



unipol

Supporting Students Affected by Bullying or Harassment

Procedure and Guidance

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1. Introduction

At Unipol, we believe that student accommodation should be a safe environment for tenants, conducive to learning. We aim to give our tenants a great housing experience, provide good value, promote social-academic interaction, and high quality housing – we want a Unipol property to be a home from home.

However, we are also aware that when a number of people are living within close proximity and sharing living spaces, often with people they did not previously know, things can go wrong. Arguments can break out and poor behaviours can impact that experience. This procedure is designed to clarify Unipol’s position regarding tenant behaviour, as well as what actions will be taken if there is an accusation of bullying or harassment within a Unipol property.

Unipol does not tolerate unacceptable behaviour and any accusation of bullying or harassment will be dealt with the utmost seriousness. This procedure applies to bullying or harassment that is committed or alleged to have been committed by any Unipol tenant, towards a Unipol tenant or within a Unipol property. The focus of this procedure will be, but is not limited to, instances or accusations of bullying and/or harassment between two co-tenants within the same property. While each instance of accusation is taken on a case-by-case basis, this procedure will offer clarity and advice for those involved.

Why this document matters: Reading this procedure is essential because it will help you understand what bullying and harassment look like, what support is available, and how Unipol can help if issues arise. By familiarising yourself with the definitions, processes, and support pathways, you’ll be better prepared to recognise concerning behaviour early, seek help confidently, and choose the option that feels safest and most appropriate for your situation. This guide is designed to be used as a practical tool—whether you’re experiencing a problem now or want to be informed should something occur—ensuring you know where to turn, what steps to take, and how Unipol will support you throughout the process.

For further information on this procedure, please contact Tenancy Support on:
tenancysupport@unipol.org.uk

2. Definitions of Bullying and Harassment

Bullying and harassment are behaviours that makes someone feel intimidated or offended. The differences between them are subtle and often contested, with no clear distinction between the two. Generally speaking, bullying is considered less severe in its effect on the victim, while harassment is more damaging. Harassment can be considered a criminal offense.

It is fundamentally the perception of the victim and how they perceived this behaviour to have impacted them as to whether action against them would be considered bullying or harassment. Additionally, should this matter be referred to Police, they would also make their assessment as to whether the perpetrator has demonstrated a course of unlawful harassment or discrimination. Unipol are limited in our abilities to determine whether incidents have been classified as bullying or harassment due to the varying definitions and similarities. However, we would offer advice and support throughout the process of a victim making a complaint.

2.1 Bullying

Although there is no legal definition of bullying, it can be described as unwanted behaviour from a person or group that is either:

- offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting
- an abuse or misuse of power that undermines, humiliates, or causes physical or emotional harm to someone

Bullying might:

- be a regular pattern of behaviour or a one-off incident
- happen face-to-face, on social media, in emails or calls
- not always be obvious or noticed by others

Examples of bullying at could include:

- spreading malicious rumours about someone
- consistently putting someone down in social situations
- deliberately tampering with someone's personal possessions in a communal space, in order to cause an inconvenience (e.g. moving their dishes in the kitchen, turning off the washing machine when in use)
- putting humiliating, offensive or threatening comments or photos on social media

Sometimes bullying might be classed as discrimination if it's related to certain 'protected characteristics' under discrimination law (Equality Act 2010). Protected characteristics are:

- age disability
- gender reassignment
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

2.2 Harassment

Harassment could be defined as severe and/or sustained unwanted behaviour from a person or group.

To be harassment, the unwanted behaviour must have:

- violated the person's dignity
- created an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for the person

It can be harassment if the behaviour:

- has one of these effects even if it was not intended
- intended to have one of these effects even if it did not have that effect

The law on harassment also applies if a person:

- is harassed because they are thought to have a certain protected characteristic when they do not (discrimination by perception)
- is harassed because they're linked to someone with a certain protected characteristic (discrimination by association)
- witnesses harassment, if what they've seen has violated their dignity or created an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive working environment for them

It can still be against the law even if the person being harassed does not ask for it to stop.

Harassment might be considered a hate crime or hate incident if the victim is harassed because they have a protected characteristic:

- because of their race or religion
- because of their sexuality
- because of their disability
- because they are transgender

If Unipol believe that a crime has been committed, we may in some circumstances report this to the police. Please see Section 3; Confidentiality for more information.

3. Confidentiality

Unipol are committed to responding to allegations fully, fairly, promptly and confidentially. Confidentiality is essential at the earliest stage of a complaint, as it helps tenants seek advice, discuss their concerns, and consider their options.

However, resolving an issue often requires communication with the person alleged to have caused the problem, as well as any named witnesses or, in some cases, other tenants. Complainants should be aware that, in order to stop the behaviour in question, the individual accused will usually need to be informed so they can respond and take appropriate action. The Tenancy Support and Wellbeing Coordinator will discuss this with tenants when a complaint is raised.

Unipol will protect a complainant's wish for confidentiality wherever possible. However, where a complaint indicates a serious wellbeing concern or a potentially criminal act that could harm people or property, confidentiality may not be fully maintainable. Further details are set out in Unipol's [Data Protection Procedure](#)¹.

While confidentiality is important, it is important for the complainant to remember that being open and honest is essential when trying to reach a resolution. When everyone involved shares accurate information and expresses their concerns clearly, it becomes easier to understand the root of the issue and identify practical steps forward.

Transparency helps build trust, reduces misunderstandings, and ensures that any decisions made are based on a full and fair picture of the situation. By approaching the process with honesty, all parties are better placed to work together toward a constructive and lasting outcome.

¹ <https://www.unipol.org.uk/governance/corporate-documents-unipol-board/data-protection-policy/>

4. Procedures for dealing with a disclosure of Bullying or Harassment

If you believe you're being affected by bullying or harassment, a number of options available to support you.

You can choose to use any of the options in Sections 4.1 to 4.4 at the time that feels right for you. There's no need to follow them in order, and you don't have to try one option before moving on to another. Every situation is different, and your comfort and safety come first. Whether you want to speak to someone directly, ask for mediation, involve your university, or look into alternative accommodation, you are free to pick whichever option best supports you. Unipol will be here to help you with whichever route you choose, whenever you choose it.

4.1 Taking personal action

If you feel you have been, or are being, subjected to bullying or harassment by a co-tenant, you should not feel that the situation is your fault or that you must tolerate it. Problems are often easier to resolve when raised early and directly with the person involved, and you may feel able to explain the impact of their behaviour on you.

There are different ways to take personal action, some of which allow concerns to be raised without referring to a specific individual or incident. Examples include speaking or writing to the person to explain what behaviour you find unacceptable or asking a peer to help bring the issue into conversation. If you do decide to take personal action, you could seek advice beforehand from Tenancy Support on how to structure your approach.

If you wish to speak to the directly to the person involved, we often recommend use of the **DESC technique** when having difficult conversations:

- **Describe** – describe the problem you are having – e.g. “When you repeatedly made comments about my appearance in front of others yesterday, it made me uncomfortable.”
- **Explain** – explain the impact it has on you – e.g. “It made me feel embarrassed and anxious, and I've been worried about spending time in the shared spaces since then.”
- **Show understanding** – show that you understand why this happened – e.g. “I understand you may have thought you were joking, and you might not have realised how those comments made me feel.”
- **Communicate an alternative** – communicate what you would prefer to happen instead or what you need going forward – e.g. “I'd really appreciate it if you could avoid making comments about me, even as a joke. If something is bothering you, I'd prefer if we talked about it directly and respectfully.”

If you choose to speak to the person directly, you may wish to have someone present. If you write to them, keep copies of any correspondence. Keep a log, with dates and note down relevant factual information.

4.2 Mediation through Unipol

If taking personal action is not possible or appropriate, you can ask Unipol for help. Tenancy Support can offer mediation between you and the perpetrator in two forms:

- **Direct Mediation:** a managed meeting and each side has the opportunity to state their case, listen to others, discuss and negotiate compromise.
- **Shuttle Mediation:** Tenancy Support will speak to each individual involved and discuss their case, report back to the others and mediate some compromise with all involved.

Mediation can be a valuable way to resolve bullying concerns, as it provides a safe and structured space for everyone involved to express their views and be heard. With the support of Unipol as a neutral mediator, misunderstandings can be clarified, behaviour can be addressed directly, and practical agreements can be reached. This often leads to quicker, more constructive resolutions while helping to rebuild trust and reduce further conflict.

No action will be taken without your explicit permission unless there is a serious wellbeing concern or a potentially criminal act that could harm people or property. If this occurs, any action Unipol takes will be fully discussed with you.

As a private landlord, Unipol's role focuses on supporting the victim. **Unipol cannot fine or discipline tenants**, and legal processes mean we are rarely able to evict a tenant accused of bullying or harassment within the typical student tenancy period. This means that in many cases, Unipol cannot take direct action against the perpetrator.

However, mediation is a way in which we can actively engage the perpetrator in taking positive steps for a safe and comfortable living environment.

Mediation is often an effective way to address bullying or harassment, particularly when the issue is raised early. However, if you feel mediation is not the right approach for your situation, you may wish to explore one of the other available options.

4.3 Reporting to the perpetrator's university

Each student, when entering a university, will agree to the university's Code of Conduct. This can be named differently within each institution, but will almost certainly include an anti-bullying and harassment policy, and a procedure for dealing with accusations of this kind. Universities are likely to place additional weight on allegations that include discrimination involving a protected characteristic such as racism, homophobia or ableism.

As a member of the university, typically each student is bound by this procedure, even while in private accommodation. Therefore, it might be more effective for you to make your university aware of the situation. If you are unsure of how to do this, Tenancy Support will be able to assist you; this could be to show you where to make a complaint or make a complaint on your behalf.

If the perpetrator attends a different institution to you, you are still entitled to make a complaint to their university even if you are not a student with them. It is also advised that you let your university know as they may be able to offer you support.

It should be noted, however, that each institution will react to the complaint in different ways. While Unipol will help support you during your complaint, the final outcome and any resulting actions remain at the discretion of the university.

4.4 Finding alternative accommodation

There may be situations where you no longer feel comfortable or safe living with the perpetrator. In these circumstances, Unipol will look to find you alternative accommodation or help you to leave your tenancy.

Unipol will always try to rehouse you within its own portfolio, in a property you feel comfortable with. However, Unipol has a limited number of properties, which are often full throughout the year. If nothing suitable is available, or you feel the options offered are unsuitable, Unipol will discuss alternative routes for leaving your tenancy.

Because your tenancy agreement is a legally binding contract, you remain liable for rent for the full contract period. If living with a co-tenant becomes unsafe or intolerable, you may be able to find someone to take over your tenancy. This will release you from the legal obligations and allow you to find alternative accommodation elsewhere.

In more serious situations, it may be appropriate to apply for Tenancy Release. Tenancy Support can advise you when they believe you will meet the criteria. Applications are reviewed by the Director of Finance. Tenancy Release is normally only granted where there is a direct risk of harm, significant evidence of bullying or harassment, or where all other options have been exhausted. It is considered a last resort.

It is important to note that **Unipol is unlikely to be able to make the person accused to leave the property**. All tenants have strong legal rights to occupy their home, and Unipol would need to take court action to evict someone.

Eviction is intentionally difficult to obtain in order to protect tenants. Under [Section 8 of the Housing Act 1988](#),² bullying or harassment complaints fall under Ground 14, which applies when:

“The tenant or any other person residing in the dwelling-house has been guilty of conduct which is a nuisance or annoyance to adjoining occupiers, or has been convicted of using the dwelling-house or allowing the dwelling-house to be used for immoral or illegal purposes.”

To pursue a Section 8 eviction, Unipol would need substantial evidence that the tenant has committed such behaviour, and the court must consider eviction to be a reasonable and proportionate response. In most cases, Unipol does not have sufficient evidence to meet this threshold, and courts rarely grant eviction for issues of this nature. Even when successful, the eviction process typically takes around six months.³ Because of these limitations, mediation or helping the victim move to alternative accommodation is often a more effective and timely solution than pursuing eviction.

Unipol understands that living with a perpetrator can be distressing, and our priority is always your safety and wellbeing. Where remaining in the property is no longer comfortable or safe, we will work closely with you to explore suitable alternatives and, wherever possible, support you in finding alternative accommodation. Our aim is to ensure you feel secure, supported, and able to move forward in a living environment that meets your needs.

² <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/50/schedule/2/enacted#:~:text=Ground%208&text=if%20rent%20is%20payable%20yearly,law%20due%20from%20the%20tenant>

³ <https://legalfordlords.co.uk/section-8-grounds-for-eviction/>

If you need help at any stage or are unsure what to do next, Tenancy Support is here to support you.

Please contact Tenancy Support at tenancysupport@unipol.org.uk .

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