

Conduct quick-reference handbook

The quick-reference handbook (“QRH”) outlines recommended procedures for those responsible for enforcing good standards of conduct in a community setting.

The nature of expected conduct and responses to behavior which contravenes these standards is a matter which should be agreed upon by your community. The specific nature of your community’s approach to good conduct may influence how you use and interpret this document; feel free to “fork” the QRH and make modifications to better suit your needs.

To use this handbook, see the table of contents (on the next page) for a list of situations you may be facing and consult the recommendations on the corresponding page.

The \LaTeX source for the QRH can be found here and modified to better suit your community’s needs:

git.sr.ht/~sircmpwn/conduct-qrh

Content warning: This document addresses many scenarios which may be triggering to some people, including harassment, sexual assault, rape, and other challenging situations.

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1 Procedure quick-reference

1.1 Immediate threat to safety

Example scenarios: medical emergency, fire, credible threat of violence

1. Contact the authorities,¹ or designate a specific person to (e.g. “**you** [pointing, eye contact], call an ambulance”) and follow the advice of the authorities.
2. Take steps to reduce exposure to danger (evacuate, render aid, etc) to the extent that it does not place yourself in danger.

Prior to the incident, establish a plan to handle life-threatening situations, particularly with respect to in-person events and communities.

- Assign roles and responsibilities (e.g. overseeing evacuation, liaise with authorities, etc).
- Ensure availability of resources (e.g. first-aid kit, fire extinguishers, etc) and adequate training for their use.
- Research details for reaching authorities, e.g. local emergency and non-emergency phone numbers.
- If possible, prepare a list of attendees to verify the safe evacuation of all people at the location.
- Prepare an evacuation plan for the location.

¹Contacting the police will often endanger marginalized people or escalate the situation. Exercise caution.

1.2 Suicidal ideation or intent

Example scenarios: someone expresses to you or another member of the community the desire or intention to end their life

1. Assess the risk.

- **High-risk:** they have committed to or are in the process of committing the act of suicide (e.g. "I <just took/am going to take> all of these pills"). High-risk cases are a medical emergency. Contact the authorities. If necessary, seek information regarding the location and circumstances of the person involved to pass on to the authorities.
- **Medium-risk:** they have made a concrete plan, have a date in mind, have access to tools, etc. Medium-risk cases are urgent but not an emergency. Encourage them to seek professional help, such as the relevant suicide hotline in their location.
- **Low-risk:** suicidal ideation, i.e. fantasizing about suicide. Low-risk cases are not urgent; thoughts of ending ones life are common. These cases require compassion, empathy, and personal support. Do not contact the authorities unless your judgement suggests a higher risk scenario.

2. Provide emotional support to the best of your ability.

- Let them know that you care for them, and they are not alone.
- Validate their feelings. Do not discredit their point of view.
- Encourage them to seek professional help, and offer to help them find support resources if you are comfortable doing so.

Consider your own needs; you are not obligated to act as an amateur therapist. Offer to connect them to other supportive members of the community to distribute the burden if necessary. If the situation persists over a long period of time, it may be attention-seeking behavior. Encourage them to seek professional help and consider employing the Disruptive behavior procedure (ref 1.4) if necessary, albeit with care and empathy.

1.3 Spam

Example scenarios: a user posts promotional content in your community's chat rooms, forums, etc

1. Take unilateral action to stop the behavior, i.e. an immediate ban or mute.

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1.4 Disruptive behavior

Example scenarios: a person interrupts a discussion with off-topic sentiments, engages in argumentative and/or distracting behavior, or otherwise acts in a manner which disrupts the normal functioning of the community

1. At your discretion, issue a correction, publicly or privately, to cease this behavior. A public warning may be warranted if, for example, other users engage with the disruptive activity (“take the bait”).
2. If the behavior continues, employ a temporary ban.
3. If the behavior continues following the temporary ban, employ a permanent ban.

1.5 Aggressive behavior (threats, intimidation)

Example scenarios: a person threatens violence or harassment towards another person, acts aggressively, engages in aggressive posturing

1. If there is a credible threat of violence, see “Immediate threat to safety” (procedure 1.1). Do not place yourself in danger.
2. Attempt to de-escalate. Separate involved parties and calm the situation. Validate the feelings of all parties and do not establish blame or wrong-doing until the situation is calmed.
3. If applicable and safe to do so, escort the aggressor from the location and/or unilaterally employ a temporary ban from an online space.
4. Conduct a deliberation.

Offer the victim emotional support following the incident.

Notes for deliberation

- The aggressor is always in the wrong. Clearly state that this behavior is unacceptable, but, at your discretion, you may consider a formal or informal mediation (ref 2.3 & 2.2) if the relationship between the affected parties can be repaired (and such a course of action is desirable to the victim).
- A temporary or permanent ban for the aggressor is likely to be the most appropriate outcome.
- If the victim responded to the threat with escalation or further threats of their own, issue a correction.

1.6 Harassment, general

Example scenarios: a person makes demeaning or unwelcome remarks towards another person, or engages in bullying. See the separate sexual harassment (1.11) and identity-motivated harassment (1.7) procedures if applicable.

In cases of overt, unambiguous harassment witnessed by a moderator

1. Unilaterally issue a permanent ban

If witnessed by a moderator

The moderator should unilaterally take one of the following steps:

- Issue a correction
- Issue a warning
- Issue a temporary ban
- Conduct a deliberation

If unwitnessed by a moderator

Conduct a deliberation to determine the appropriate course of action.

In all cases

Offer the victim emotional support following the incident.

1.7 Harassment, identity motivated

Example scenarios: a person makes demeaning or unwelcome remarks towards another person or people group, specifically with respect to their sex, sexual identity, gender identity, race, religion, etc, including the use of slurs. See the separate sexual harassment (1.11) and general harassment (1.6) procedures if applicable.

If witnessed by a moderator

1. Unilaterally issue a permanent ban

If unwitnessed by a moderator

Conduct a deliberation to determine the appropriate course of action. If the authenticity of the events can be established to the satisfaction of the committee, issue a permanent ban.

In all cases

Offer the victim emotional support following the incident.

1.8 Discrimination

Example scenarios: a person believes that they are being treated unfairly

1. Seek an explanation for the victim's perceived unfair treatment.

If no unfairness is evident

1. Provide the victim with an explanation.

If unfairness is evident

1. Correct the unfair situation.

If the unfairness results from actions on the part of a member of the community, a correction or warning may be issued to that person.

1.9 Assault

Example scenarios: a person or persons engage in acts of physical violence

1. If there is a present threat of violence, see “Immediate threat to safety” (procedure 1.1). Do not place yourself in danger.
2. Attempt to de-escalate. Separate involved parties and calm the situation. Validate the feelings of all parties and do not establish blame or wrong-doing until the situation is calmed.
3. Immediately issue a temporary ban for the aggressor.
4. Offer, but do not insist, to help the victim contact the authorities.

If witnessed by a moderator

1. Issue a permanent ban for the aggressor.

If unwitnessed by a moderator

Conduct a deliberation to determine the appropriate course of action. If the authenticity of the events can be established to the satisfaction of the committee, issue a permanent ban.

Notes for the deliberation

- Prepare to provide long-term emotional support to the victim.
- Maintain the victim’s identity and experience in strict confidence.
- Maintain the privacy of the aggressor unless (1) the committee has established the truth of the matter to their satisfaction and (2) disclosure is in the best interests of the safety of the community.

1.10 Theft

Example scenarios: someone reports that their property has been stolen

1. Allow for the possibility that the property is simply lost and take steps along these lines, e.g. visit the lost and found desk
2. Offer, but do not insist, to contact the authorities

If the identity of the thief is known or suspected

1. Approach the accused and ask for the stolen property to be returned

Regardless of the outcome of approaching the thief, if the veracity of the accusation can be ascertained to the satisfaction of the moderators, they may issue a temporary or permanent ban at their discretion.

1.11 Sexual harassment

Example scenarios: a person makes unwelcome sexualized remarks regarding another person, such as propositioning them for sex or intimacy, unwelcome comments on their appearance, sexual or romantic propositions, etc

1. Immediately issue a temporary ban
2. Conduct a deliberation

Offer the victim emotional support following the incident.

Notes for the deliberation

- When working with the victim, do not express disbelief; consider their story in earnest.
- If the veracity of the claims can be established to the satisfaction of the committee, the ban may be made permanent.
- Maintain the victim's identity and experience in strict confidence.
- Maintain the privacy of the aggressor unless (1) the committee has established the truth of the matter to their satisfaction and (2) disclosure is in the best interests of the safety of the community.

1.12 Sexual assault

Example scenarios: a person reports unwanted, sexual physical contact from another person, or having witnessed the same, such as groping, kissing, etc

1. Immediately issue a temporary ban.
2. Offer to remove the victim to a comfortable, private location, and provide them with someone to talk to. If possible, assign a trusted same-gender person to support the victim.
3. Offer, but do not insist, to help the victim contact the authorities.

If witnessed by a moderator

Unilaterally issue a permanent ban.

If unwitnessed by a moderator

Conduct a deliberation.

Notes for the deliberation

- When working with the victim, do not express disbelief; consider their story in earnest.
- If the veracity of the claims can be established to the satisfaction of the committee, issue a permanent ban for the aggressor.
- Maintain the victim's identity and experience in strict confidence.
- Maintain the privacy of the aggressor unless (1) the committee has established the truth of the matter to their satisfaction and (2) disclosure is in the best interests of the safety of the community.

1.13 Rape

Example scenarios: a person reports having been raped or witnessing a rape

If the rape occurred immediately prior to the report

1. Follow the procedure for aggressive behavior (1.5). Remove the aggressor from the situation.
2. Remove the victim to a comfortable, private location. Make them feel safe and provide them with someone to talk to. If possible, assign a trusted same-gender person to support the victim.
3. Offer to arrange to take the victim to the hospital.

Following the incident

Once the situation is safe, or in cases where the rape occurred well prior to the report, take the following steps:

1. Immediately issue a temporary ban for the aggressor.
2. Offer, but do not insist, to help the victim contact the authorities.
3. Conduct a deliberation.

Notes for the deliberation

- When working with the victim, do not express disbelief; consider their story in earnest.
- If the veracity of the claims can be established to the satisfaction of the committee,² issue a permanent ban for the aggressor.
- Prepare to provide long-term emotional support to the victim.
- Maintain the victim's identity and experience in strict confidence.
- Maintain the privacy of the aggressor unless (1) the committee has established the truth of the matter to their satisfaction and (2) disclosure is in the best interests of the safety of the community.

²Note that the matter can be understood to your satisfaction without necessarily requiring the case to appear before a court of law. The committee need only be privately assured of the situation to take action; rather than depending on the authorities to render judgement.

2 Procedures miscellaneous

2.1 Unilateral action

In cases where a moderator is witness to a conduct incident, in cases where there is a threat to the safety of the community or members thereof, or where otherwise suggested by specific procedures, moderators may act unilaterally at their discretion to resolve the situation without securing the consensus of the committee.

In such cases it is strongly advised that, once the incident has been resolved, the acting moderator is to bring the details of the matter to the attention of the committee, who may then suggest an amended response.

2.2 Informal mediation

An informal mediation is a process available to moderators to resolve conduct incidents. In such mediations, a moderator or moderators will informally act as dispassionate third-parties to resolve disputes between members of the community, engaging them in discussions privately, making suggestions, and facilitating a productive dialogue between parties to the conflict.

2.3 Formal mediation

A formal mediation is a process available to moderators to resolve conduct incidents. Members of the committee are assigned to handle the mediation, and will arrange for interviews (2.5), discussions between affected parties, and deliberations (2.4) to be conducted as appropriate. The affected parties are notified that a formal mediation is to proceed, and will be furnished with the names and contact details of the assigned mediators and information about the process. The mediators will strive to resolve the matter in a reasonable time frame.

Once the mediators have established the facts of the matter to their satisfaction and given all parties the opportunity to advise them on the subject, they will prepare a report of the incident which summarizes their understanding of the situation and makes specific recommendations regarding how to proceed, either by advising the parties to take a particular course independently, enforcing moderation actions, or both. The completed report will be provided to all parties.

2.4 Deliberation

Deliberation is a process wherein the moderators convene to discuss a conduct incident and decide on a course of action. The moderators may call for mediations and interviews, call on outside consultants for advice, and make the final decision regarding corrective actions to be taken.

2.5 Interview

Moderators may call for interviews with parties to a conflict, as well as with external subject-matter experts as necessary. A party called to an interview need not accept, and the moderators should strive to arrange matters such that the interview takes place at a convenient time and location for the interviewee.

Interviewees may be accompanied by trusted persons to provide emotional support during the interview, but not to provide testimony – they may suggest that the moderators perform a separate interview for this purpose. If an interviewee brings someone along to provide emotional support, the moderators are to confirm that the interviewee is not being coerced by this person.

In the event that a party is subject to an accusation of a conduct violation which was not witnessed by the moderators, they will always be given the opportunity to be interviewed regarding their side of the story before a final decision is reached.

2.6 Correction

A correction is a private, written warning from a moderator, providing clarity around the nature of the violation and an explanation of why the behavior was inappropriate.

2.7 Warning

A warning is a written notice from a moderator that clearly states that a behavior is inappropriate and specifies the consequences for a continuation of that behavior. The recipient of a warning may be subject to a probationary period, wherein their behavior is amended at the instruction of moderators, such as limiting engagement in certain community spaces, not contacting or interacting with parties to a conflict, and so on. Failing to uphold these conditions may lead to a temporary or permanent ban.

2.8 Temporary ban

A temporary ban constitutes a complete prohibition from all interactions within the community, including all public or private interactions with parties to the conflict, for a period of time decided at the discretion of the moderators. Failing to uphold these conditions may lead to a permanent ban.

2.9 Permanent ban

A permanent ban constitutes a complete and indefinite prohibition from all interactions within the community.

A permanent ban can only be overturned if all of the following apply:

- A significant period of time has passed
- The offender has demonstrated remorse and improved behavior
- The victim (or victims), if any, agree to dismiss the ban

3 Policy reference

3.1 Appeal

Unless explicitly prohibited by the consensus of the moderators, those subject to enforcement actions may appeal their case to another moderator or call for further deliberation.

3.2 Privacy

Moderators will strive in all cases to maintain the confidentiality of both the victim and those accused of conduct violations. All reports are handled in strict confidence, and the moderators will take all necessary steps to secure records related to conduct enforcement.

3.3 Repeat offenses

In the event that a person is the subject of repeated incidents (of the same or differing natures), they may be subject to stricter enforcement actions than any particular incident would require in isolation.