

TOOL 4.9

Checklist for Publicly Committing to Address GBVH and Model Respectful Behavior

- » **GOAL:** Outlines steps leadership teams can take to demonstrate commitment to addressing GBVH
- » **TARGET UNITS:** Executive Board, Senior Management, and Human Resources

Model Behavior and Speak Out

Commitment to address gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH) by a company's board of directors and senior management helps drive changes in company culture. It is important for leaders to model positive behavior and publicly demonstrate their company's commitment to preventing GBVH **to build confidence that complaints will be taken seriously.**

Steps a company can take include:

- **Board and CEO messaging and behavior** to raise awareness that GBVH is not tolerated and that workers who witness, hear about, or experience GBVH should raise concerns.
- **Recognition of workers** who make efforts to address GBVH and have adopted good practices. Company reward or praise in meetings, for example, can help encourage others to reflect on and change their behavior.
- **Establishing a senior manager tasked with driving change**, as well as other individuals who can play an important role in preventing and responding to GBVH. Focal points should demonstrate an interest in addressing GBVH (and have the right values), and the role should be included in their work program, with realistic time allocated to the role. Regular performance reviews should focus on role, tasks, and results. Regular reporting to the board can be explored to enhance accountability.
- **Agree how to communicate clear and consistent messages** about GBVH, both internally and externally with communities and service users. Simple, culturally sensitive messages about the behavior that is expected of employees are most effective (for example, "we support a safe and respectful workplace for all").

Encourage Workers to Think about Respectful Behavior on a Spectrum

Respectful workplaces operate in the GREEN, where a company's values are lived out, conflict is resolved respectfully, employees treat each other with respect, and when people make mistakes, they are reflective and hold themselves accountable. Any behavior that is not in the green zone of respectful behavior requires a response—but what

those responses look like varies depending on the context and level of the behavior and possibility for harm. Employees can shift across the spectrum in different contexts, so while they might appear to be in the green in some contexts, they may not be in others.

Encourage workers to reflect on their conduct and strengthen respectful behavior.

FIGURE 4A | Workplace Behavior Spectrum



Treat Employees as Allies

Treat your employees as allies when addressing GBVH. Employees will respond better if you ask them to help you prevent and respond to GBVH than if you treat them as potential perpetrators. Link your GBVH initiatives to company values.

Allyship in the workplace unites employees by increasing engagement and activating company values. Being an ally means contributing towards company action on GBVH and supporting survivors. Companies should encourage allyship as it can help destigmatize GBVH and protect survivors.

Encourage Bystander Action

Being an active bystander means being aware of when someone’s behavior is inappropriate or threatening and choosing to oppose it. A bystander is somebody that is not directly involved in the abuse as a perpetrator or survivor but witnesses or hears about the GBVH.

Bystander action can include diffusing a situation to protect someone from harm, supporting someone affected by GBVH by checking in on their wellbeing, speaking up and challenging a perpetrator of GBVH, or reporting the incident. It should be acknowledged that bystander action by staff can be more challenging if senior staff or management are the perpetrators. It is crucial that company leadership are role models of bystander action.

Different situations may require different responses, and it's important that employees prioritize safety when taking action. For further guidance on company policies and associated actions, see [TOOL 4.12](#).

Key steps a company can take to promote bystander action include:

- Introduce the idea of active bystanding and link it to company values (i.e., everyone in an organization has a responsibility to uphold company values).
- Emphasize that different situations will require different responses as an active bystander (e.g., report, speak up, support, and defuse).
- Stress to employees that active bystanding is not a step-by-step process. The response depends on the context, but if a situation is causing serious harm, then you should report it.

Support Employees

When issues are raised, employees should be encouraged to access support services (see [TOOL 4.5](#)), and complaints should be taken seriously and acted upon. If issues are not addressed, employees will lose trust in the company and will stop raising issues, impacting staff morale and wellbeing and the company bottom line. It is key that details of support services are kept up to date and shared with employees and community members. See guidelines on service providers in [TOOL 4.5](#). Bystanders who report incidents should be protected by similar principles applied to survivor care, including confidentiality.

Complaints should be taken seriously and acted upon. If issues are not addressed, employees will lose trust in the company and will stop raising issues, impacting staff morale and wellbeing and the company bottom line.

Important Things to Remember

Move Beyond Individual Action: Move away from messaging that overemphasizes individual action and focus instead on messaging that is inclusive (i.e., everyone in an organization has a responsibility to intervene when they witness or become aware of workplace violence taking place inside and outside the physical workplace).

Relying on singular employees or champions is inadvisable as it can undermine the long-term sustainability of GBVH actions that need to be embedded at a company level and upheld by employees collectively in order to have an impact. Overreliance on individual champions also threatens sustainability of actions against GBVH if certain staff rotate, leave a company, etc. Given that GBVH is rooted in gender inequality and unequal power which can leave people, especially women and girls, vulnerable to violence and harassment, it is key that female employees do not shoulder the responsibility of prevention and response.

Long Timeframes and Continued Action: Communicate that addressing GBVH is a long-term endeavor and that changes take time. Tell employees and community members what activities you plan to implement and when, and how these activities work together to address GBVH. This will help manage expectations on what can be achieved through each individual GBVH intervention. It is also critical to ensure that sufficient resources are allocated for GBVH actions to ensure continued improvement and sustained progress.

Companies should note that it is normal if complaints increase in the short to medium term—this is a helpful indication that the actions taken are working. Companies should also steer away from zero tolerance approaches (see Box 4J).

Don't Perpetuate Stereotypes: It is important that we do not perpetuate stereotypes when we address GBVH. GBVH is a cause and consequence of gender inequality, and we should not reinforce norms that perpetuate gender inequality. **Steer away from language, images, or actions that suggest that men are stronger than women or need to protect women.**

Some people can be more vulnerable to violence based on race, income, religion, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, or disability. Any communication or action to address GBVH should not exacerbate vulnerabilities. For instance, GBVH communications should not describe one racial group as 'worse' than another. Stick with simple culturally sensitive messages about the behavior that is expected of employees.

Training is Not a Silver Bullet: Training can be a powerful medium to increase people's knowledge or skills or to improve attitudes. However, many GBVH issues may need to be addressed by structural changes such as improving procedures, changing company culture that is not aligned with company values, or changing work practices that may expose employees to risk (e.g., not providing safe transportation to and from night shifts).

Stay Curious and Humble: Addressing GBVH in the workplace is a relatively new field. No one knows all the answers, and we need to learn together. Expect that while some initiatives may go better than expected, there will be some challenges. It's important to continuously learn from our actions. For more information, see the monitoring and evaluation guidance in [TOOL 4.15](#).

BOX 4J | Guidance on Zero Tolerance Approaches

A zero-tolerance approach to workplace violence and harassment may have unintended effects. Zero tolerance messaging often is interpreted to mean that only very serious incidents can be reported and acted upon. For instance, many people may not report sexually explicit jokes if they believe someone will be terminated. This can lead to underreporting and escalation, as employees may wait until they believe the situation is serious enough to report. Perpetrators of violence may also retaliate if they believe their employment may be terminated. In instances where the terminated employee is the sole family breadwinner, the family may be significantly adversely impacted by the company’s action.

It may also be challenging to implement zero tolerance policies, especially in countries where there are high levels of GBVH, as it may lead to a large proportion of workers being terminated. It may be more useful to implement proportionate disciplinary action and limit termination of employment to the most serious cases.