

## **YOUR TEAM ATTENDING A WORK-RELATED SOCIAL EVENT ORGANISED BY OTHERS**

It is good practice to check in with your team, individually, on how the external event was. Make sure they know in advance that if any poor behaviour occurs, they should report it to their manager who will take appropriate investigative steps. We have found that several of the incidents reported through Safe Space relate to behaviour at an industry-wide event where people are unsure who to turn to, or whether anything will be done.

If you are told about such behaviour, depending on the concerns raised you may need to speak to your HR department on next steps, which may be to reach out to the organiser of that event. It should not go unheeded.

# CHECKLIST

- ✔ Refresh your knowledge of the relevant policies and approach HR if you have any questions.

- ✔ Have a conversation with the team regarding the company's conduct and behaviours expectations and be clear on what will be considered inappropriate behaviour;

- ✔ In the event that you witnessed any inappropriate behaviours at the event? What did you do? Did you intervene? What happened? What do you plan to do next? Does it need to go to HR? Try and note down key details as soon as possible.

- ✔ If possible, speak to the employee and explain that it is important to bring the matter to the attention of HR. Speak to HR. Play an active role in making sure that there is no retaliation against anyone involved.

- ✔ External events organised by other organisations: check in with your team member, if they raise concerns, speak to your HR department on next steps.

- ✔ Remember, share details of the EAP scheme and support the individual raising the concerns or complaint, ensure they are supported.

- ✔ Think carefully about an investigation process and be mindful that the individual may be feeling vulnerable. Consider allocating independent support during this time.

Employers and managers are responsible to ensure work related social events are there for everyone to enjoy. Employees should not say or do anything at a work-related social event that could offend, intimidate, embarrass, or upset another person.

Let's enjoy a fabulous festive season!

We welcome your thoughts on this document, please do get in touch via [info@diversityproject.com](mailto:info@diversityproject.com)

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