



DEALING WITH DISCRIMINATION & RESPONDING TO MICROAGGRESSIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

Dealing with Discrimination

A 2016 U.S Equal Employment Opportunity Commission study concluded that 87% - 94% of individuals do not report discrimination in the workplace (go.umd.edu/eec2016). In 2021, a survey analyzed by AllVoices showed only 50% of employees have reported harassment (go.umd.edu/av21). However, reporting discrimination in the workplace is extremely important. Reporting discrimination can help ensure an employer knows of an issue, which holds them accountable and can stop/prevent the discriminatory events from happening again. Here are some steps you can take if you face discrimination in the workplace.

1. Keep a record

Write down the details of the discriminatory behavior that occurred, including a summary of the incident, as well as the time and date the event took place. Be as specific as possible.

2. Find witnesses

Talk to anyone who may have witnessed the event. Write down what they saw and ask them if they are willing to be a witness.

3. Save evidence

Keep any photos or other objects that can prove the discrimination as evidence. If you received a harassing email or text, make sure to save it.

4. Do not wait

Report something as soon as it happens. Time is of the essence as there are state and federal time limits to reporting harassment. Also check your company's policy for handling discrimination.

5. Ask for support

Harassment can be traumatic. Whether it is a friend or therapist, reach out to someone you trust. Talking about the event can be essential for your mental health.

6. Review your options

Is there a supervisor you feel comfortable approaching? If not, you may contact a Human Resources representative or someone responsible for handling internal complaints. An Equal Employment Opportunity Counselor (EEOC) can also help you decide how to proceed as well as discuss the possibility of litigation and what it entails. To contact an EEOC and file a formal complaint visit go.umd.edu/eeccomplaint.

For assistance with handling discrimination in the workplace, we invite you to reach out to Engineering Career Services (see contact information below).

Sources: go.umd.edu/eecoverview, go.umd.edu/careerdiscrimination

RESPONDING TO MICROAGGRESSIONS

Responding to Microaggressions

If you are experiencing microaggressions in the workplace, then there are some steps you can take to stop the abuse, such as addressing the situation head-on, writing down your thoughts and soliciting the help of a human resources professional. Here are some ways to address microaggressions in the workplace.

Immediately After the Encounter

- Pause and take a deep breath. Do not act with anger as it will not help the situation.
- Decide when and if you want to respond.
- Assume there is no malicious intent. Approach the situation with a positive attitude, and give the individual the benefit of the doubt.
- Focus on the event and not the person. The goal is not to win a point or to make your colleague feel bad. It is about helping them understand how their comments or actions are hurtful.
- Discuss your feelings about the impact of the incident. Use emotional intelligence to help diffuse the situation. Try to understand the situation, and be empathetic.
- Actively listen.
- Document the incident(s). If this behavior becomes a pattern, you may have to take formal action. Human resources may request specifics (date, time) of each incident.
- If you choose not to address the interaction directly, you should process your experience with an ally, who will help validate your experience. Or do something creative to express your feelings about the experience (i.e., write your feelings in a journal).

Next Steps

1. Address the situation head-on

Being direct with the perpetrator can sometimes be a good approach if the aggression is minor enough to address head-on. It shows the aggressor that you've given them the benefit of the doubt before "going over their head" to file a complaint, which is an attempt to minimize future conflict between you.

- Make sure to be professional. Something you can say is: "I found what you said/did unacceptable and ask you to please not let it happen again as a friend/co-worker."
- Let them know you would like an apology and a correction of the behavior in the future.

2. Write down your thoughts. Ask yourself:

- How did the situation make you feel?
- How has it affected your overall health and self-esteem?
- What do you wish you could say to the person who made you feel invalidated or stereotyped?

3. Contact HR

- Set an appointment with a human resources professional at your company.
- Discuss the situation and seek guidance on how to navigate the particular issue.
- Seek advice from the HR profession in assisting you with monitoring and resolving the issue.

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4. Seek support from trusted peers and loved ones.

Ways to prevent/stop microaggressions in the workplace

1. Educate yourself on the different types of microaggressions.
2. Recognize your own biases and prejudices.
3. Become an ally (advocate for others when you see microaggression in the workplace).

For assistance with responding to microaggressions in the workplace, we invite you to reach out to Engineering Career Services (see contact information below).

Sources: go.umd.edu/baker, go.umd.edu/crln