



## **Joint Commission Issues New Code of Conduct Standard For Employers**

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In today's fast-paced society, the high-stakes, pressure-packed work environment can sometimes cause co-workers to leave their manners at the door. Rude behavior, if left unaddressed, can escalate into intimidating and disruptive behavior that negatively affects all types of work environments.

In the healthcare arena, the Joint Commission has recognized that intimidating and disruptive behavior such as verbal outbursts, condescending attitudes, and refusing to take part in assigned duties all create breakdowns in the teamwork, communication and collaboration necessary to deliver quality patient care. Moreover, the Joint Commission found that disruptive behaviors can foster medical errors, contribute to preventable adverse outcomes, and increase the cost of care.

In order to address this problem, the Joint Commission has introduced new standards requiring accredited health care organizations to create a code of conduct intended to address all types of harassing and disruptive behaviors, not just conduct made illegal under workplace discrimination and harassment laws.

The standard, which is effective January 1, 2009, requires all accredited health care organizations to clearly define acceptable and inappropriate behaviors. It also requires health care organizations to create and implement a process for managing undesirable behaviors. For successful implementation of a new code of conduct, the Joint Commission recommends the following, among other things:

- Educate all employees about professional behavior, including training in general business etiquette and general people skills.
- Hold all employees accountable for modeling desirable behaviors, and enforce the code of conduct consistently and equitably.
- Establish a comprehensive approach to addressing intimidating and disruptive behaviors that includes a zero tolerance policy and strong involvement from upper management.
- Develop a system to detect and receive reports of unprofessional behavior.
- Determine how and when disciplinary actions should be begin.
- Reduce fears of retribution against those who report intimidating and disruptive behaviors and protect those who do report or cooperate in investigation of intimidating and disruptive behavior.
- Implement a no retaliation policy.
- Develop and implement a system for assessing employee perceptions of the seriousness and extent of instances of unprofessional behavior.
- Document all attempts to address intimidating and disruptive behaviors.

Though the Joint Commission requirements are likely very similar to employment practices that your company or organization already has in place, they are important to consider because they target conduct that is not necessarily illegal, but is nevertheless unacceptable. The Joint Commission requirements provide all employers a model for formally recognizing and addressing disruptive behaviors that negatively impact the workplace environment. A formal process for identifying and addressing these types of behaviors will likely assist

employers in stamping out disruptive behavior, and assist with reinforcement of positive and productive attitudes in the workplace.