



# Footsteps Member Safety Policies

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## Introduction

Footsteps is committed to creating and maintaining a safe and respectful community for all members. Part of that commitment includes striving to prevent and address conduct that violates our Member Safety Guidelines.

**Any member who feels that they have experienced or witnessed unsafe behavior, from a Footsteps member, staff, volunteer, supporter or guest, etc. including within Footsteps' digital spaces, is encouraged to report the incident(s) to a Footsteps staff member. The behavior that would merit an incident report includes but is not limited to the following examples:**

- **Bullying:** an individual or a group of people, repeatedly and intentionally cause hurt or harm to another person or group of people who feel helpless to respond. Bullying can be physical, verbal, or social (the intent to harm someone's social reputation and/or cause humiliation), and take place in person or virtually. Bullying can continue over time, is often hidden, and will probably continue if no action is taken.
- **Violence:** behavior of any kind involving physical force intended to hurt or damage (i.e. intimate partner violence, sexual violence, child or elder maltreatment or abuse, etc.).
- **Stalking:** unwanted behaviors directed towards an individual, physically or virtually, by another that results in the person to whom the behavior is directed fearing for themselves and/or others.
- **Sexual misconduct:** any non-consensual act committed by any person upon any other person, regardless of the sex, gender, sexual orientation, and/or gender

identity of those involved. Please refer to our [Sexual Misconduct Information](#) for a more detailed description of sexual misconduct.

- **Offensive behavior:** conduct or communication that would offend a reasonable person, including but not limited to, unwelcome sexual or romantic attention; remarks or direct online messages having sexual innuendo; derisive humor about race, sex, gender, or other classifications; comments intended or construed as being derogatory to an entire class of persons.

If you are unsure if the behavior constitutes a violation of our Member Safety Policy, we encourage you to discuss the incident(s) with our staff.

**Note:** False or retaliatory reports will be considered a violation of our community agreements, and may result in membership revocation or being placed on limited membership as well.

If you have any questions about these policies, please reach out to Hoda ElMahdy, Senior Director of Programs, at [hoda@footstepsorg.org](mailto:hoda@footstepsorg.org).

## Respectful Space and Safe Events Guidelines

Footsteps is committed to promoting a safe and hospitable environment for events where everyone who attends is treated respectfully. Below are our community guidelines in support of this commitment. We recognize that, for most of us, these guidelines are intuitive and how we generally engage with others in our lives – but it is important that we make them explicit as well to ensure these guidelines are clear to everyone who may be attending Footsteps events.

### **One of Footsteps' core values is to promote the free exchange of ideas.**

Therefore, critical examination of beliefs, including critical commentary on another person's views, does not, in and of itself, constitute hostile conduct or harassment. However, Footsteps has zero tolerance for communication or behavior that is offensive, degrading, coercive, or disruptive, or that has the purpose or effect of interfering with someone's participation in or enjoyment of an event.

**Communication and conduct at Footsteps events which is prohibited by these guidelines include (but is not limited to) harassment based on race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, partnership status, family status, caregiver status, sexual preference, status with regard to public assistance, mental or physical impairment, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, veteran status, uniformed service, age, other group identity, or other characteristic protected by law.**

While disagreement and critical examination are welcome, conduct that would violate these guidelines include:

- Yelling at or threatening members, staff, guests, speakers, or observers
- Significantly disruptive conduct that impacts the experience of others at the event
- Out-of-control intoxication
- Repeated interruption of a speaker or performance
- Creation of an atmosphere of harassment or intimidation, including but not limited to stalking, whether physical or virtual
- Sexual Harassment or misconduct
  - You can find more information about our sexual misconduct policies [here](#).
- Conduct or communication that would offend a reasonable person, including but not limited to unwelcome attention, remarks or conduct having sexual innuendo; derisive humor about race, sexual orientation, gender, or other classifications; comments intended or construed as being derogatory to an entire class of persons
- Actual, threatened, or implied retaliation against a person for complaining about a violation of these policies or for cooperating with an investigation into a complaint

**What to do if you experience or see unsafe conduct:**

If you experience or witness hostile or harassing conduct during a Footsteps event, you can contact Footsteps staff. If safe to do so, the person(s) who is the targeted subject, as well as any witness(s) may also demand that the person who is causing harm stop the offensive conduct or communication.

No one shall be retaliated against for complaining in good faith about a violation of these policies or for cooperating with an investigation into a complaint. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the investigatory process to the extent consistent with adequate investigation and appropriate corrective action.

Reports of hostile or harassing conduct will be promptly addressed. As a first response, staff will speak with the person about whom the complaint has been made, to identify the behavior and request it be stopped. If the action or behavior continues, the offending person may be asked to leave the event and their membership status may be revisited.

If a member or other event participant is intoxicated to the extent that their behavior is disorderly or aggressive, staff will require that person to leave the event.

These guidelines cover events that Footsteps holds for its members, events that we sponsor, and events for which we provide our facilities. These policies apply to members, staff, volunteers, guest attendees, and observers, including media representatives.

**For general interpersonal conflict, we ask you to resolve it on your own and encourage you to feel empowered to voice your boundaries and needs with others.**

## Digital Space Guidelines

**The usage guidelines posted below apply to all of the Footsteps-run digital spaces, including our Google Groups and our social media pages, and are intended to help maintain a welcoming atmosphere for all of our members.** We strongly encourage self-moderation. Before you post something, think about whether what you are saying fits these guidelines.

*Please note:* while we encourage respectful behavior in all corners of the internet, we are only able to enforce these guidelines within our organizational online spaces, and in online interactions between Footsteps members, staff, volunteers, supporters, or guests – regardless of whether it is a Footsteps organization space or not.

**These digital spaces are an extension of our safe space, and the guidelines within our membership agreement also apply:**

- Our groups offer a supportive space that encourages growth, change, and the development of one's authentic self.
- Please remember that these are spaces where multiple views are accepted. Disagreement is also acceptable. To maintain an inclusive conversation — even in disagreement — please refrain from personal attacks and individual conversations in a group thread.
- Confidentiality applies to these groups. Forwarding emails that originate in the Google Groups to someone who is not a member violates confidentiality, as does sharing a screenshot, etc.
- Please also be aware that when you post, you are putting something trackable into the world, and Footsteps cannot guarantee your confidentiality in online groups as big as these. Footsteps does our best to make sure that confidentiality is maintained, and if we find a violation, we will address it. Keep in mind that you might not know everyone in the groups, so please be mindful.
- All Google Group participants must be recognizable to Footsteps staff. Members are welcome to use pseudonyms to maintain their confidentiality. ***However, if asked individually by staff, members must identify themselves to maintain an atmosphere of safety for all our members.***
- Illegal activity, including sexual harassment, is not allowed in these groups.

**Critique and debate are encouraged, but shaming and defaming someone else is unwelcome:**

- Everyone is invited to share their experiences, interactions, and complaints with individuals and organizations in a manner that can be helpful to others.
- Statements that spread rumors or hearsay from a third party about individuals or organizations, that damage their reputations, shame them, or otherwise defame them can be damaging to the trust of the group and to individuals. This includes Footsteps members, staff, outside individuals, and other organizations.

**These groups are hosted and moderated by Footsteps:**

- We strongly encourage self-moderation. Before you post something, think about whether what you are saying fits the guidelines posted above.
- Currently, staff moderators use their discretion to ensure that posts follow the guidelines. This means:
  - Footsteps staff will address issues of harassment, harm, shame, and spam. This can include removing a member from the group, temporarily or permanently.
  - If we receive feedback about a problematic post, staff will address the poster with the guidelines detailed in the [Respectful Space and Safe Events Guidelines](#).

## Sexual Misconduct Information

Below is further detailed information about sexual misconduct specifically.

### What is Sexual Misconduct?

Sexual misconduct is defined as any non-consensual act committed by any person upon any other person, regardless of the sex, gender, sexual orientation, and/or gender identity of those involved.

Violations include, but are not limited to:

- *Sexual Harassment*: unwelcome, sexual, or gender-based verbal, written, online, and/or physical conduct.
- *Non-Consensual Sexual Intercourse (Rape)*: any sexual penetration or intercourse, however slight, with any object by a person upon another person that is without consent and/or by force.
- *Non-Consensual Sexual Contact (Sexual Assault)*: any intentional sexual touching, however slight, with any object by a person upon another person that is without consent and/or by force.
- *Sexual Exploitation*: is a situation in which a person takes non-consensual or abusive sexual advantage of another.

### **Consent is defined as a knowing, voluntary, and clear permission to engage in mutually agreed upon sexual activity.**

Since people may experience the same interaction in different ways, it is the responsibility of each person to make certain that the other has consented before engaging in the activity. For consent to be valid, there must be a clear expression in words or actions that the other person consented to that specific sexual conduct.

A person cannot consent if they are unable to understand what is happening or are disoriented, asleep, or unconscious for any reason, including due to alcohol or other drugs. An individual who engages in sexual activity when they know, or should know, that the other person is physically or mentally incapacitated has not received consent.

### Getting Help

Footsteps believes that as a victim of any sexual misconduct, you get to decide what to do, how to cope, and what help you want. You get to decide what makes sense for you.

Footsteps staff is here to support any member who experiences any form of sexual misconduct.

After an incident of sexual assault, harassment, or discrimination, the decision to file a report can often be a scary one. Below are some reasons why it is both challenging and important to report sexual misconduct.

Please look at the chart below to help you in making a decision:

Reasons People Report	Reasons People Hesitate to Report
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Feelings of unsafety</li> <li>● Discomfort and fear of seeing the person around the community</li> <li>● Wanting to protect others</li> <li>● Not wanting the person to get away with what they have done</li> <li>● Wanting to feel in control and stand up for oneself</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Not wanting to be named in the reporting process</li> <li>● They don't think it is serious enough</li> <li>● Fear of further harm or re-traumatization</li> <li>● Shame, fear of judgment, blaming oneself, etc</li> <li>● Fear of getting in trouble</li> </ul>

Below are resources we encourage you to utilize:

- **Hotline:**  
Safe Horizon has a 24/7 confidential hotline for victims of sexual misconduct. If you are unsure of what to do, have any questions, or want to explore your options, this is a great place to start. They can be reached at 1-800-621-4673.
- **Medical Attention:**  
If you experience sexual assault, we highly encourage you to seek medical attention as soon as you can.

If you decide to go to the hospital, in New York City you can call 311 or the Rape, Sexual Assault, and Incest Hotline at 212-227-3000. You can also ask the police where the closest SAFE Center is. SAFE stands for "Sexual Assault Forensic Exam". A SAFE Center is a place where the staff is specially trained to provide sensitive care to victims of sexual assault. If you prefer, you could go to the nearest hospital.

*If you decide to go to the hospital after being sexually assaulted and you don't have health insurance, you do not have to pay for any costs related to the Sexual Assault Forensic Exam. The New York State Office of Victim Services can cover the cost of your medical care.*

Completing a Sexual Assault Forensic Exam can be a difficult experience. The process can take several hours. It can be hard to talk about what has happened and the exam may feel uncomfortable and intrusive. You have the right to stop or refuse any medical procedure you don't want to have. You also do not need to go alone and can have someone accompany you.

- **Law Enforcement**  
Sexual assault is a crime. Working with the police and courts can be a way to get



protection and justice. For some survivors, it is an empowering experience, for others, they may be uncomfortable or triggered by the idea of engaging with police. The choice is at the discretion of the survivor.

It can also be a long and difficult process. And the outcome may not be what you hope for. If you decide to report a sexual assault, the police will ask you about what has happened, often several times. Their role is to investigate, and based on the evidence, they will decide whether or not they can make an arrest.

If an arrest is made, you will speak to a prosecutor at the district attorney's office. The prosecutor decides whether to bring criminal charges.

You might also change your mind after you report to the police, and not want the assailant to be charged. One thing to know is that once you report to the police, it is in their hands to investigate, and it is the district attorney's decision whether to prosecute. They may go forward with the case even if you change your mind.

*You get to decide what makes sense for you and your safety.* If you want to report it, you can go to the hospital and tell the hospital staff, call 911, or call the NYPD Sex Crimes Report Hotline at 212-267-RAPE. If you aren't sure whether you want to report it, you can call Safe Horizon's hotline at 1-800-621-4673.

### **Reporting Sexual Misconduct to Footsteps**

If you would like to file an incident report with Footsteps about a sexual assault at the hands of another Footstepper or Footsteps staff, volunteer, supporter, or guest, please reach out to the staff you feel most comfortable with who will assist you in scheduling an appointment and/or you can request an appointment with:

- Senior Director of Programs, Hoda ElMahdy, [hoda@footstepsorg.org](mailto:hoda@footstepsorg.org)
- Senior Director of People and Culture, Jess Bloom, [jessica@footstepsorg.org](mailto:jessica@footstepsorg.org)
- Senior Director of Finance, Data, and Administration, Jess Markowitz, [jmarkowitz@footstepsorg.org](mailto:jmarkowitz@footstepsorg.org)
- Director of Clinical Services, Tobi Erner - LCSW, [turner@footstepsorg.org](mailto:turner@footstepsorg.org)
- Senior Staff Social Worker, Julia Jerusalmi-Henig - LCSW, [julia@footstepsorg.org](mailto:julia@footstepsorg.org)
- Senior Staff Social Worker, Sophie Kaufman - LMSW, [skaufman@footstepsorg.org](mailto:skaufman@footstepsorg.org)
- Family Justice Program Manager, Mattie Liskow - LMSW, [mliskow@footstepsorg.org](mailto:mliskow@footstepsorg.org)

**If this is an emergency and you are in an unsafe situation, please call 911 immediately. Your personal safety must always come first.**

If you identified closely with the above chart about being unsure of reporting, you may not be ready to make a report. Consider making an appointment to talk with one of our social workers, who will work with you to decide what is the right course of action for you.

### ***What happens after I report?***

If you decide to file an incident report with Footsteps, there may be a temporary suspension of the accused member from Footsteps member groups and events in order to conduct a full investigation. During this time, the investigatory team interviews parties and witnesses, takes notes, collects evidence, and may involve a 3rd Party Consultant if necessary such as the Crime Victims Treatment Center or other LCSW. After reviewing all information available the panel will make a decision regarding the appropriate course of action.

For more information please see [Footsteps Procedures for Filing an Incident Report](#).

### ***Helping Someone***

We at Footsteps are a community that cares for one another. You are encouraged to contact Footsteps staff and they will do their best to support you. *Please keep in mind that only the person who has directly experienced or witnessed misconduct can file an incident report with Footsteps.*

Below are some things to consider and pointers if you find yourself in a situation of needing to help another member who may have experienced sexual misconduct:

- ***Consider their safety***

Ask the person who you are supporting: “is your immediate safety at risk?” If yes, contact 911 immediately or call an ambulance for them.

If you are not sure if someone is in imminent danger but have concerns about an individual’s safety, contact Safe Horizon (1-800-621-4673) for confidential crisis response and consultation.

- ***Listen without judgement, which includes but is not limited to:***

- Believing the story they are sharing, regardless of their choices (e.g., dress, alcohol consumption, etc.)
- Limiting your questions
- Offering compassion and empathy
- Not blaming the person for what occurred (e.g., do not ask “why” questions)
- Focus on their experience without labeling or defining it for that individual
- Leave investigating and determining facts to those with that responsibility (e.g. law enforcement)
- Validating their feelings and reactions

- ***Empower them with next steps***

Provide options about resources so that the person you are supporting can make informed choices. Refer to the resources provided above and ask if they would like you to accompany them or assist them in connecting with the resources they desire.

## **Procedures for Filing an Incident Report**

If you or a member you know have experienced or witnessed unsafe behavior, from a Footsteps member or staff, volunteer, supporter or guest, etc. in Footsteps' space and programs, as described and detailed in any of the descriptions above, you are encouraged to report the incident(s) to a Footsteps staff member.

### **How to File an Incident Report with Footsteps:**

*For incidents occurring at a Footsteps-sponsored event:*

A member who believes they have experienced or witnessed a violation of our Member Safety Policy should contact the Senior Director of Programs, Hoda ElMahdy, or any Footsteps staff person the member feels comfortable with as soon as possible.

Please note that a central tenet of Footsteps is giving agency/control to the person harmed if they choose to report. If the incident occurred at a Footsteps' event, our [Respectful Space and Safe Events Guidelines](#) will be enforced and may result in immediate action, such as the removal of the accused individual from the event. Following the event, staff will determine any follow-up action, which could include filing an Incident Report. The process for filing an Incident Report is detailed below.

*For incidents involving another Footsteps member:*

Reach out to the Senior Director of Programs, Hoda ElMahdy, or any Footsteps staff person the member feels comfortable with, who can discuss various options, including assisting in scheduling an appointment to file a formal Incident Report.

If the member who has experienced or witnessed unsafe behavior decides to report the incident(s), a member of the Footsteps staff will schedule an appointment and will complete an Incident Report Form.

During that meeting, the staff member, in addition to filling out an Incident Report, will provide supportive resources and may request contact information for others who may be involved. At this time, the staff member will also take any immediate action needed, including but not limited to temporarily suspending the accused member. Membership of the offending party may be limited or suspended during the course of the investigation.

We will conduct an investigation which may include:

- interviewing connected parties, which may include the accused;
- gathering any evidence that substantiates the complaint;
- drafting recommendations for the Safety Review Panel;
- bringing the Incident Report to a Safety Review Panel;
- communicating any decision by the Safety Review Panel to both parties.

The Safety Review Panel will conduct an investigation based on the Incident Report, and will determine a course of action. The Safety Review Panel is a panel convened by Footsteps

with at least three members, including the staff person who took the report. Those members may include:

- Senior Director of Programs
- Director of Clinical Services
- Senior Director of People & Culture
- Member of the Senior Leadership Team
- As needed, 3rd Party Consultant: Crime Victims Treatment Center or other LCSW

The role of the Safety Review Panel is to determine a course of action, with the input of the person harmed, included but not limited to the following:

- Issuing a warning, or reprimand,
- Referring to outside counseling,
- Monitoring behavior at Footsteps events,
- Temporarily suspending membership, limiting membership, or revoking membership,
- Deciding to take no further action.

Depending on the nature of the reported incident, a temporary suspension of membership of the alleged party may be necessary during the course of the investigation. Decisions by the Safety Review Panel are final, and will only be open to reconsideration upon new or additional relevant information becoming available. Any reported allegations of a violation of our Member Safety Policy, harassment, discrimination, or retaliation will be investigated.

*Incidents involving non-members:*

A staff person will document incidents involving non-members; however, Footsteps cannot complete the procedure above when the incident involves individuals who are not Footsteps members.

**Retaliation:**

No one shall be retaliated against by Footsteps or a staff member for coming forward in good faith or for cooperating with an investigation into an incident. Any retaliation by a Footsteps member will result in immediate loss of membership privileges.

**Confidentiality:**

Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the investigatory process to the extent possible while consistent with adequate investigation and appropriate corrective action. The identities of persons participating in an investigation and the information they provide will not be shared with individuals who do not have a legal or legitimate need to know. In order to appropriately investigate, Footsteps cannot take any anonymous reports. Investigators will maintain confidentiality to the extent possible.

***If you have questions about these policies, or to file an Incident Report, please contact:  
Hoda ElMahdy, Senior Director of Programs at [hoda@footstepsorg.org](mailto:hoda@footstepsorg.org).***

**Note:** If the complaint of misconduct is against a Footsteps Staff Member, the incident will

be investigated by the CEO, the Senior Director of People & Culture, and the Senior Director of Finance, Data, and Administration or other appropriate party.