

Respectful Workplace Policy

It is the policy of Buncombe County to maintain a professional and respectful work and public service environment where all employees contribute to a safe, supportive, and inclusive work environment that is free of offensive remarks, material, or behavior.

The goal of this policy is to support a culture where employees feel safe to address these issues constructively and with management support. The hope is to stop disrespectful behavior in the work environment before it crosses the line into disciplinary action, however, when necessary management will use disciplinary action up to and including dismissal if warranted. The County will not tolerate disrespectful behavior by or towards any employee or other individual by employees, visitors or vendors.

This policy provides for:

- a. Fostering a workplace which values diversity; personal dignity; courteous conduct; mutual respect, fairness and equality; positive communication between people; collaborative working relationships;
- b. A reporting/complaint procedure for any individual who experiences or witnesses behavior prohibited by this policy;
- c. A response procedure for supervisors who become aware of behavior prohibited by this policy;
- d. Accountability for violations or enforcement failures through appropriate disciplinary actions;
- e. Actions by the County to heighten employees' and supervisors' awareness of workplace violence issues, including domestic violence as it relates to the workplace.

This policy prohibits disrespectful behavior, including but not limited to, the following:

- a. Offensive and inappropriate remarks, gestures, material and behavior;
- b. Comments or actions that either groups people or isolates individuals along personal characteristics that result in negative or inappropriate stereotyping;
- c. Yelling;
- d. Belittling;
- e. Reprimanding in the presence of others;
- f. Aggressive or patronizing behavior;
- g. Embarrassing or humiliating behavior;
- h. Damaging gossip or rumors;
- i. Covert behavior, i.e., inappropriately withholding information, undermining, underhandedness;
- j. Unlawful discrimination or harassment as defined by federal and state laws;

Employee Responsibilities:

- a. Treat others with respect;
- b. Set an example by respecting the dignity and human rights of all employees and members of the public;

- c. Recognize and refrain from actions that offend, embarrass, isolate, or humiliate others;
- d. Name and address disrespectful conduct with the employee displaying it or with a person in authority as soon as possible;
- e. Do not make allegations of disrespectful behavior that are frivolous or vindictive;
- f. Make every effort to contribute to a safe and respectful work environment by resolving issues as they arise and/or reporting the issue to his/her supervisor or the Human Resources Department.

Supervisory/Management Responsibilities:

- a. Supervisors and managers are responsible to immediately act upon any situation involving disrespectful behavior. They will:
 - a. Promote awareness of this policy;
 - b. Recognize and address actions that offend, embarrass, isolate, or humiliate others;
 - c. Treat each situation as a serious matter;
 - d. Manage the situation towards a resolution between the parties if possible, with a view to educating and correcting behavior and preserving long term working relationships;
 - e. Ensure that there are no reprisals against employees making a complaint or participating in an investigation (in compliance with the Buncombe County No Retaliation Policy);
 - f. Provide support to employees who are experiencing the effects of disrespectful behavior;
 - g. Inform employees of Employee Assistance Program services;
 - h. Consult with Human Resources if the situation cannot be resolved and/or rises to the level of potential discrimination or harassment in the workplace.

Respectful Workplace Policy Procedures-Reporting Violations

An employee who believes he or she has been subjected to a violation of this policy and who has either opted not to try to personally resolve the situation or who has been unsuccessful in attempting a resolution should report the violation immediately to his or her supervisor. If the employee's supervisor is the source of the alleged policy violation, or if the employee's supervisor does not respond to the report in a timely and/or appropriate manner, the employee should contact the Human Resources Department and/or may follow the steps outlined in the County Grievance Procedure.

Respectful Workplace Policy Procedures – Investigating Reports of Violations

Buncombe County will promptly and thoroughly investigate any verbal or written report of a violation of this policy, and will respond to the reporting employee or other individual regarding the results of the investigation, except that specific personnel actions taken may not be revealed. The investigation will be kept carried out in a circumspect manner and with an eye toward respecting every employee's privacy as much as possible and in compliance with N.C. Gen. Stat. 153A-98 or as amended.

Respectful Workplace Policy Procedures – Corrective Actions

Any employee found to have acted in violation of this policy shall be subject to appropriate corrective and disciplinary actions, up to and including dismissal as this constitutes unacceptable personal conduct. Any visitor or vendor found to have acted in violation of this policy shall be subject to responsive action as determined appropriate by the County, up to and including being removed from the workplace and being prohibited from returning in the future.

Respectful Workplace Policy Procedures – Retaliation

Buncombe County will not tolerate retaliation or intimidation directed towards any employee or other individual who makes a verbal or written report of a violation of this policy and/or participates in an investigation around a complaint generated from a violation of this policy. Any individual who retaliates against or intimidates an employee who has made a report and/or participated in an investigation shall be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.