



Code of Conduct: Our Principles

WITNESS is dedicated to creating and protecting safe spaces for people, online and off. We strive to treat people with dignity, decency, and respect, and to build a community for everyone, free of intimidation, discrimination, or hostility — regardless of gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, nationality, origin, race, ethnicity, religion, age, disability, or physical appearance. We do not tolerate harassment in any form.

This Code of Conduct embodies our commitment to uphold these principles and outlines our expectations and our response. We also hope that this policy will promote values of dignity, decency, and respect, and will enable each of us to contribute to a safe and inclusive shared space.

Participants and stakeholders of the WITNESS community are expected to understand and abide by this Code of Conduct. Anyone who is found to have violated this policy may be sanctioned or asked to leave WITNESS spaces as a result.

We believe that it takes courage to report cases of harassment, and we salute that courage. We also understand that users at risk, including victims and survivors of harassment, often are in a less privileged position than the person conducting the harassment, and face more barriers to speaking out, including social stigma. We commit to continually improving our support for survivors and efforts to prevent future harms.

We also understand that we work in a global capacity, with stakeholders from many different backgrounds. We have done our best to make this policy clear, but we encourage you to reach out to us at conduct@witness.org for any questions or feedback you may have about our Code of Conduct. Emails sent to conduct@witness.org will be reviewed by our Code of Conduct Team as outlined below.

*This policy is effective as of **12th of November 2018** and has been updated as of **1st of October 2025**. WITNESS reserves the right to update this policy, and will strive to notify all affected stakeholders of any changes. We will put a date on our policy and change it if it is updated, and we will provide an old copy of the policy upon request.*

What represents a violation of the Code of Conduct?

WITNESS prohibits harassment, including sexual harassment, of any kind.

Harassment is any verbal, nonverbal, or physical conduct designed to threaten, intimidate, silence, or coerce. Harassment includes but is not limited to:

- **Offensive or unwelcome comments**, including epithets, slurs, negative stereotyping, and discriminatory remarks disguised as humor, based on gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religion, age, disability, or physical appearance;
- **Distribution, display, or discussion of written or graphic material that ridicules, insults, or shows hostility or disrespect** toward an individual or group because of gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religion, age, disability, or physical appearance;
- **Deliberate “outing”** of any aspect of a person’s identity without their consent;
- **Deliberate misgendering or use of rejected names**;
- **Intimidation or silencing**, including sustained and deliberate disruption of discussion;
- **Threats of violence or incitement of violence**, including encouraging a person to commit suicide or to engage in self-harm;
- **Stalking or following**, including repeated one-on-one communication despite requests to cease, unwanted photography or recording, and tracking and logging online activity without consent;
- **Failure to safeguard confidential or privately shared information**, including publication of private communication without consent;
- **Unwelcome sexual attention**, including innuendoes, suggestive comments, jokes of a sexual nature, sexual propositions, lewd remarks and obscene gestures, and requests for sexual favors (including repeated and unwelcome requests for dates);
- **Distribution, display, or discussion of any sexually suggestive written or graphic material**, including emails, photos, text messages, and tweets, that is gratuitous, off-topic, or shows hostility or disrespect toward an individual or group;
- **Unwelcome physical contact** including inappropriate touching, tickling, pinching, petting, brushing up against, hugging, cornering, kissing, fondling, and forced sexual intercourse or assault.
- **Attempts at intimidation, retaliation or retribution** to someone who has
 1. Filed or responded to a report of discrimination or harassment.
 2. Appeared as a witness in the processing of a report.
 3. Served as a coordinator of a report.
- **Encourage or assist violations** of this Code of Conduct.

When and where does the Code of Conduct apply?

This Code of Conduct applies in all **WITNESS programs, events, and spaces**, including websites, mailing lists, social media platforms, coalitions, and convenings such as the Focus for Change Benefit, workshops, and any other fora that WITNESS hosts, both online and off.

How to contact us about a violation

If you are being harassed by a participant or stakeholder of the WITNESS community, notice that someone else is being harassed, or have concerns about other conduct, **please contact us as soon as possible**. WITNESS has **designated staff for receiving reports** and an **established procedure for handling incidents** of harassment.

Contact us in person: You can reach out to anyone on our Code of Conduct Team at conduct@witness.org. We will work to ensure your safety, privacy, and the confidentiality of the report itself and the information that you are sharing.

Contact us via email: You can share information via email to conduct@witness.org. Again, what you share will be reviewed by our Code of Conduct Team and possibly legal counsel.

Contact us anonymously: You can do this by using the [online form](#).

In each of these cases, you have the option of providing your contact information if you would like to be available for further follow-up, or to be kept informed of any actions that have been taken.

We understand that talking about an incident that you experience or witness can be upsetting. We will make every effort to respond with sensitivity and respect, and we encourage you to share the information in any way that makes you feel comfortable, including bringing someone along to support you when you contact us. You will not be asked to confront others or engage in the response process for a violation of the Code of Conduct.

How we respond to information about violations

1. **We work to stabilize the situation**

As soon as we get information about a possible violation of the Code of Conduct, we will immediately take any steps necessary to ensure the safety of the reporting individual/survivor(s), and of the community, which may include: taking the survivor(s) to a safe location; calling law enforcement, medical services, and other emergency services; and/or asking the object of the report to leave the premises.

2. **We initiate the review and response process**

After stabilizing the situation, and as soon as possible, our Code of Conduct Officer will **initiate the response process**, and with the support of the Code of Conduct team, will review the information that we have received, including determining whether we need additional information.

3. **We determine what action is needed, including remedy**

After carefully considering factors such as the content, nature, and threat level of the incident, and evaluating the available information, we will determine a course of action, including deciding whether and which remedy is appropriate. Potential remedies include warnings; denying funding and support; removing a speaker from an event; or banning a participant from future events. If a remedy or the timing of it puts the safety and confidentiality of the reporting individual(s)/survivor(s) at risk, our team will take that into consideration and prioritize preventing further harm.

4. Whenever possible, we inform the reporting individual/survivor and the object of the report of the decision made and reasons for it. We will not provide information that violates the consent of the reporting individual

Who is on our Code of Conduct team

All members of our Code of Conduct team are available to help if you want to report an incident, and they are each empowered to take immediate steps to stabilize a situation. This group is made up of WITNESS' Senior Global People Partner, Director of People & Systems and Executive Director.

Generally our Senior Global People Partner will serve as the main point-of-contact for communications and follow-up, working with the other members of the Code of Conduct team, to reach resolution of an incident. In addition, they may also consult with legal advisors and other members of WITNESS' management team if that is necessary for resolution. If anyone responding to an incident is involved in the incident of abuse or harassment -- or we identify any other conflict of interest -- that team member will be recused from handling the incident.

At times, the Code of Conduct team may consult with our trusted support network of survivors and experts on how best to handle and resolve difficult cases. In such an instance, we will only share information that is necessary for appropriate guidance, and strictly uphold the confidentiality of the reporting individual and survivor(s), and the privacy of the individuals involved.

Confidentiality

For the purpose of protecting survivors of harassment, WITNESS will not name survivors without their affirmative consent.

During and after the report handling process, WITNESS and those involved will protect the confidentiality of the information we receive, the privacy of the individuals involved, and the wishes of the reporting individual insofar as is legally possible, and as is compatible with the safe implementation of the chosen remedy and protection of the community.

In addition, any notes or documents written by or received by the person(s) conducting the report handling process will be kept confidential to the extent possible and according to any applicable existing state or federal law.

Exception

The exceptions of the Code of Conduct violation are: Presentation or discussion of graphic content related to sexuality or sexual activity, including pornography, is permissible if it meets all of the following criteria:

1. it is necessary to the topic of discussion and no alternative exists and
2. it is presented in a respectful manner, especially towards minorities and at-risk communities. Specifically, for the display of pornography, the following additional criteria must be met:
 - WITNESS has specifically granted permission in writing and
 - attendees are warned in advance in the program and respectfully given ample warning and opportunity at the beginning of the session, to leave beforehand.