



Freedom — Business



FREEDOM
BUSINESS
ALLIANCE

**Employee
Handbook**

— VERSION 1.0

IMPORTANT: Please seek professional legal advice to ensure that your Handbook complies with all applicable laws and regulations.

EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK FOR HEALING-CENTERED WORKPLACES

BACKGROUND

Welcome to the Employee Handbook for Healing-Centered Workplaces, co-created by the Freedom Business Alliance (FBA) and the Freedom Businesses who volunteered time and resources towards this project.

Imagine Freedom Businesses being recognized for exemplary workplaces where employees thrive. The resources included in this Handbook support the implementation of policies that integrate the Six Commitments of Freedom Business, demonstrating how these practices create a healing-centered workplace, particularly in alignment with Commitment 5 of the [Freedom Business Code of Excellence](#).

This Handbook leverages FBA's global network and collective expertise from pioneering healing-centered workplaces. Begun in 2024, this project gathers best practices, policies, and structures that promote healing and aims to help business leaders create supportive, trauma-informed environments tailored to their employees' unique needs.

METHODOLOGY

To create this Handbook, FBA invited FBA Members to participate in three online roundtables, bringing together leaders from diverse industries, regions, and business sizes. These discussions highlighted areas where businesses with healing-centered workplaces desired to have stronger policies, particularly on issues unique to their work, with limited guidance available from mainstream HR resources.

FBA reviewed commonly used organizational policies and templates alongside policies shared by Freedom Businesses, gathering insights from those already pioneering healing-centered practices. Stakeholders identified in the first roundtable included employees (and their families), board members, consumers, investors, NGO partners, and mental health professionals.



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The draft template was shared with FBA members, stakeholders and subject matter experts for input. It was also reviewed by individuals with lived experience of trauma, exploitation and/or trafficking to ensure its policies are sensitive, practical, and trauma-informed. The valuable insights we have received have helped shape the Handbook to better reflect the needs and experiences of those it aims to support.

Following revisions, the final draft was approved by the FBA Board and is set for publication in January 2025.

Review and Updates: The first version of this Handbook was published in January 2025.

FBA desires for the Handbook to reflect current trends and best practices of Freedom Businesses and other businesses with healing-centered workplaces. Accordingly, this document will be reviewed and updated periodically.

If you have any questions or suggestions on this Employee Handbook, please write to impact@freedombusinessalliance.com.

For more information on Freedom Business Alliance, please visit www.freedombusinessalliance.com.



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The following Freedom Business Alliance Members and individuals provided their time and expertise and/or resources towards this Project.

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Aruna Project
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HOW TO USE THIS EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK TEMPLATE

This Employee Handbook - Policies for Healing-Centered Workplaces Template was created to help Freedom Business Alliance Members and other companies establish healing-centered workplace policies that are aligned with the Six Commitments of the [Freedom Business Code of Excellence](#).

Intended as a **starting point**, this template should be carefully reviewed and tailored to fit the unique context and culture in which your organization exists.

Implementation Guide – Please read!

1. **Getting Started:** Begin by reviewing the entire template with your leadership team, identifying policies that align with your company's values, business strategy and operational needs.
2. **Template Structure:** This template provides a suggested format for your consideration. Firstly, each section lists out common topics you may include in your organization's Employee Handbook. Sample wording is not included for common topics as ample material already exists for this.

Secondly, this Handbook provides detailed guidance and sample wording for policy topics unique to businesses striving to become healing-centered workplaces, where external resources are limited.

3. **Legal Compliance:** Since employment, tax, and industry laws vary by country, please consult a legal advisor to ensure that your organization's Employee Handbook complies with local requirements, protecting both your business and employees. Examples:
 - a. Some of the suggested financial assistance and benefits provided to employees (e.g. transportation stipend, meals, etc.) may be taxable in some jurisdictions. Please consult a legal or tax professional so that you can plan, make necessary adjustments or inform your employees accordingly.
 - b. Countries vary in the stipulations around annual leave, sick leave and other leave entitlement and calculations. Please ensure that your company's leave policy complies with local laws and regulations.

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4. **Financial viability:** This template contains a collection of practices that have been used by Freedom Businesses which may or may not be applicable to your unique workplace, now or in the future. An important consideration in deciding which practices and employee benefits to adopt is financial viability, especially for those that go above and beyond the requirements of local laws and regulations.
5. **Tailoring the Content:** This Handbook contains a “smorgasbord” of sample policy wording for you to consider. Please feel free to adapt, delete, or add content to customize these policies for your business and cultural context. Some paragraphs may be relevant to your business, while some may not be appropriate or relevant. Commentary and examples have been included in *italics* and square brackets indicate areas that require your review or input.
6. **Audience:** For the different policies set out in the Handbook, you may wish to consider if they apply to all employees or only specific categories of employees, e.g. full-time, part-time, casual, volunteers, etc. Some of the paragraphs already contain square brackets with options for you to choose which group of employees the policy applies to, but you have the liberty to adapt the applicability of certain policies to specific groups of personnel.
7. **Timing and Phased Implementation:** The Handbook is divided into sections which may allow gradual adoption; you may choose to implement one section at a time depending on the capacity and needs of your business. If you decide to implement gradually over time, we suggest writing a plan to set clear goals, priorities and an implementation timeline to ensure progress but without feeling overwhelmed or delaying important steps.
8. **Training:** We suggest rolling out the Handbook with structured training during employee onboarding and schedule annual refresher sessions to keep employees informed and aligned with company values. For some important sections pertaining to the company's identity, mission and values, we suggest finding creative ways to reinforce them on an ongoing basis. This will help set the tone for a cohesive, unified culture for your organization.
9. **Ongoing Updates and Reviews:** Review the Handbook at least every three years or when significant changes occur to ensure it reflects current practices, industry standards, legal requirements and business strategy. Actively gather feedback from employees and managers, using the anonymous feedback procedure detailed in the Handbook if needed, to address sensitive topics and improve the Handbook.

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[COMPANY LOGO]

[COMPANY NAME]

EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK

Updated: [Date]

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1. INTRODUCTION

Please provide a brief introduction of your organization. You may wish to include:

- *Welcome*
- *Who this Handbook applies to*
- *Expectations (if any) on Employees to be familiar with the content. You may also consider asking Employees to sign an acknowledgement.*
- *How the policies will be implemented (including persons responsible for implementation or responding to any questions relating to the Handbook)*

1.1 Employee Handbook Training and Accessibility

We are committed to ensuring all employees understand the contents in this Handbook. Training will be provided during onboarding and at regular intervals.

All of our policies are available in [•] and [English]. [An audio version of the Handbook is also available and you can find it at [•] or ask [•] for access.¹]

If you have any difficulty reading or understanding any part of the Handbook, [HRI] will provide additional support to meet your needs. Please contact [•] if you need any clarification or further information.

1.2 Review and Updates of this Employee Handbook

The Handbook will be reviewed and updated as needed, and at a minimum, at least once every three years to ensure it reflects the company's practices, business strategy, operations, and industry best practices.

¹An audio version of the Employee Handbook can enhance accessibility for employees who may be illiterate or prefer listening. With AI advancements, businesses are encouraged to create and store audio versions on accessible platforms for easy employee use.

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2. ABOUT THE COMPANY

Please provide the mission and purpose of your organization.

Below are suggestions for the topics you may include in this section:

- *Overview of your Business*
- *Vision Statement*
- *Mission Statement*
- *Core Values*
- *History (including key milestones)*
- *Any important certifications or partnerships (e.g. certifications such as World Fair Trade Organization, B-Corp. etc.)*
- *Leadership and Organizational Structure*
- *Other Branches (if applicable)*

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3. ON THE JOB

Outline the terms of employment at your company, including any legal requirements specific to your jurisdiction. Consult a legal professional to ensure compliance with relevant employment, corporate, tax, and industry-specific laws and regulations.

Below are suggestions for the topics you may include:

- *Different types of employment classifications at your company e.g. full-time, part-time, casual, seasonal, volunteers, piece-work, etc. as applicable.*
- *Onboarding, orientation and training*
- *Probation*
- *Notice Periods*
- *Return of Company Property*
- *Continuing obligations after leaving company*
- *Working Hours*
- *Wages (Fair Pay/Living Wages), Overtime (paid or time in Lieu)*
- *Social Security*
- *Insurance*
- *Clocking in/out*
- *Timesheets/recording work*
- *Pay schedule*
- *Flex schedules*
- *Tax obligations*
- *Workplace safety*
- *Safety training (may be specific to your industry and workplace needs, e.g. safe use of equipment, food handling, etc.)*
- *General emergencies*
- *Fire safety*
- *Medical emergencies*
- *Workplace cleanliness*
- *Personal hygiene*
- *First aid*
- *Other medical emergencies*
- *Email and internet usage*
- *Use of electronic devices (including phones)*
- *Company property and equipment*
- *Protection of intellectual property*
- *Procedure for reimbursement of authorized expenses*
- *Transportation for company-related work*

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3.1 Work Attire

The company aims to maintain a professional and inclusive workplace where employees feel respected and comfortable. Below are the guidelines to adhere to:

- Wear clean, well-maintained clothing with no visible stains or tears.
- Clothing that is excessively revealing, such as crop tops, low-cut tops, or very short skirts or shorts are prohibited.
- Avoid distracting attire (e.g., loud patterns or offensive language).
- Follow safety or role-specific requirements, such as uniforms or protective gear.²

We respect cultural, religious, and personal preferences. If accommodations are needed, please contact HR or your supervisor, and we will work together to find a solution.

² More industry-specific guidance may be provided depending on the needs of your organization.

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4. ABSENCE FROM WORK

We are committed to supporting the well-being of our employees by providing various forms of leave (or time-off work) to eligible team members, recognizing the importance of rest, recovery, and personal time.

4.1 Public Holidays

Employees are entitled to national public holidays. These are:

[List national public holidays of your country]

In addition, *[insert other non-mandatory holidays your company will celebrate, e.g. Christmas, Easter, Lunar New Year, Diwali, International Women's Day, etc.]* will also be paid leave.

*[Employees will be informed in advance and provided alternative leave options, such as compensatory time off or additional pay, in line with company policy and local regulations.]*³

4.2 Summary of Types of Leave

- Annual Leave: Paid time off for rest and recreation.
- Sick Leave: Time off for illness, medical appointments, or recovery.
- Parental Leave: Leave for the birth, adoption, or fostering of a child.
- Compassionate Leave: Time off for personal emergencies, including death of a loved one.
- Personal Well-Being Leave: Leave to support employee well-being and work-life balance, providing time off for personal matters, burnout recovery, or family needs.
- Unpaid Leave: Additional leave options, subject to approval, for personal or family needs.

³ This option is included for industries where work on public holidays may be required (e.g. hospitality)

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4.3 How to Apply

- For planned leave, please submit a leave request form to [HR]. Please provide at least [•] of days' notice for planned leave (e.g., annual or parental leave).
- For unplanned leave where you need to be absent from work for part or all of a day without prior approval from your supervisor (e.g., sick or emergency leave), please call (not text message) your supervisor as soon as possible.
- For certain types of leave (e.g., sick leave), supporting documents may be required.
- In all cases of leave, you are responsible for coordinating a substitute and arranging a replacement for your work, if needed, to help minimize the impact of your absence on the company. Please ask for approval from your supervisor of such arrangements.
- [HR] will maintain records of all employee leave on file.

4.4 Annual Leave

We encourage all employees to take full advantage of their annual leave entitlement to rest, recharge, and maintain a healthy work-life balance. It can be used for whatever reason you see fit.

Annual leave entitlements are determined by an employee's years of service and role within the company. [Full-time employees working at least [•] hours per week and who have completed [•] of employment are eligible for annual leave.]⁴

Partial day leave is also permitted. Leave must be used by [date] and cannot roll over unless approved by [•]. Rolled-over leave must be used within the following year and cannot roll over again. Unused leave that cannot be carried over may not be cashed out unless required by law. At the end of employment, unused leave will be paid out, except in cases of termination for just cause.

Leave scheduling must consider operational needs and requires prior approval from the supervisor. While the company will make efforts to accommodate requests, adjustments may be necessary due to priorities or overlapping requests. Generally, employees may not take more than [•] consecutive days of leave in a year without special approval to ensure smooth operations across the company.

⁴ Please seek legal advice on applicable laws on annual leave entitlements for full-time, part-time, casual employees etc.

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Eligible employees accrue annual leave based on their years of service, starting from their hire date. [Additional annual leave may be granted at the time of hire to recognize prior experience.] Leave may also be prorated based on the hire date. Annual leave for current employees is allocated on [January 1st] each year, according to the schedule below.⁵

Years of service	Annual leave days entitlement
0-1	[•]
2-5	[•]
5-10	[•]
More than 10	[•]

4.5 Sick Leave Policy

All [full-time] employees are eligible for [3] days of paid sick leave.⁶ [Employees with children or spouses may take one additional paid sick day to care for an ill family member.] If you are unable to work due to illness, please call your supervisor (not text message) as soon as possible, preferably at least [1] hour before your shift starts. If you are unable to notify your supervisor personally, please ensure a message is left with a colleague or through the appropriate communication platform. If your illness or injury is work-related, please notify [•], who will assist you in recording the incident and providing details about the cause of the illness or injury.

For absences longer than [3] consecutive days, a doctor's note or medical certificate may be required to confirm your illness and support your leave request. If there is no doctor's note provided, the employee may have to use annual leave for any days beyond the [3] days. For sickness that is certified by a medical doctor, employees are entitled to [•] months of paid sick leave.

If you need additional support, accommodations, or flexibility especially for an extended period of illness, please speak with [•].

⁵ Please amend in accordance with any legal requirements in your country.

⁶ Please check any legal stipulations in your country.

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4.6 Parental Leave

The company's goal is to support employees during significant life events such as the birth or adoption of a child, and to balance work and family responsibilities while maintaining a supportive, inclusive and flexible workplace.

Eligible employees may take up to [•] [weeks/months] of paid leave following the birth or adoption of a child. This can be taken all at once or in smaller blocks if needed, in consultation with your supervisor. Please inform your supervisor as early as possible, ideally [•] [weeks/months] in advance, to allow for appropriate planning and accommodations.

Your job will be protected during parental leave, and you will return to your position (or an equivalent one) upon your return to work. If you need any adjustments during your leave or upon your return, please discuss them with [HR] or your supervisor.

4.7 Compassionate Leave

Employees may take [paid/unpaid leave] in accordance with the table below following the death of an immediate family member. Additional time may be requested and will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Relationship to Employee	Leave Days (Work Days)
Spouse	[•]
Child	[•]
Parent	[•]
Grandparent	[•]
Spouse's Parent	[•]
Spouse's Grandparent	[•]
Sibling	[•]

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In the event of a death of someone close to the employee but is not the employee's immediate family member, unpaid leave may be granted at the discretion of [•]. In all situations, please inform your supervisor or HR as soon as possible so we can provide support and make necessary arrangements.

If you need additional time or accommodations, such as flexible scheduling upon your return, we encourage you to speak with [•] or your supervisor.

4.8 Personal Well-Being Days

The Company offers Personal Well-Being Days to support your overall well-being, work-life balance, and recovery from stress or trauma-related experiences. These days are intended to provide flexibility for personal matters such as health, family needs, burnout or self-care, including when workplace incidents or trauma-related stressors arise.

If you are impacted by a workplace incident or other trauma-related stressor, you are encouraged to use Personal Well-Being Days for immediate recovery and self-care. You are not required to disclose detailed reasons for your absence beyond what is necessary for scheduling.

[[Full-time/part-time/casual] employees are eligible for [•] Personal Well-Being Days [after [•] months of employment].] These days are separate from annual and sick leave and cannot be carried over to the next year or paid out upon termination.

Please request Personal Well-Being Days as early as possible, ideally [•] days in advance. In cases of sudden trauma or stress, employees may request a Personal Well-Being Day without prior notice, and every effort will be made to accommodate such requests. Taking Personal Well-Being Days, especially for trauma-related stress, will not negatively impact your performance reviews or job security.

Supervisors are trained to handle requests for Personal Well-Being Days with empathy and confidentiality, ensuring a supportive response. For ongoing challenges, additional resources such as mental health counseling are available to assist you. Please see the section on Burnout Prevention and Support in this Handbook for further information and accommodations.

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4.9 Unpaid Leave

Employees may take up to [one] [days/month] of unpaid leave for emergencies, such as health issues or caring for ill family members. Unpaid leave is not an extension of annual leave and should only be requested for valid reasons. Employees seeking unpaid leave must submit a request to their supervisor and [HR]. In exceptional cases, [•] may grant additional personal leave at their discretion.

5. OUR WORKPLACE CULTURE AND VALUES

5.1 Commitment to Our Mission and Values

The company's mission and values, as stated on page [•] of this Handbook, are central to everything we do. We strive to embody them in our daily operations and interactions, creating a positive and supportive work environment. Our mission and values will be repeated in company meetings and events, and also in our written materials. Employees are encouraged to familiarize themselves with our mission and values. We try to have both formal and fun ways to recognize and appreciate any demonstrated commitment to these principles.

5.2 Code of Conduct

This Code of Conduct outlines the company's expectations for all employees and serves as a foundation for a positive, inclusive work environment.

1. **Respect and Dignity:** Treat all colleagues with respect, kindness, and understanding. Use language and actions that honor each person's dignity, recognizing the diverse experiences and backgrounds of everyone in our workplace.
2. **Integrity and Honesty:** Conduct yourself with integrity and honesty in all actions, communications, and decisions. Be truthful, transparent, and accountable in your work, fostering trust within our team.
3. **Ethical Conduct:** Uphold the highest standards of ethical behavior. Make decisions that align with our company's values and the well-being of others, ensuring that our actions support a just and responsible workplace.
4. **Confidentiality:** Maintain the privacy of all team members by keeping personal information confidential. Respect others' boundaries and never ask questions that may feel invasive or uncomfortable.
5. **Open Communication:** Engage in honest, empathetic communication. If challenges arise, address them respectfully, and seek help from a supervisor or HR if needed.

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6. Supportive Leadership: Supervisors and team leads are encouraged to lead with empathy, providing support and guidance to those they manage, particularly in ways that respect any personal history of trauma.

7. Zero Tolerance for Harassment, Bullying or Discrimination: Harassment, bullying, or discrimination of any kind will not be tolerated. We are committed to an environment free from intimidation, and any violations will be addressed promptly to ensure everyone's safety. Please see below for more details on our policies to this end, in particular our No Harassment Policy.

8. Encourage Participation and Inclusion: Every employee is valued, and we encourage all voices to participate in shaping our workplace.

9. Self-Care and Boundaries: We encourage all employees to prioritize self-care and set healthy boundaries. If you feel overwhelmed, please speak to your supervisor or [HR] to explore support options.

5.3 Inclusion and Participation

The company believes that the diverse voices and perspectives of all our employees (irrespective of role or length of employment within the company) enrich our workplace and strengthen our community.

We strive to share company updates regularly in [weekly/monthly/quarterly] meetings to ensure all employees feel informed and included in organizational changes.

We ensure that all employees, regardless of background or experience, have equal opportunities to participate in decision-making, share their ideas, and shape our work culture. We strive to create spaces where everyone feels heard and respected, valuing the well-being and comfort of every employee.

The company will facilitate [regular] focus groups with employees to gather feedback on new policies or workplace improvements. Employees may also use the anonymous feedback procedure outlined in [•] of this Handbook to share their thoughts on how our workplace could be improved.

Our employees' feedback is important to the company and we will endeavor to refine workplace policies and enhance support systems tailored to the felt needs of employees.

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5.4 Equity

We value the different backgrounds, experiences, and views of all our employees and want to give everyone a fair chance to grow and succeed.

When it comes to hiring, promotions, pay, and how we run the workplace, we focus on fairness, openness, and including everyone. We work to remove any obstacles that might make things harder for some employees, so that everyone feels valued and supported.

To make sure we are always improving, the company will have regular checks to see if there are any unfair practices or barriers in our workplace. These checks will be done every [one/two] years by [•]. What we learn from these checks will help us make our workplace even fairer and more inclusive for everyone. Employees are encouraged to bring any equity-related concerns to [HR or [•]] with confidence that these will be handled with care, respect, and a focus on resolution.

5.5 Questions are Always Welcome

The company welcomes open communications with our employees. You are encouraged to ask questions about your work, the company and any other aspect that affects your work environment and/or employment – including any concerns, complaints or suggestions. When employees deal openly and directly with their supervisors, communication improves, issues can be fairly addressed, and attitudes become positive. If your supervisor cannot adequately address your question or solve your problem, you may contact [•].

5.6 Safe Physical Spaces

We are committed to fostering a supportive and intentional workplace where employees can feel safe, express themselves freely, regulate emotions, and address personal matters in ways that best suit their needs.

Our workspace design incorporates both open and closed spaces to accommodate diverse preferences and needs. Open doors with windows are used where possible to promote visibility and transparency while maintaining privacy. However, we recognize that some individuals may prefer spaces that are more enclosed for a sense of focus or safety. While balancing these needs, our design choices aim to create a harmonious environment for everyone.

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For those who prefer quieter, closed-off environments, the company has designated a few comfortable, safe spaces located at [•]. These spaces are available during working hours and can be used without the need for formal approval.

We encourage employees to share feedback about the physical environment with [HR or [•]]. While we understand our current setup may not fully meet every individual's ideal needs, we are committed to continually improving and striving toward a workspace that is as inclusive and supportive as possible.

5.7 Freedom of Movement

Employees have the right to leave the workplace [or company accommodation] premises freely, within the scope of their work schedule [or housing agreements]. If you ever feel your freedom of movement is being restricted, please report it to [HR or [•]] immediately, and it will be addressed with care and urgency.

5.8 Conflict of Interest

Employees must avoid any business interests or activities, direct or indirect, that could interfere with their independent judgment or the company's best interests.

A conflict of interest generally arises when an employee:

- Engages in activities with businesses providing products or services to or purchasing from the company (excluding company-owned entities).
- Commits to outside activities that unreasonably limit their ability to fulfill their responsibilities to the company.
- Participates in activities misaligned with the company's mission, vision, or values.

If you are unsure whether an activity constitutes a conflict of interest, consult your supervisor or [•].

5.9 Receipt of Gifts

5.9.1 Gifts from External Parties

Working relationships may involve offers of hospitality or gifts from external organizations. To avoid conflicts, employees and their immediate family should

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not accept payments, discounts, or valuable gifts from anyone doing business with the company, except when:

- The gift is of very minor value and customary in business.
- The gift does not compromise the employee's independence in performing his/her duties.

In all cases, the employee should consult his/her supervisor before accepting any gift.

5.9.2 Gifts or Benefits from Others Within the Company

Gifts, favors, or benefits exchanged between employees, especially from superiors to subordinates, must adhere to the following guidelines:

- **Appropriate:** Simple gestures that reflect appreciation (e.g., a thank-you card, small tokens like snacks or flowers) and do not create a sense of obligation or favoritism.
- **Not Appropriate:** Lavish gifts, monetary rewards not sanctioned by the company, or anything that creates undue pressure, favoritism, or an imbalance of power in the workplace.

Employees should avoid giving or receiving gifts that could be perceived as an attempt to gain preferential treatment or create conflicts of interest.

5.10 Bribery and Corrupt Behavior

The company has a strict no-bribery policy. A bribe is when someone offers money or other benefits to make someone act unfairly or as a reward for past unfair actions.

Giving, accepting, or helping with a bribe to gain business or an advantage for the company is serious misconduct. If this happens, it will be investigated, and consequences may include dismissal.

5.11 Workplace Interactions

Professional interactions between individuals of any gender should foster mutual respect, comfort, and understanding. We want to ensure that everyone feels valued and free from any form of discomfort, intimidation, or uninvited attention.

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Employees are encouraged to engage with each other in a way that is professional, considerate, and mindful of personal boundaries and what is culturally appropriate. Key principles of this approach include:

- Respecting boundaries
- Open communication
- Awareness of power and gender dynamics
- Being conscious of the impact of tone, language, and personal interactions
- Avoiding inappropriate or intrusive comments

Any form of disrespectful, inappropriate, or unwanted behavior, including unwelcome advances or unprofessional conduct, will not be tolerated. Employees found in violation of this policy may face disciplinary action.

If an employee feels uncomfortable in any interaction, he/she has the right to express his/her feelings or seek guidance from [•].

5.12 Workplace Relationships

All employees should refrain from engaging in romantic relationships with colleagues in cases where it is a potential power imbalance, conflict of interest, or perceived favoritism may arise.⁷

If a romantic relationship develops between employees, especially between those in supervisory or reporting roles, the relevant employees should confidentially inform [•]. This allows the company to address any potential concerns proactively, ensuring that professional boundaries and well-being are maintained for everyone. The company may consider if a transfer, reassignment or resignation is necessary especially if there is an actual or likely conflict of interest.

The company recognizes that workplace relationships can sometimes impact individuals differently, and the company's goal is to ensure that all employees feel safe, comfortable, respected, and free from any form of pressure.

⁷ In some cultural contexts, there may be some other relationships that are illegal (e.g. with a minor) or culturally forbidden or inappropriate. You may wish to expand this section as needed.

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5.13 Drug-Free Workplace

The use, possession, sale, or misuse of illegal or prescription drugs is prohibited on company premises, during work hours, or while representing the company. Employees must report to work fit for duty with a clear mind free from any adverse influence of drugs or alcohol. Employees should not show up to work with a hangover.

Employees may lawfully possess and use prescribed medications. Employees are responsible for consulting their doctor or licensed healthcare professional about how their medication may affect their ability to perform their job safely. Any work restrictions should be promptly disclosed to their supervisor.

5.13.1 Drug Testing

Testing may occur for pre-employment, reasonable suspicion, post-accident, or legal compliance. Testing will be conducted respectfully, with clear communication and confidentiality.

5.13.2 Support for Employees

Employees struggling with substance use are encouraged to seek help through company-provided resources such as counseling or referrals. Voluntary disclosure of substance use will be met with support, not immediate disciplinary action.

Policy violations may result in disciplinary action, up to termination, though the focus is on rehabilitation and support where possible. For questions or assistance, please contact [HR] or [•].

5.14 Inspections

The company reserves the right to inspect its premises, including all areas, for illegal drugs, alcohol, firearms, or other prohibited items. Employees and visitors may be asked to cooperate with inspections of their person, work areas, and property (e.g., purses, lunch boxes, briefcases, desks, or vehicles) to ensure compliance with company policies. Employees are advised that privacy should not be expected in these circumstances.

5.15 No Harassment Policy

Harassment is any unwelcome behavior—verbal, physical, sexual or emotional—that creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment.

Examples of Harassment:

- Verbal: Insults, threats, derogatory comments, name-calling, inappropriate jokes, or unwelcome remarks about personal characteristics (e.g., gender, race, religion, or disability).
- Physical: Unwanted touching, physical intimidation, or assault.
- Non-Verbal: Offensive gestures, visual displays (e.g., inappropriate images), prolonged staring, limiting social freedom, stalking.
- Cyber Harassment: Inappropriate or hostile communication through emails, messages, or social media.
- Sexual Harassment: Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, sexually explicit comments or jokes, or any conduct of a sexual nature that creates discomfort or pressure.
- Power Imbalance: Misusing authority to demean, manipulate, or pressure others.

Harassment of any kind is taken seriously, and confirmed incidents will result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination. Harassment will not be tolerated.

5.16 No Violence

The company is committed to maintaining a safe, supportive, and respectful workplace where everyone feels secure. Acts of violence, threats, or any behavior that causes physical or emotional harm have no place in our company and will not be tolerated.

5.16.1 Definition of Violence

Violence includes, but is not limited to:

- Physical harm or threats of harm to any person.
- Intimidating behavior, such as aggressive gestures or actions.
- Verbal abuse or threats that create fear or discomfort.
- Damage to company or personal property.
- Any behavior that disrupts the safety or well-being of employees or others in the workplace.

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Employees should immediately report concerns following the reporting options detailed in [•] of this Handbook. All reports will be handled confidentially. Employees impacted by violence will be offered support, including access to counseling or other appropriate resources. Reported incidents will be investigated promptly, ensuring fairness and sensitivity to all involved.

5.16.2 Zero Tolerance

Violence or threats of violence are grounds for disciplinary action, up to and including termination, depending on the severity of the situation. We are committed to protecting the safety of our employees while taking steps to understand and address underlying issues when possible.

Our goal is to create a workplace where everyone feels safe, respected, and empowered to thrive without fear of violence or harm. Employees should immediately report concerns following the reporting options detailed in [•] of this Handbook. All reports will be handled confidentially.

5.17 No Discrimination

We are committed to providing a workplace that is inclusive, respectful, and free from discrimination.

We do not tolerate discrimination based on race, gender, age, religion, nationality, disability, sexual orientation, or any other protected characteristic. Every employee is valued and treated with dignity, ensuring equal opportunities for all.

If you experience or witness discrimination, you should immediately report concerns following the reporting options detailed in [•] of this Handbook. All reports will be handled confidentially.

5.18 Conflict Management and Grievance

The company is committed to fostering a respectful and safe environment where all employees feel empowered to address concerns without fear of retaliation or intimidation. We understand that conflicts and grievances may arise and that power imbalances can influence how employees feel about voicing concerns. Below are the principles and steps we take to ensure that every employee feels heard, supported, and respected throughout the process. Our goal is to work towards addressing shared challenges collaboratively.

5.18.1 Empathetic and Non-Judgmental Listening

- Step 1: Upon receiving a report (anonymous or direct), [•] will review the concern. If the report includes contact information, [•] will arrange a private meeting to understand the issue, focusing on the employee's experience and any power dynamics involved.
- Step 2: The representative will listen without judgment and document details while ensuring confidentiality. This initial meeting is designed to make the employee feel safe, heard, and respected.

5.18.2 Supportive Mediation

- Step 3: If both parties agree to mediation, a neutral third-party mediator [agreed upon by the parties] will facilitate a discussion focused on respectful communication and understanding.
- Step 4: To address power imbalances, each party may have a support person present if needed, and separate meetings may be arranged to allow each person to voice their perspective freely.
- Step 5: The mediator will work with all parties to collaboratively identify restorative solutions, considering both the employee's needs and the overall workplace environment.

5.18.3 Focus on Restorative Solutions

- Step 6: Based on the mediation or discussion, we will work collaboratively to reach a fair and respectful resolution, to rebuild trust among team members. Solutions may include adjustments to team structures, roles, communication practices, or other mutually agreed-upon changes.
- Step 7: [•] will outline the agreed-upon steps and ensure each party understands their role in maintaining a positive workplace following the resolution.

5.18.4 Clear Documentation and Follow-Up

- Step 8: All grievance reports and resolutions will be documented. HR will share a summary with involved parties and add it to company records in a secure, confidential manner.
- Step 9: A follow-up meeting will be scheduled with the employee after the resolution to ensure its effectiveness and to address any ongoing concerns or adjustments that may be needed.

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5.18.5 Protections Against Retaliation

Employees involved in the grievance process are protected from retaliation. Any form of retaliation will be promptly investigated, and if confirmed, addressed through disciplinary measures, up to and including termination.

5.18.6 Third Party Assistance

For more serious or complicated situations, the company may consider involving a third party [such as [•]] to investigate and help resolve the conflict impartially, further enhancing anonymity and protection for all parties involved.

5.19 Whistleblowing

In addition to the above on reporting conflicts and grievances, employees are encouraged to report serious concerns, including fraud, legal violations, and unethical conduct. The company will ensure strict confidentiality and protection against retaliation for those who come forward in good faith. Reports will be independently reviewed, and where necessary, escalated to relevant authorities. Employees will be informed of the investigation outcome as allowed by law. The company's commitment is to maintain a safe, transparent, and lawful workplace.

5.20 Reporting Concerns or Incidents

To ensure accessibility for all employees to feel safe without fear of retaliation, we offer multiple avenues for employees to report any breaches or concerns relating to any of the matters discussed in this Handbook:

- Verbal Reporting: Speak directly with your supervisor or [designated HR representative].
- Assisted Reporting: Use a trusted colleague or [designated neutral third party outside of the organization e.g. counsellor, social worker, or pastor etc.] to help communicate your concern. You may request for this person to help you report anonymously if you wish.
- Phone Line or Voice Messaging: Leave a message on a dedicated, confidential reporting line.
- Drop-off Box: Submit a message in a secure drop-off box located at [•].

Reports submitted anonymously are reviewed by [HR]. While anonymous reporting allows employees to raise concerns discreetly, follow-up

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communication may be limited due to the lack of direct contact information. However, [HR] will act on any anonymous report as thoroughly as possible based on the information provided.

The [HR Director], [under the supervision of [•]], serves as the primary point of contact for any questions or concerns regarding breaches of company policy, particularly those involving violence, abuse, discrimination, or harassment. All reports will be taken seriously and addressed with care, ensuring a thorough and impartial investigation. Employees are encouraged to report concerns promptly, and confidentiality will be maintained to the extent possible.

Other topics you may include:

- *Equal employment opportunity (include any relevant legislation)*
- *Anti-discrimination (include any relevant legislation)*

6. EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

6.1 Balancing Performance, Productivity and Well-Being

The company is committed to achieving excellence in our work while supporting the well-being of our employees. The company recognizes that a balanced approach to productivity—one that respects both business needs and individual well-being—creates a more sustainable, fulfilling workplace for everyone.

To support this balance, our approach includes the following principles:

- 1. Clear Expectations and Benchmarks:** The company sets clear productivity goals, deadlines, and quality standards to help employees understand the requirements of their role. These expectations ensure that the company meets business goals, delivers high-quality work, and maintains customer satisfaction.
- 2. Respect for Well-Being:** The company understands that achieving these goals should not come at the expense of well-being. Employees are encouraged to communicate with their supervisor if they experience challenges in meeting expectations, whether due to workload, personal stress, or other factors. Supervisors will work collaboratively to explore supportive solutions, such as workload/benchmark adjustments, additional resources, or flexible scheduling where possible.
- 3. Open Communication and Support:** The company's supervisors receive ongoing training to approach productivity issues in a way that is respectful and understanding. If performance concerns arise, supervisors will address them through a constructive conversation, listening to the employee's perspective and identifying any potential barriers to productivity.
- 4. Maintaining Accountability:** While the company prioritizes empathy and support, we also expect employees to demonstrate commitment to their work responsibilities. Failing to meet productivity standards without valid reasons will be addressed through a performance improvement process, which may include formal reviews and, if necessary, disciplinary action.

The company's goal is to foster a culture where employees feel empowered to excel and supported in their work, knowing that their well-being is valued. This approach helps us achieve our business goals while nurturing a respectful and collaborative work environment.

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6.2 Punctuality and Attendance

Regular attendance and punctuality help create a reliable and respectful work environment, ensuring that teams can collaborate effectively and meet shared goals of rapport and productivity. All employees should be ready to start at the beginning of each scheduled shift. Frequent absences or lateness can impact team productivity and place additional responsibilities on other employees.

"Unexcused Absence": An absence is considered unexcused when it is not pre-approved by a supervisor, not reported in advance, or when no valid reason (such as illness or emergency) is provided.

"Lateness": Arriving more than [15] minutes after your scheduled start time is considered late.

"Early Departure": Leaving work more than [15] minutes before your scheduled end time without prior approval is considered an early departure.

6.2.1 Timely Notification

If an employee is likely to be late or need to be absent, please inform the supervisor as soon as possible. Early notification helps us plan and reduce any impact on your colleagues.

6.2.2 Understanding Absence Causes

The company recognizes that personal, health, or family issues may sometimes affect punctuality or attendance. If this is the case, the employee should communicate the underlying concerns or recurring issues with the supervisor. The company will seek to understand and work together with the employee to identify supportive solutions, such as flexible scheduling, wellness resources, or counseling services.

6.2.3 Consequences for Unexcused Absences or Chronic Lateness

While we will seek to understand and support employees, repeated unexcused absences, lateness, or early departures without communication can impact team morale and productivity.

[Number] instances of unexcused absence, lateness or early departure within [week/month/quarter], except in special circumstances, will be counted as [a deduction from the employee's annual leave allowance].

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If attendance issues persist, the company will take the following steps:

1. **Initial Conversation:** The supervisor will meet privately with the employee to discuss the issue, explore causes, and offer support.
2. **Progress Check-Ins:** Regular check-ins may be implemented to review attendance, set goals, and provide continued support.
3. **Personalized Improvement Plan⁸:** A formal plan with clear goals and resources, like flexible scheduling or counseling, may be established if needed.
4. **Final Steps:** If issues continue despite all support, progressive discipline, up to and including termination, may be considered.

6.3 Workplace Mental Health Episodes

Creating a safe and supportive environment is the company's top priority during and after a workplace trigger or mental health episode. Supervisors will address the episode with empathy and respect, prioritizing the physical and emotional safety of all employees involved. Clear communication will be maintained throughout the process to minimize uncertainty and stress.

When a mental health episode occurs:

- **Private Discussion:** Supervisors will meet privately with the employee to understand the cause, using a non-judgmental and empathetic approach.
- **De-escalation:** Supervisors may guide the employee through calming techniques, such as breathing exercises, to help restore calm.
- **Support for Affected Employees:** Employees impacted by the episode will be offered appropriate support, including debriefing, access to counseling resources, or workload adjustments.
- **Collaborative Resolution:** Employees will have the opportunity to express their needs and preferences for resolution strategies, which may include resource referrals or flexible work arrangements.

If workplace triggers persist, supervisors may take further action, always prioritizing the well-being and dignity of everyone involved. All discussions will remain confidential. Supervisors will also follow up with employees to provide ongoing support and foster team cohesion after the incident.

⁸ Please see Appendix 3 (Sample Form of Performance Improvement Plan) for your reference

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6.4 Supervision

The company aims to provide employees with supportive and respectful supervision to ensure you feel valued and safe in your roles. Supervisors will schedule [weekly/bi-weekly/monthly] one-on-one meetings, separate from performance appraisals, to focus on personal growth, goals, and well-being of employees. These meetings build trust, foster open communication, and support meaningful employee development. Supervisors will also be trained to provide empathetic feedback, maintain open communication, and offer flexibility to address individual needs.

At onboarding, a job description, daily schedule and clearly written rules (such as this Handbook) and expectations will be given so that employees understand their roles, responsibilities and behavioral standards. Supervisors are encouraged to schedule regular one-on-one check-ins with employees, depending on the needs of the individuals and circumstances. These meetings allow the supervisor to provide guidance, discuss challenges, and celebrate achievements. These check-ins are a safe space for employees to share concerns and seek support. Constructive feedback can provide a path for continual learning and growth.

6.5 Flexible Work Arrangements

Employees may request flexible work arrangements, such as adjusted hours, remote work, or compressed workweeks, to meet personal or family needs. Requests should be submitted to your supervisor [or HR] and will be evaluated based on individual circumstances and operational requirements.

6.6 Performance Appraisal

Performance appraisals are designed as constructive opportunities for growth, with a focus on empathy, transparency, and support. At the start of each appraisal period, employees receive a clear job description, performance standards, and goals to set expectations. Formal appraisals⁹ occur annually, emphasizing each employee's unique strengths and progress, while regular quarterly feedback sessions and optional informal check-ins provide ongoing support and reduce stress.

⁹ Please see Appendix 2 (Sample Form of Performance Evaluation) for your reference

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If performance falls below expectations, a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP)¹⁰ may be initiated and your supervisor will work collaboratively with you to set clear goals and a [60- to 90-day] improvement timeline.

Weekly or bi-weekly check-ins during the PIP ensure continued feedback and guidance. The company encourages employees to communicate any personal challenges that may impact performance, so we can work together on accommodations that support well-being and sustainable growth.

Performance appraisals are customized to focus on the employee's unique strengths and circumstances rather than rigid metrics.

6.7 Learning and Career Development

The company is committed to supporting employees' growth, aligning personal career goals with company opportunities, and fostering a culture of learning. This approach creates a workplace where employees feel empowered to achieve their aspirations in a supportive environment.

6.7.1 Individualized Development Plans

Supervisors will spend time to get to know new employees in the onboarding process to provide additional time or support for new employees to adjust to a new environment and to acquire the skills needed to do their job. Employees are encouraged to discuss their career interests with supervisors, who will help develop personalized plans and conduct regular check-ins to discuss progress, aspirations, and identify growth opportunities.

6.7.2 Recognition of Individual Needs

To the extent feasible or appropriate, the company will try to provide multiple forms of training (e.g., hands-on, visual, and verbal) to accommodate different learning styles.

6.7.3 Support for Growth

We offer a range of learning resources, including workshops, mentorship programs, and training sessions on topics such as learning leadership, budgeting,

¹⁰ See Note 8 above

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or technical skills for future opportunities. Employees can reach out to [•] for more information.

6.7.4 Internal Advancement

When possible, the company promotes from within, matching employees to roles that align with their goals and providing guidance on training for career advancement.

6.7.5 Support for Career Transitions

We recognize that career growth may sometimes lead employees to opportunities beyond our company. We are committed to supporting employees in transitioning to the next phase of their career. This includes providing resources such as resume-building workshops, mock interviews, professional references, and job search guidance. We aim to equip employees with the skills and confidence needed to pursue external opportunities successfully, ensuring that their time with us serves as a strong foundation for future endeavors.

If employees encounter barriers to growth, they are encouraged to seek support from their supervisor and/or [•], who can help explore accommodations and additional resources.

6.8 Support for Supervisors and Managers

The company is committed to equipping all supervisors and managers with the necessary training and resources to lead, supervise, support, and guide employees effectively. This may include training on creating a safe and respectful environment, cultural sensitivity, particularly emphasizing trauma-informed principles.

We provide ongoing training and support to ensure that supervisors/managers can uphold our values, foster a positive work environment, and meet the needs of all employees in a trauma-informed, respectful, and supportive manner.

7. EMPLOYEE DISCIPLINE

The company is committed to fostering a safe, respectful, and productive workplace while supporting employees with empathy and fairness. Employees will be informed of any concerns about their behavior or performance, with clear explanations of the issue and its impact on the workplace. Where appropriate, we will provide support, such as additional training, counseling, or adjustments, to help employees address concerns and succeed in their roles.

The following are examples of behaviors that may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination. This list is not exhaustive, and all situations will be handled with care and consideration:

- Persistent lateness or poor time-keeping.
- Unapproved absences or leaving work without valid reason or notification.
- Smoking in unauthorized areas.
- Failure to meet job performance standards.
- Inappropriate hygiene impacting professionalism.
- Theft or unauthorized possession of company property.
- Breach of confidentiality or actions harmful to company interests.
- Misuse of drugs or alcohol affecting fitness for duty.
- Refusal to follow reasonable and lawful instructions.
- Bribery, accepting bribes, or facilitating bribery.
- Physical or verbal aggression.
- Misrepresentation of qualifications or credentials.
- Deliberate damage to property.
- Repeated failure to follow company policies or procedures.
- Conduct deemed seriously inappropriate or harmful to the workplace.

7.1 Progressive Approach

1. Minor issues will first be addressed through a private and respectful conversation between the employee and their supervisor, focusing on understanding and resolution. For issues that can reasonably be resolved, employees may receive verbal warnings.
2. Written Warning: For ongoing or serious concerns, the employee will receive a written warning outlining the issue, steps for improvement, and a timeline for review. Ongoing concerns may be defined as the same issue or new issues occurring [•] or more times within [•] [months/year].

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3. **Formal Review:** If issues persist, a formal meeting attended by [•] will be held to discuss the matter in depth. The employee may bring a trusted colleague or representative for support. Repeated or multiple violations may lead to termination.

7.2 Serious Infractions

For conduct deemed severe or not reasonably correctable, progressive steps may not be applied, and immediate termination or other significant measures may be taken.

Below is a non-exhaustive list of examples of behaviors that may result in immediate termination:

- Using the internet for illegal purposes or viewing pornography.
- Participating in or facilitating any form of human trafficking.
- Procuring or engaging in commercial sex acts.
- Using forced labor for any work-related activity.
- Destroying, withholding, confiscating, or denying an employee access to their identity or immigration documents (e.g., passports or driver's licenses), regardless of the issuing authority.
- Possessing firearms or other harmful weapons.

7.3 Clear Documentation

Any breaches of HR policies (including any verbal or written warnings given) will be documented in the employee's personnel file. This documentation will include a description of the incident, any investigations conducted, and the outcome or disciplinary actions taken. Such records ensure accountability and provide a clear history of actions for future reference, while maintaining confidentiality and fairness.

7.4 Employee Rights

In all circumstances, employees have the right to be heard and to present their perspective during any stage of the process. Employees may appeal disciplinary decisions through a formal review process.

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Employees are encouraged to discuss any concerns or questions about this policy with their supervisor. Supervisors are available to clarify expectations, provide guidance, and support employees in addressing and improving performance or behavior.

7.5 Termination

The company's goal is to handle terminations with care, fairness, and transparency, ensuring dignity for all parties involved.

Terminations will be conducted respectfully, taking into account the individual's circumstances and well-being.

Employees will be informed of the reasons for termination in a clear and private manner, with an opportunity to ask questions or share their perspective.

Where appropriate, we will offer resources to assist employees in their transition, such as counseling, references, or job placement support.

7.5.1 Procedure

- (a) Fair Review: Before any decision, the company will review the situation thoroughly, ensuring fairness and compliance with all applicable policies and legal requirements.
- (b) Termination Meeting: A private meeting will be held to communicate the decision, with clear explanations and documentation provided. Employees may have a trusted colleague or representative present for support.
- (c) Final Arrangements: The company will explain final pay, benefits, and return of company property. If applicable, resources or referrals will be offered to assist with the transition.

Employees will have the opportunity to provide feedback or appeal if they feel the termination was handled unfairly. The company will ensure confidentiality throughout the process.

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8. LEAVING THE COMPANY

Below are suggestions for the topics you may include:

- *Notice periods*
- *Resignation*
- *Redundancy*
- *Return of Company Property*
- *Continuing obligations after leaving the company*
- *Retirement*
- *Severance*

8.1 No Penalty For Leaving

Employees will not be required to pay any fees or penalties for leaving the company, whether through resignation, termination or otherwise.

9. EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING AND BENEFITS

*In this section, we include sample wording for employee benefits that some Freedom Businesses offer. We suggest that the paragraphs denoted with * should be included, with adjustments made for your context if necessary. For other paragraphs, please delete or amend as appropriate. You may add to this section any other employee benefits that your company provides.*

9.1 Meal Allowance

The company will provide a meal¹¹ for employees who work at least [·] hours at the Company premises on any given day. This meal will be provided to all employees working on-site. The meal benefit will be provided during the employee's scheduled shift.

9.2 Lactation Accommodation*

The company is committed to supporting employees who need to breastfeed or express breast milk during work hours. Employees requiring lactation accommodations may take reasonable breaks and use a designated private space to do so. The company will provide a clean, comfortable, and safe environment for this purpose. Any adverse consequences towards an employee requiring lactation accommodations will not be tolerated. Any actual or perceived adverse consequences experienced by an employee requesting such accommodations should be reported to her direct supervisor or other manager for the company to take appropriate action.

9.3 Housing

The company provides housing support to full-time employees through two options: staff housing or a housing stipend¹². Employees may be offered company-provided staff housing, or if eligible, a housing stipend of [value] per month to help with housing costs. The type of housing support provided will be

¹¹ This wording assumes that actual meals will be provided to all employees at the workplace (e.g. by way of an on-site cook or ordered meals, etc.). This is important because in some jurisdictions, a meal stipend may be considered a taxable benefit to employees.

¹² Please seek legal advice on whether such housing stipend is a taxable benefit for employees in your relevant jurisdiction.

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determined based on availability and employee needs. Employees should discuss eligibility and options with [·].

9.4 Childcare

The company provides on-site childcare services for all employees, regardless of job classification in the company. This service is available to support employees in balancing work and family responsibilities. Our childcare service is located at [·] and available from [time] to [time]. Please speak to [·] for more information.

9.5 Financial Assistance for Education for Employees

To support employees in their learning and growth journey, the company offers education assistance to employees seeking to further their studies or professional development. Employees may be considered for financial or scholarship assistance to support their educational goals [related to their work at the company]. Eligibility and assistance details will be provided based on individual circumstances. The company may provide up to [·] per year toward an employee's educational expenses. Please speak to [·] for more information and to discuss eligibility.

9.6 Financial Assistance for Education and Care for Children of Employees

The company may offer assistance towards the education, care or health of the children of [full-time] employees in the form of financial or scholarship support, if needed. Assistance will be considered on a case-by-case basis, depending on the family's circumstances. Details and eligibility criteria will be provided to employees upon request. Please speak to [·] for more information and to discuss eligibility.

9.7 Literacy, Numeracy and Job Readiness Training

The company is dedicated to empowering employees by providing a range of literacy, numeracy and job readiness training to prepare them for work within or beyond the company, and in the field of their choice. Training may include technology skills, internet safety, and essential literacy and numeracy skills, tailored to support their career development and personal goals. The company's

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aim is to equip each individual with the tools and knowledge needed for a successful and fulfilling work experience. Please speak to [·] for more information and to discuss eligibility.

9.8 Savings Program

The company may offer assistance to employees in building savings based on their individual circumstances. This program is designed to support employees in reaching their financial goals, with options available depending on need. Eligibility and specific details will be provided on a case-by-case basis. Please speak to [·] for more information and to discuss eligibility.

9.9 Personal Assistance and Other Loans

The company may offer [interest-free] loans to employees based on their individual circumstances. Loan amounts and terms will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Employees can apply for loan assistance, and approval will be based on need and company policies. Please speak to [·] for more information and to discuss eligibility.

9.10 Transportation Stipend

To assist with commuting expenses, we offer a monthly transportation stipend of up to [·] to cover costs related to your travel to and from work. Please speak to [·] for more information and to discuss eligibility.

9.11 Assistance with Obtaining Legal Identification and Other Legal Support

Employees in need of assistance (for themselves or their children) with legal identification, registration, or legal processes are encouraged to speak confidentially with HR. We will provide guidance, resources, and, where possible, connect employees with trusted legal support to ensure they feel safe and supported throughout the process.

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9.12 Mental Health & Well-being Support*

We deeply care about the well-being of each employee and recognize that mental health and personal challenges, including addiction, can impact life both inside and outside of work. If concerns arise regarding an employee's well-being or safety, or if it affects others, the company may suggest professional interventions or other support to ensure everyone's safety and care. Our goal is to create a supportive environment where employees feel safe to address their well-being without stigma or fear of judgment.

The company provides access to confidential resources, including counselling support available for employees.

[If an *in-house counsellor is available*] If an employee would like to speak with a counsellor, the employee may schedule appointments with [•] as needed.

[*External counsellor*] If an employee would like to speak with a counsellor, the employee can speak to [•] who will be able to suggest trusted external professionals. To assist with the cost, the company may provide a counselling stipend of up to [•] per year. Please reach out to [•] for more information.

Supervisors and other designated staff are available to discuss any concerns confidentially and explore supportive options together.

9.13 Employee Group Therapy Support

The company offers a group therapy program designed to provide a safe space for employees to come together, share, and support each other through facilitated discussions.

Group therapy sessions are led by [a licensed professional] and are completely confidential. Participation is voluntary, and sessions are structured to provide comfort, respect, and mutual understanding. Please speak to [•] for more information.

9.14 Burnout Prevention and Support

The company is committed to employee health, well-being, and supporting a healthy work-life balance to prevent burnout. We encourage employees to take regular breaks during the work day, make full use of their lunch hour, and use any

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leave they are entitled to during the year. Flexible scheduling options are available where possible to help manage both work and personal responsibilities, and employees are not expected to check work communication platforms outside their designated working hours.

If an employee is regularly working beyond scheduled hours or constantly checking work communications, we encourage a discussion with their supervisor to assess workload and ensure it remains balanced.

For those in supervisory, managerial, or caregiving capacities within the company, we recognize the added stress these responsibilities may bring. The company will provide accommodations for additional respite and recovery time to support their well-being. This employee's supervisor should be proactive in regularly reviewing the employee's well-being, at the minimum on a [quarterly] basis as part of the employee's [quarterly] feedback session (or more frequently, if needed). As part of this review, there should be a plan in place for respite, recovery, support and prevention of future burnout.

Please reach out to [•] for confidential assistance with accessing any of the services, support, or accommodations provided by the company as outlined in this Handbook.

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10. HOW WE HANDLE INFORMATION

10.1 Internal Company Information

The company prioritizes the security of sensitive information and is committed to protecting data in a way that fosters trust and ensures a safe workplace. This is because we are committed to protecting the privacy and confidentiality of our business, operations, employees, and clients. To uphold this commitment, all employees are required to sign a confidentiality agreement upon joining the company. The confidentiality agreement helps ensure that any sensitive information employees may encounter in his/her work is handled responsibly and remains confidential. By signing, employees agree to protect and respect this information, both during and after employment with the company.

All employees are expected to handle sensitive data responsibly, ensuring that personal, client, and company information is kept confidential at all times.

Access to data is limited to authorized personnel based on their roles and responsibilities. Employees should only access or use data necessary for their work.

Employees must follow company guidelines to protect data, including secure passwords, encryption, and adherence to secure storage and sharing protocols.

Any potential or actual data breaches must be reported immediately to [appropriate contact/department] to ensure timely action and minimize harm.

Employees will receive training on data security practices to ensure understanding of their responsibilities and how to handle data safely and ethically.

If employees feel overwhelmed or concerned about handling sensitive data, they are encouraged to seek guidance from their supervisor or [HR].

10.2 How the Company Handles Employee Information

Personnel files include important employment-related records, such as applications, identity documents, emergency contacts, leave records, training documentation, and performance evaluations.

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Personnel files are the property of the company. Employees may request to review their file by contacting their immediate supervisor. With reasonable notice, employees can view their file in the presence of [designated representative] in a private and supportive setting.

Only supervisors and management personnel with a legitimate business reason may access personnel files.

Employees are expected to use company systems and property responsibly. Passwords assigned to employees remain the property of the company and must not be shared with unauthorized individuals.

While using company systems or property (e.g., email or voicemail), employees should be aware that these systems are subject to monitoring if necessary for legitimate operational or security reasons. Monitoring will be conducted respectfully, with care to avoid unnecessary intrusions into personal matters.

If employees have concerns about how their information is handled, they are encouraged to speak with HR or their supervisor.

10.3 How Employees Should Handle Other Employees' Information

Employees are expected to handle any information, personal circumstances, or stories they may learn about their co-workers (and their respective family members) with the utmost confidentiality and respect. Sharing such information without consent, even unintentionally, can harm trust and well-being and is considered gossip, which is discouraged in our workplace. Employees are encouraged to create a safe, supportive environment by respecting each other's privacy.

10.4 External Communications

10.4.1 Ethical External Communications and Storytelling

We are committed to sharing the impact of our business in a manner that honors the dignity, autonomy, and well-being of all individuals and to honor the cultural

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context that our company exists in. Our approach to storytelling is guided by principles of respect, informed consent, and sensitivity to the complexities of personal narratives. We want to be vigilant about the potential impact of our communications and storytelling on the individual and take steps to mitigate any negative effects.

Before sharing any individual's story, we obtain explicit, informed consent. This process involves:

- Explaining the purpose, scope, and potential reach of the story in accessible language.
- Ensuring individuals understand that participation is entirely voluntary and that they can withdraw consent at any time without any negative consequences. Offering choices regarding anonymity and the use of identifying details to protect privacy.
- Providing a supportive environment during the storytelling process, with access to emotional support if needed.

We are committed to portraying individuals' stories and images with accuracy and respect. We steer clear of narratives or images that perpetuate stereotypes or sensationalize experiences. We highlight strengths, resilience, and agency rather than focusing on victimization. We ensure that photos and stories honor cultural contexts and are appropriate, respectful, and free from exploitation.

Appropriate Use of Photos and Words:

- Photos: Use images that represent individuals in a dignified and empowering way. Avoid using photos that depict vulnerability or distress in a way that could evoke pity or reduce the individual's humanity. We do not use photos showing full faces unless express consent has been given by the individual. Images should always respect cultural sensitivities and portray individuals with their consent.
- Words: Choose language that reflects respect and empathy, avoiding terms or descriptions that could sensationalize, stigmatize or diminish the subject. Focus on strengths and achievements rather than framing individuals solely through the lens of trauma or hardship.

Review and Approval:

We will ensure that individuals have the opportunity to review photos and accompanying text to ensure they are comfortable with how their story is represented before publication. We will also strive to share the final stories and photos with them after release.

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Continuous Reflection and Improvement:

We are dedicated to ongoing reflection and improvement of our storytelling practices:

- Encouraging feedback from those whose stories we share to ensure their perspectives are honored.
- Providing staff with training on ethical and trauma-informed storytelling practices, including selecting appropriate words and images.
- Regularly reviewing and updating our policies on this topic to align with best practices and the evolving understanding of ethical storytelling.

10.4.2 Employees' Personal Blogs and Social Media

Employees who use personal blogs or social media platforms are responsible for the content they post. When referencing the company, employees should exercise care, ensuring that comments align with company policies, respect confidentiality, and avoid content that is false, malicious, obscene, or violates workplace policies.

To protect privacy, employees are not permitted to publicly write about or post pictures of colleagues in connection with the company on social media. All employees are expected to respect the privacy and dignity of others at all times.

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11. EMPLOYEE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THIS HANDBOOK

The company would like to ensure that all employees understand the contents of this Employee Handbook and agree to its policies and procedures.

As an employee of the company, you are required to sign or mark the written acknowledgment below confirming you have received, read, and understood the Employee Handbook and agree to follow the policies and procedures outlined herein. [HR] should ensure that this is done within 10 days of you starting employment with the company.

For employees who are not able to read the contents of this Handbook on their own, a designated supervisor, HR representative, or trusted colleague (nominated by the relevant employee) will verbally review the Employee Handbook's key contents with the employee. The employee will confirm their understanding verbally or through a thumbprint or other suitable acknowledgment, witnessed by a supervisor or HR representative.

Reminder:

You are encouraged to ask questions or seek clarification on any part of this Handbook. Supervisors or HR are available to provide explanations and additional guidance to ensure every employee feels confident in their understanding of workplace policies.

By signing or otherwise acknowledging receipt of this handbook, you affirm your commitment to following the outlined policies and contributing to a safe, respectful, and inclusive workplace.

Employee Name: _____

Employee Signature (or Thumbprint): _____

Witness¹³ Name: _____

Witness Signature: _____

Date: _____

¹³ A witness is only required where an employee acknowledges with a thumbprint

APPENDIX 1

Sample Form of Equity Audit

Audit Date: _____

Audit Lead: _____

Departments/Areas Included: _____

1. Purpose of the Equity Audit

The purpose of this equity audit is to assess and identify any disparities within our organization, ensuring a fair, inclusive, and trauma-informed workplace for all employees. This process aims to create a supportive environment that promotes equal opportunities for everyone.

2. Data Collection

Employee Demographics:

Gender:

- [•]% Female
- [•]% Male
- [•]% Other

Race/Ethnicity:

- [•]%
- [•]%

Disability Status:

- [•]% of employees self-identify as having a disability
- [•]% of employees report no disability

Age Range:

- Below 20 years: [•]%
- 20-30 years: [•]%
- 31-40 years: [•]%
- 41-50 years: [•]%
- 51+ years: [•]%

Marital Status:

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- [•]% Single (never married)
- [•]% Married
- [•]% Living with Partner (unmarried)
- Divorced
- Separated
- Widowed
- Other/Prefer not to disclose

Education Level:

- Illiterate/No formal education: [•]%
- Primary school education (some or completed): [•]%
- Secondary school education (some or completed): [•]%
- Higher education or vocational training: [•]%
- Post-graduate education: [•]%

Data Sources:

- Employee surveys/interviews (confidential)
- HR records (e.g., compensation, benefits, promotions)
- Exit interviews
- Grievances/complaints

3. Key Areas of Assessment

A. Workplace Culture and Environment

- Are all employees respected and treated equally?
- Is there a safe and supportive space for employees to raise concerns?
- Are the physical workspaces accessible and inclusive?

B. Recruitment and Hiring Practices

- Are diverse candidate pools actively sought?
- Do interview processes account for potential bias?
- Are all applicants considered equally, regardless of background?

C. Compensation and Benefits

- Are employees paid equitably based on role and performance?
- Are there disparities in pay based on gender, race, or other factors?
- Are benefits accessible to all employees, including those with disabilities?

D. Career Development and Advancement

- Are opportunities for advancement available to all employees?
- Are promotions and raises distributed equitably?
- Do employees feel supported in professional development?

E. Harassment, Discrimination, and Reporting

- Are there systems in place for reporting harassment or discrimination?
- Are these systems trauma-informed, confidential, and accessible to all employees?
- Have any recent complaints been handled effectively and fairly?

4. Employee Feedback

Survey/Interview Questions:

- Do you feel valued in your workplace? (Yes/No)
- Have you ever experienced discrimination or bias at work? (Yes/No)
- If yes, do you feel comfortable reporting it? (Yes/No)
- Do you believe that the company offers equal opportunities for all employees? (Yes/No)
- Are there any changes you would recommend to improve fairness and inclusivity?

5. Findings and Analysis

Summary of Key Findings:

- *Example: "The workforce consists of 75% women and 25% men, reflecting the nature of the industry and recruitment practices. However, all managerial positions are currently held by men, leading to limited upward mobility for female employees."*
- *Example: "60% of employees have no formal education or have only completed primary school. While this aligns with the company's mission of creating opportunities for underprivileged individuals, training programs for job-specific skills (e.g., customer service, sewing techniques) need to be enhanced."*
- *Example: "While wages meet local minimum wage standards, employees with the same roles and responsibilities report inconsistencies in pay, often tied to subjective factors like supervisor favoritism. Employees are unaware of how pay structures are determined."*
- *Example: "Employees generally report feeling supported by peers and supervisors. However, 25% of employees shared that they feel uncomfortable raising concerns due to fear of retaliation or lack of clear grievance mechanisms. This is more pronounced among female workers who feel hesitant to voice workplace harassment concerns."*
- *Example: "Many employees in production roles are illiterate and struggle to understand written policies or safety instructions. While verbal explanations are provided, employees indicate a need for more accessible communication tools, such as pictorial guides or audio instructions."*

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- *Example: "70% of employees have received no formal training since joining the company. Training is often informal and inconsistent, leaving employees underprepared for complex tasks or career advancement opportunities."*

6. Recommendations

- *Example: "Implement a transparent pay structure that clearly defines pay scales based on role, tenure, and performance. Share this information with employees through verbal explanations or visual charts."*
- *Example: "Conduct annual pay equity audits to ensure consistency and fairness across all roles."*
- *Example: "Establish clear career pathways and communicate them verbally and visually. For example, explain how an entry-level worker can progress to a supervisor role."*
- *Example: "Offer mentorship programs where experienced employees support entry-level workers in building skills and confidence for advancement."*
- *Example: "Create anonymous feedback systems, such as suggestion boxes or verbal check-ins, to encourage employees to share concerns without fear of retaliation."*
- *Example: "Conduct regular team-building activities to foster trust and camaraderie among employees and supervisors."*
- *Example: "Develop communication tools such as pictorial guides, audio instructions, and videos to ensure all employees understand policies, safety protocols, and expectations."*
- *Example: "Train supervisors in effective, compassionate communication strategies for employees with literacy challenges."*
- *Example: "Rotate employees through different tasks to reduce physical strain and repetitive injuries."*
- *Example: "Provide ergonomic equipment (e.g., padded mats for standing or chairs with back support) to enhance comfort during work."*
- *Example: "Implement structured on-the-job training programs that include clear, simple instructions and peer mentoring for new hires."*
- *Example: "Offer skill-based certifications (e.g., advanced sewing techniques, hospitality service standards) to enhance employees' resumes and career prospects."*
- *Example: "Train employees to handle customer harassment situations and designate a supervisor to support employees in such cases."*

7. Next Steps and Timeline

- **Action Plan:** Outline clear, actionable steps to address the identified gaps.
- **Implementation Timeline:** List out actions to be implemented Short-Term (0-6 months), Mid-Term (6-12 months) and Long-Term (12+ months).
- **Responsible Parties:** Identify who will be accountable for implementing changes.

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8. Follow-Up

- **Review Process:** Schedule a follow-up review after [3/6/12/24] months to assess progress on equity goals.
- **Employee Check-In:** Conduct another survey to gather employee feedback on changes made.

9. Acknowledgment

By completing this audit, we commit to addressing any disparities and fostering an inclusive environment that supports the well-being and growth of all employees.

Audit Lead Signature: _____

Date: _____

HR Director/Management Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX 2

Sample Form of Performance Evaluation

Employee Name: [Name]

Position: [Position]

Department: [Department]

Evaluation Period: [Start Date] - [End Date]

Supervisor Name: [Supervisor Name]

Date of Evaluation: [Date]

Evaluation Categories:

1. Key Strengths:

List out specific strengths related to job performance:

- *Example: "Consistently assembles [X] units per shift with high accuracy."*
- *Example: "Always maintains a clean and organized workspace, ensuring safety for the entire team."*

2. Accomplishments Since Last Review:

List out specific accomplishments:

- *Example: "Learned to operate a new machine within the expected timeframe, increasing productivity."*
- *Example: "Helped train a new employee, demonstrating teamwork and patience."*

3. Areas for Growth:

List out specific areas of growth:

- *Example: "Improve consistency in meeting daily production targets."*
- *Example: "Enhance attention to detail to reduce the number of errors in assembly."*

4. Action Plan:

- *Example: "Attend on-the-job training sessions on machine operation techniques by [specific date]."*
- *Example: "Work on completing at least [X] units per day over the next [30 days]."*
- *Example: "Check work for errors before submission to the supervisor, with guidance provided as needed."*

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5. Company Support Needed:

- *Example: "Provide a 15-minute one-on-one coaching session weekly with the supervisor to discuss progress. Person responsible for arranging: [•]"*
- *Example: "Assign a peer mentor for the next [two weeks] to assist with new tasks. Person responsible for arranging: [•]"*

6. Review and Feedback:

- Date for next follow-up meeting: [Date]
- Supervisor Comments: [Supervisor's additional notes or feedback.]

Employee Signature: _____

Supervisor Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX 3

Sample Form of Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) Template

Employee Name: [Name]

Position: [Position]

Department: [Department]

Date of Plan Initiation: [Date]

Supervisor Name: [Supervisor Name]

Duration of Plan: [e.g., 90 Days]

1. Areas of Concern:

- *Example: "Frequently unable to meet daily production targets of [X] units."*
- *Example: "Leaves workstation untidy, causing safety hazards."*

2. Improvement Goals:

- *Example Goal 1: "Complete at least [Y] units per shift consistently for the next [30 days]."*
- *Example Goal 2: "Ensure the workstation is clean and organized at the end of every shift."*
- *Example Goal 3: "Arrive on time for all shifts over the next [two weeks]."*

3. Action Plan:

- *Example Action 1: "Participate in hands-on training on production techniques to increase efficiency."*
- *Example Action 2: "Supervisor will provide a daily checklist for maintaining a clean and safe workstation."*
- *Example Action 3: "Use a simple visual schedule to track shift times and attendance, provided by HR."*

4. Company Support Provided:

- *Example: "Supervisor will provide clear instructions and demonstrations for tasks during the first [two weeks]. Person responsible for arranging: [•]"*
- *Example: "Access to a buddy system for support and feedback during shifts. Person responsible for arranging: [•]"*
- *Example: "Allow short breaks if stress or fatigue becomes a concern. Person responsible for arranging: [•]"*

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5. Review Schedule:

Check-In Dates: [e.g., Weekly on [specific days].]

Mid-Plan Progress Review: [Date]

Final Review: [Date]

6. Outcomes of Plan:

Successful Completion: *[e.g., "If the employee meets all goals, the PIP will conclude, and they will return to regular performance monitoring."]*

Unsuccessful Completion: *[e.g., "If goals are not met, further action, including reassignment or termination, may be considered."]*

Employee Signature: _____

Supervisor Signature: _____

Date: _____



REFERENCES

HR Policies from Freedom Businesses

We would like to acknowledge and thank the following Freedom Business Alliance Members who generously shared their HR policies with the FBA as part of our research for this Handbook.

- [Aruna Project](#)
- [Purnaa](#)
- [Savhera USA](#)
- [Starfish Project](#)
- [The Market Project](#)
- [The Whispering Willow](#)
- [Threads of Hope Hellas](#)

Trauma-Informed Care Principles

- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) (<https://www.samhsa.gov/>)
- [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach. HHS Publication No. \(SMA\) 14-4884. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014.](#)
- Trauma-Informed Care Implementation Resource Center
 - www.traumainformedcare.chcs.org/wp-content/uploads/hrpolicyguidancetraumainformed.pdf

Ethical Conduct in Workplaces

- United Nations Global Compact
 - <https://unglobalcompact.org/what-is-gc/mission/principles>
- International Labor Organization (ILO)
 - <https://www.ilo.org/ilo-declaration-fundamental-principles-and-rights-work>
- Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM)
 - <https://www.shrm.org/about/bylaws-and-code-of-ethics/code-of-ethics>

Anonymous Reporting and Workplace Safety

- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (www.unodc.org)
 - https://www.unodc.org/documents/corruption/Publications/2015/15-04741_Person_Guide_eBook.pdf

IMPORTANT: Please seek professional legal advice to ensure that your Handbook complies with all applicable laws and regulations.

- o https://www.unodc.org/documents/corruption/Publications/2021/Speak_up_for_Health_-_Guidelines_to_Enable_Whistle-Blower_Protection_in_the_Health-Care_Sector_EN.pdf

General Workplace Policies, Accessibility and JEDI

- Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) (<https://www.shrm.org>)
- National Safety Council (NSC) (<https://www.nsc.org>)
- National Equity Project (www.nationalequityproject.org)
 - o <https://www.ctipp.org/post/integrating-accessibility-and-belonging-into-trauma-informed-policy-and-practice>
- BCorp
 - o <https://www.bcorporation.net/en-us/news/blog/evolving-the-standards-for-bcorp-certification-impact-topic-justice-equity-diversity-inclusion/>
 - o https://assets.ctfassets.net/l575jm7617lt/OAhjgWqeCd46FRWnwgx7n/6e07effbb1131da919c23ca0621b17c2/B_Lab_Global_JEDI_Baseline_Pillars_of_Focus_-_FINAL.pdf

Ethical Storytelling and Dignity-Focused Practices

- Dignified Storytelling (<https://www.dignifiedstorytelling.com/>)
- Ethical Storytelling (www.ethicalstorytelling.com)