



Workforce

**Bullying and Harassment : guide to
confidential contacts**

The following guide forms part of the standard for workforce policies that apply to all staff within NHSScotland regardless of which Board they are employed by.

Role of the confidential contact

The role of confidential contacts is to provide informal signposting and support to employees who perceive that they are [being bullied](#)¹, [harassed](#)² or victimised at work, or have been accused of demonstrating [bullying](#)³ and [harassing](#)⁴ behaviours. They provide a listening ear, information about the [bullying and harassment policy](#)⁵ and procedures, and signposting to other more formal sources of support such as the staff counselling service or trade unions. Some NHS Scotland employers have expanded this role to cover other policies such as whistle-blowing. The contacts will have received training to enable them to support employees appropriately so they know the possible ways forward and are able to outline options without telling the employee what to do or making a decision for them. Confidential contact will not make judgements about anyone who accesses them.

Maintaining confidentiality

The nature and content of discussions with a confidential contact are private and personal to the employee and as such will not be discussed with a third party without the express permission of the employee. However there are limits to this confidentiality, if for example the employee or others are being subjected to unlawful behaviours or harm.

Employees' names and contact details are known only by the confidential contact who is providing the support unless the individual requests or gives approval for their information to be shared.

Any notes from discussions with employees will be destroyed once the monitoring form has been completed with an anonymous record of the contact.

Accessing a confidential contact

The names and contact details of confidential contacts are publicised on NHSScotland employers' websites. Employees who have concerns about bullying and harassing behaviours are encouraged to make contact with the person on the list who they feel is most appropriate for them. Often the selection is random, but staff seeking support can approach a contact in another division or site for confidentiality reasons.

Initial contact can be by telephone or email. Discussions take place either

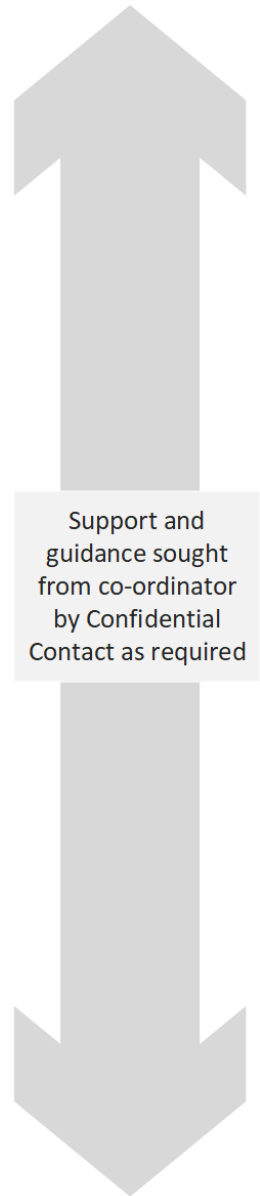
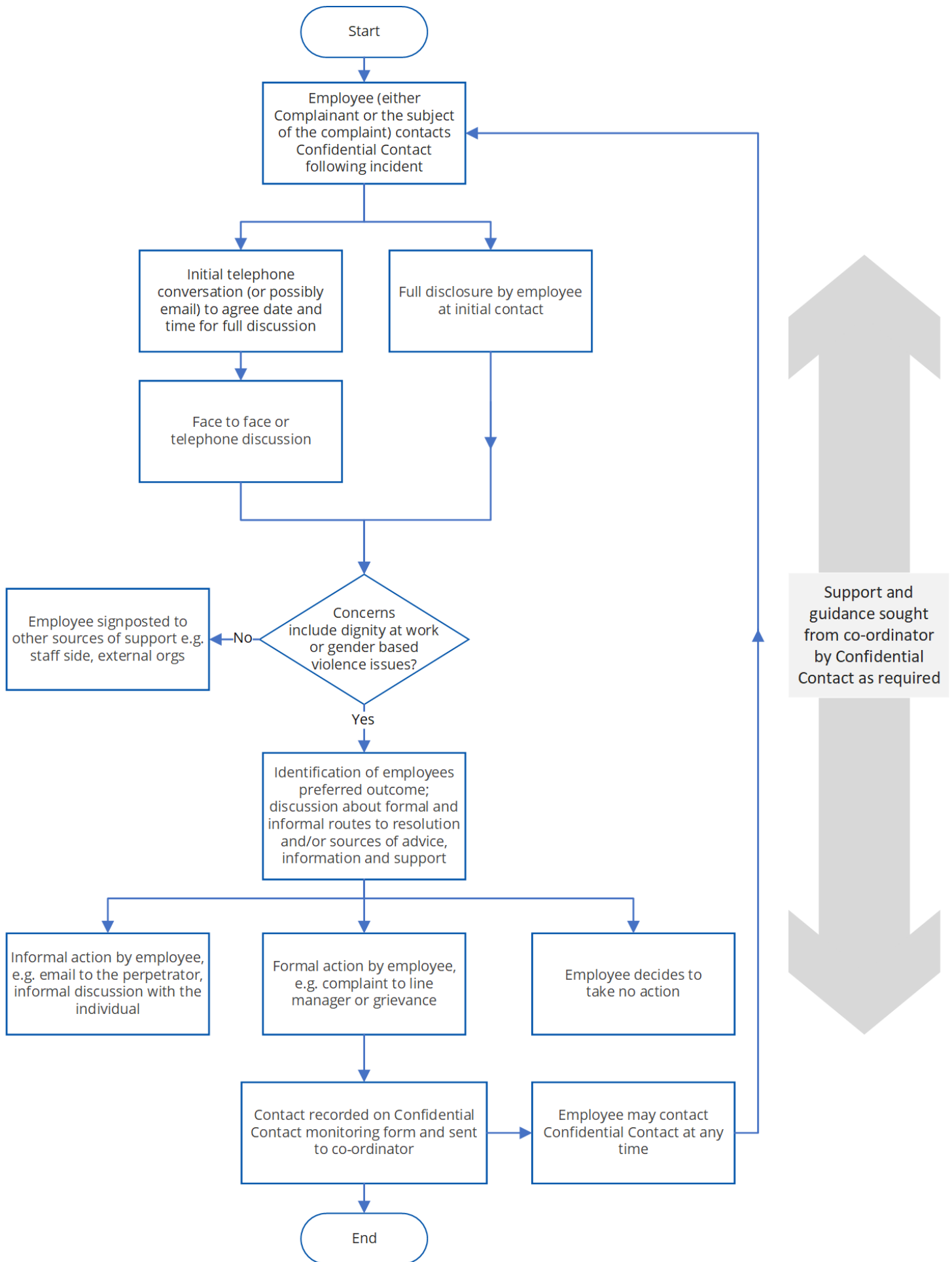
face to face or over the telephone, depending on the preference of the employee seeking support.

The contact will usually spend some time listening to the employee before exploring the nature of the complaint. Typically, the contact will determine the employee's preferred course of action and provide them with information about appropriate workforce policies. If appropriate, the employee will be encouraged to approach other sources of more formal support such as the staff counselling service, their manager or their trade union representative.

In most cases the employee will be supported by the contact for one or two meetings, but sometimes the support may continue over a longer period, depending on the circumstances and the wishes of the employee.

Confidential contacts do **not** represent or provide advice to employees, and will not act as intermediaries in disputes. Confidential contacts do not provide a counselling or therapy service. Neither do they accompany individuals in hearings or meetings about their complaint. Confidential contacts will set out the extent of the support which they can provide in discussion with employees who contact them.

Confidential contacts flow chart



Confidential contacts Role Description

Confidential contacts are employees who undertake to provide support and signposting to colleagues who are concerned about bullying, harassment and other dignity at work issues in the workplace. The role is in addition to a person's substantive post. It does not attract any financial reward, however, it is potentially very rewarding and may present opportunities for professional and personal development for those who take it on.

What the role involves:

Confidential contacts are expected to:

- Provide support over the telephone or face-to-face to employees who are concerned about bullying, harassment or other dignity at work issues
- Be contacted without prior notice and asked for support or signposting from people accessing the service
- Provide information about the Bullying and Harassment Policy and procedure to employees who contact them
- Signpost employees to relevant sources of further support and information or advice
- Attend regular group meetings for training, information sharing and support
- Maintain their knowledge about dignity at work, equality and diversity, and a range of other subjects through completing e-learning and face to face training modules
- Complete monitoring forms for each contact they receive

Confidential Contacts do **not**:

- Provide a counselling service
- Provide advice or representation to staff
- Form part of any formal procedures for dealing with dignity at work issues

The person:

To fulfil the role effectively, confidential contacts require the following skills, knowledge and values:

- Should have worked for the organisation for at least 12 months to ensure a degree of familiarity with workings of the organisation
- Have a genuine interest in the issues of dignity at work, bullying and harassment and be motivated to enhance their knowledge in this area
- Be approachable, confidential and sensitive to the needs of staff who may be seeking support or information

- Be non judgemental – it is important to remember that they may need to offer support to those accused of being a perpetrator as well as victims
- Be clear about boundaries, particularly in terms of where their role as a confidential contact ends and where a more formal approach is required
- Be willing to participate in training and supervision where required

References

¹ Bullying and Harassment Policy : am I being bullied at work reflection tool
<https://workforce.nhs.scot/supporting-documents/tool/bullying-and-harassment-policy-am-i-being-bullied-at-work-reflection-tool/>

² Bullying and Harassment Policy : am I being harassed at work reflection tool
<https://workforce.nhs.scot/supporting-documents/tool/bullying-and-harassment-policy-am-i-being-harassed-at-work-reflection-tool/>

³ Bullying and Harassment Policy : examples of bullying behaviour
<https://workforce.nhs.scot/supporting-documents/tool/bullying-and-harassment-policy-examples-of-bullying-behaviour/>

⁴ Bullying and Harassment Policy : examples of harassing behaviour
<https://workforce.nhs.scot/supporting-documents/tool/bullying-and-harassment-policy-examples-of-harassing-behaviour/>

⁵ NHSScotland Workforce Bullying and Harassment Policy
<https://workforce.nhs.scot/policies/bullying-and-harassment-policy-overview/>