



INCLUSIVE COMPANIES TOOLKIT



BANTER AWARENESS

www.inclusivecompanies.co.uk
CHAMPIONING DIVERSITY IMPLEMENTING INCLUSION

Inclusive Companies are delighted to present a Toolkit focussing on 'Banter Awareness'. This toolkit is designed to address the line between acceptable banter and bullying. 'Banter' is a term which is frequently mentioned throughout the workplace, but when do workers know when to stop? When does playful teasing turn into something spiteful and lead to potentially bullying?

What is Banter?

"An exchange of light, playful, teasing remarks; good-natured raillery."

- Dictionary Definition

<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/banter>

"To speak to or address in a witty and teasing manner"

- Merriam-Webster Definition

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/banter>

"Sharp, good-humoured, playful, typically spontaneous conversation"

- Wiktionary Definition

<https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/banter#Noun>

Banter is form of social communication, a common term within British culture and a word that is frequently brought into the workplace. Gentle teasing amongst colleagues is often a way people communicate with one another, helping the development of workplace relationships. However, banter can often be misconstrued and often go too far, leaving workers feeling deflated, hurt and unmotivated. True banter is a friendly exchange of jokes in a balanced environment and should be kept in context that connects everybody involved. But there is a fine line between banter and bullying.

Bullying is a repeated behaviour which causes direct harm both physically and emotionally, this can be through an insulting, humiliating or malicious action. Often a joke or comment which started off as 'just banter' can lead to bullying, even if it didn't intend to. The impact of bullying can have a harmful influence on a person's mental health, often having a knock-on effect in a persons work and home life. It's important that everybody involved in the conversation regarding banter is enjoying the interaction, however, be aware of how co-workers react to certain subjects. Some may find topics insulting or offensive but may carry on with the 'banter' as they do not want to draw attention to themselves.

Examples of using Banter in the workplace

- Gentle teasing amongst work colleagues.
- Back and forth jokes.
- Joking about a past events with friends/colleagues.
- Good natured/light-hearted jokes.

Examples of bullying in the workplace

- Picking on somebody's insecurities.
- Persistent abusive or insulting behaviour.
- Aggressive tones or shouting.
- Making threats or physically threatening contact.
- Interfering with people's personal, work and family life.
- Spreading misinformation about colleagues or spiteful rumours.
- Excluding, isolating or degrading colleagues from conversations in work or social events.
- Managers unevenly distributing workload.
- Upward bullying – a term used when a more senior member of staff uses their position to bully a staff member lower level than them.

If a colleague's 'banter' is linked to a protected characteristic, then they run the risk of breaching the Equality Act 2010 and may be liable to unlawful discrimination and harassment. The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people in the workplace from discrimination and in some cases, if an employer does not correctly handle a situation of discrimination, then they could be exposed to an Employment Tribunal claim. The UK Equality Act 2010 safeguards the following protected characteristics:

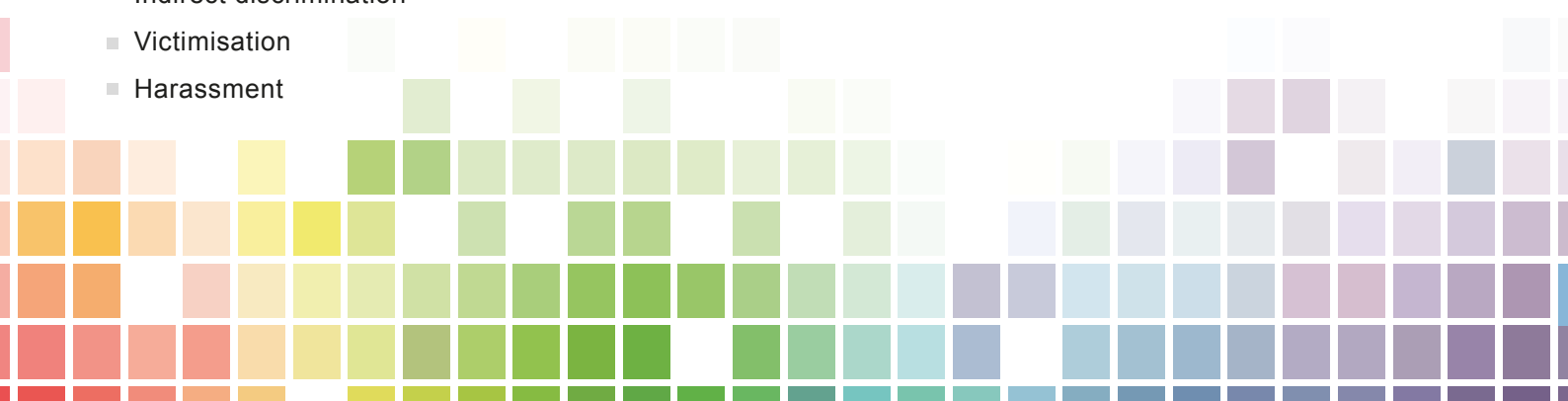
- Age
- Sex
- Race
- Gender
- Religion
- Belief
- Disability
- Sexual orientation
- Marriage and civil partnership



Under the Equality Act 2010, you are protected from discrimination in the workplace, but how can you be discriminated against? There are 4 main types of discrimination which employers need to know about to correctly handle a situation.

The 4 main types of discrimination under the Equality Act 2010:

- Direct discrimination
- Indirect discrimination
- Victimisation
- Harassment



Direct discrimination

Direct discrimination is when somebody treats a person worse than another because of a protected characteristic. For example:

- If a manager doesn't interview women as they feel they aren't as sufficient as men, then that is a direct form of discrimination.
 - If colleagues arrange a football game but don't invite a fellow staff member because they have a disability. They are directly discriminating against their disabled colleague, on the grounds that they aren't as physically able as somebody without a disability.
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Indirect discrimination

Indirect discrimination is when an organisation implements policies/rules which apply to everyone but can negatively affect some people more than others. For example:

- Banning certain hairstyles at work such as dreadlocks, would impact certain racial groups more than others.
 - Banning the use of headscarves, which could impact certain religious groups more than others.
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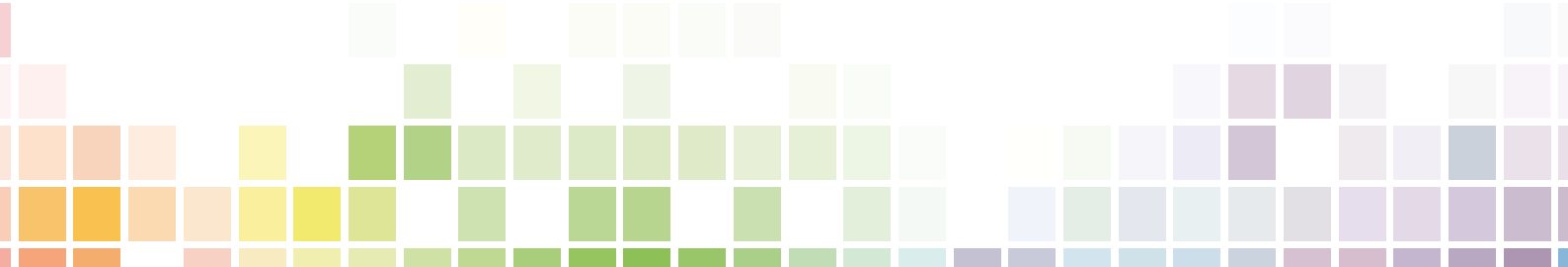
Victimisation

Victimisation is when somebody treats a person badly or unfairly because the person made a complaint that they've been discriminated against. Or if somebody is trying to help another colleague who has been a victim of discrimination. For example:

- If there has been a sexual harassment claim and the manager has dismissed the claim with no explanation.
 - Senior management not delegating workload equally amongst employees and overloading 1 specific employee with work.
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Harassment

Harassment is an unwanted behaviour that can directly cause offense, making somebody feel humiliated or threatened. Harassment can come in three forms, verbal, physical or visual, which again causes offense to the protected characteristics. For example:

- **Verbal:** sending emails which contain offensive jokes or pictures about a certain race or religion
 - **Physical:** unwanted touching of a person, sexual abuse and kissing/ hugging somebody inappropriately
 - **Visual:** wearing clothing which has racial slurs, vulgar language printed or exposing private parts.
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Note that visual harassment is sometimes harder to spot than the other forms of harassment, as it's the most subjective and requires employers to put themselves into the shoes of the offended staff member. Some people may find jokes more offensive than others, it is about an individual's own perception of the situation.

The Institute of Leadership & Management surveyed 1,000 of its members and found that 20 percent of women were made to feel less confident because of workplace banter, whereas 10 percent of their male colleagues felt the negative impacts. 10 percent of women felt workplace banter had a direct impact on their mental health, compared to just 3 percent of men. The report found that 1 in every 25 women stated they had left a job because of workplace banter.

Sometimes workplace banter doesn't have to be instigated by co-workers, the report found that 65% were more likely to initiate banter using themselves as the primary subject. Some workers may feel that they must subject themselves in order to be involved in workplace banter to create friendships. However, as a consequence their co-workers may feel that it's acceptable to target the individual in future, which could then lead to bullying.

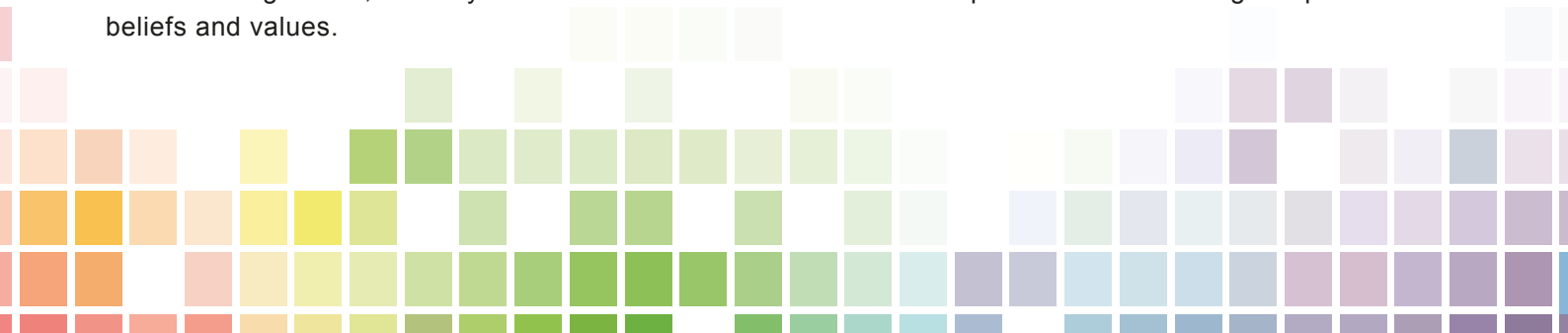
Impact banter can have on the employee if taken too far

- Sleep deprivation
- Anxiety
- Fatigue
- Poor hygiene
- Work life imbalance
- Lack of concentration
- Stress

Impact banter can have on the business if taken too far

- Low moral
- Decrease in work ethic
- Unmotivated staff
- Low work environment
- Poor mental focus
- High volume of sickness

Does this mean that people can't make jokes around the office? No, it doesn't. Employees can continue to connect using banter, but they must make a conscious effort to be respectful of their colleagues' personal beliefs and values.



Here are 5 practical steps to take into consideration when 'bantering' with colleagues

1. Think before you speak – Would it be funny if someone said the same thing to you?
 2. Don't pick on someone's insecurities – nobody should be picked on, especially their insecurities.
 3. Be aware whether someone is clearly not enjoying the 'banter' – If they're not STOP.
 4. Don't laugh along if you're not finding it funny – you're essentially adding fuel to a fire.
 5. Saying something is 'just banter' doesn't mean it is – There's a line. Don't cross it.
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Here are some tips for professionals

- Understanding the elements of banter is important to know whether something is bullying or not.
 - Sometimes 'Banter' doesn't represent all elements of bullying, however, this doesn't mean it's acceptable or hurtful for the people involved.
 - Use friendly tones and open body language.
 - Make small talk with colleagues before you start bantering with them, be aware that some people may not enjoy banter or jokes in general.
 - Bad language can be just as hurtful as physical violence for some people.
 - Using negative language or behaving in a certain way which refers to a protected characteristic / under the Equality Act 2010, by law can be classed as harassment.
 - Just because somebody uses certain language or phrases referring to themselves, doesn't mean that it's acceptable, nor does it make it acceptable for you to use it.
 - Often people don't feel confident or comfortable to speak up if they are offended by something a co-worker said, they may even go along with it, so it doesn't draw attention to themselves.
 - Be aware of your surroundings as third parties may be offended, even if they're not part of your conversation.
 - You should implement clear policies in your place of work so nobody oversteps the mark, such as harassment, bullying, equality, diversity and inclusion.
 - If a member of staff comes to you with a complaint, take it seriously. You don't want any member of your team to feel as though they don't have a voice. Investigate any complaints of harassment or discrimination.
 - Keep up to date with both internal and external training.
 - Keep an anonymous suggestion box in the office, this way you will receive crucial feedback from your staff on what they'd like to change.
 - Make staff clear at the induction stage what is appropriate workplace banter and what isn't, this will minimize further repercussions.
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Regardless of a person's circumstance or background, organisations who drive inclusivity directly support employees, which then motivates staff to thrive at work. Try to create an inclusive work culture where people feel valued, respected and accepted for who they are by co-workers and the wider organisation, without feeling like they have to conform to social norms.