



Video: Ostracism Subtle and Overt Behaviors 2024

# Ostracism Subtle and Overt Behaviors: Facilitation Guide



## Overview

This facilitation guide and accompanying video have been developed to assist equal opportunity (EO) and equal employment opportunity (EEO) professionals and practitioners in discussing to subtle and overt behaviors of ostracism.

Additional information on how to conduct a facilitation can be found in *The Leader's Conversation* guide (available at [deomi.mil](http://deomi.mil)).

This guided discussion is focused on two videos that reflect *Ostracism- Subtle Behaviors and Ostracism- Overt Behaviors*. The videos portray two ways this behavior can be expressed among coworkers. The facilitator can use the videos and guide to discuss the demonstrated problematic behaviors and how the unit members and leaders can prevent, mitigate, or address them. Adherence to this facilitation guide is encouraged to ensure consistency in training delivery.

However, this guide is not all-inclusive and may be expanded and modified based on the facilitator's experience. Throughout this guide, questions are framed to stimulate the facilitator's thoughts on areas to explore and consider in this process and on the specific topic. Users should provide a controlled, safe, and non-attributional environment where individuals will be willing to share their perspectives. EO and EEO professionals, practitioners, and leaders can use this event to review and educate their members on policy and acceptable and unacceptable behaviors.



## Purpose

The objectives for this discussion:

- Define ostracism and subtle and overt behaviors.
- Discuss the videos and the behaviors seen within them.
- Grasp how ostracism can affect the individual and the organization.
- Understand the impacts of ostracism if the behavior is not addressed.
- Discuss strategies to mitigate ostracism behaviors.

## Preparation

This guide has been developed assuming that users have some basic facilitation skills and understand the facilitation process. Users should also review *The Leader's Conversation* guide for additional parameters, techniques, and information on facilitation (available at [deomi.mil](http://deomi.mil)). *The Leader's Conversation* guide provides areas to consider, including the following:

- Site selection
- Ground rules the facilitation may use
- Question development
- How to conduct the discussion

## Definitions

The *DoD Retaliation Prevention and Response Strategy Implementation Plan* defines ostracism as follows:

- Ostracism – The offense of “Ostracism” consists of:
  1. with a nexus to military service, wrongfully excluding a military member from social acceptance or membership in or association with a group of which such military member was a part or a reasonable person would conclude wanted to be a part with the intent to do any of the following:
    - a. inflict emotional distress on the military member (“emotional distress” means a highly unpleasant mental reaction, such as anguish, grief, fright, humiliation, or fury);
    - b. discourage reporting of a criminal offense or sexual harassment; or
    - c. otherwise discourage the due administration of justice concerning a criminal offense or sexual harassment; and
  2. because the perpetrator knew or believed that:
    - a. the member reported or was planning to report a criminal offense or sexual harassment;
    - b. the member was a victim or alleged victim of a criminal offense or sexual harassment;
    - c. the member was reported by another as being the victim of a criminal offense or sexual harassment;
    - d. the member intervened to prevent or attempt to prevent a criminal offense or sexual harassment from occurring; or
    - e. the member cooperated in an investigation, or the member has served or will or may serve as a witness or otherwise cooperate in the future in a criminal, disciplinary, or administrative proceeding or investigation involving a criminal offense or sexual harassment.



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The Department of Defense (DoD) Instruction 1020.03 defines these terms as follows:

- Retaliation – Retaliation encompasses illegal, impermissible, or hostile actions taken by a Service member’s chain of command, peers, or coworkers as a result of making or being suspected of making a protected communication in accordance with DoD Directive 7050.06. Behaviors include ostracism, maltreatment, and criminal acts for a retaliatory purpose in connection with an alleged sex-related offense or sexual harassment; or for performance of duties concerning an alleged sex-related offense or sexual harassment.

The DoD Directive 7050.06 defines these terms as follows:

- Reprisal – Taking or threatening to take an unfavorable personnel action, or withholding or threatening to withhold a favorable personnel action, for making, preparing to make, or being perceived as making or preparing to make, a protected communication.
- Personnel action – Any action taken on a Service member that affects, or has the potential to affect, that member’s military pay, benefits, or career. Personnel actions may be either favorable or unfavorable. Favorable personnel actions are those that are reasonably expected to result in a positive impact on the Service member’s military pay, benefits, or career. They do not include inconsequential matters. Such actions include, but are not limited to:
  - Threatening to take any unfavorable action.
  - Withholding, or threatening to withhold, any favorable action.
  - Making, or threatening to make, a significant change in the duties or responsibilities of a Service member not commensurate with the member’s grade.
  - Failure of a superior to respond to any retaliatory action or harassment (of which the superior had actual knowledge) taken by one or more subordinates against a member.
  - Conducting a retaliatory investigation of a Service member.
  - Referral for mental health evaluation in accordance with DoD Instruction 6490.04

**Note:** The military defines ostracism under very specific parameters as seen above. However, in a broader sense, many might view that ostracism could also occur for other reasons. For example, if I do not like an individual’s demeanor or personality or even their ‘look,’ I might demonstrate behaviors that others could construe as ostracism. Leaders should understand that while an ostracism type behavior may not meet the legal parameters as defined above, the detrimental impacts against individuals can be the same and negative behaviors should still be addressed.



## What Are Subtle and Overt Behaviors of Ostracism?

Some examples of subtle and overt behaviors that are considered ostracism include the following:

Subtle	Overt
Leaving a peer off of work-related emails	Blatantly ignoring a peer
Avoiding encounters with a peer	Uninviting a peer to a group chat
Making less eye contact than normal with a peer	Not participating in expected work activities with a peer

Ostracism in the workplace can have many negative impacts on the individual and the organization. It is important for leaders and Service members to be able to recognize subtle and overt behaviors of ostracism so that it can be addressed. It is also important to be able to recognize the impacts of ostracism, as behaviors in individuals experiencing ostracism can indicate when an issue may be occurring. Some of the individual and social impacts of ostracism in someone who is the victim of it include the following:

- Feelings of sadness, anger, and confusion
- Decreased levels of self-esteem
- Increased levels of stress
- Anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts
- Social isolation or withdrawal from social engagement
- Feelings of being invisible or insignificant
- Uncharacteristic increases in aggression or anger responses

## Strategies to Prevent Ostracism

Ostracism is often a response of retaliation against a coworker who expected to—or is believed to—have reported a case of sexual harassment or a criminal offense. Strategies for preventing ostracism center around the promotion of a climate with a no-tolerance response to ostracism, which holds individuals accountable for actions that go against policies. If it is understood that the climate does not tolerate violations of policy and offenders are held accountable, it is less likely that there will be an expectation that offenders should have gotten away with an infraction or that individuals would be expected to look the other way.

Leaders also play a vital role in creating a climate that does not tolerate retaliation, including ostracism. Leaders should model accountability by enforcing DoD policies in an appropriate and expedient manner, making it clear that the offender is the individual that was in the wrong, not the individual who reported the offense.

Notes:



## Process

Before the participants' arrival, determine and prepare the setting for a guided discussion. Ensure the video is prepared to view (direct from the Cultural Portal at: <https://www.deomi.mil/Center-of-Excellence-Portal/Harassment-Prevention-and-Response/#ostracism>) or may be predownloaded.

## Video Description

### Subtle and Overt Behaviors of Ostracism

#### FOR FACILITATOR USE ONLY:

**Subtle behaviors:** In this scenario, a female Service member explains an interaction with a male Service member that was clearly sexual harassment, which she reported. However, as she explains, since she reported the incident, her coworkers are acting “a little off.” The Service member provides examples of her coworkers' behaviors, such as the other female Service members she did PT with regularly prior to reporting the incident now all seem to have some excuse for why they cannot participate as usual when she asks. The Service member goes on to explain that she has noticed that she does not see most of her coworkers in the office like she used to, indicating they might be avoiding her, and that she feels all these changes in how she is being treated are directly related to her reporting the incident of sexual harassment.

**Overt behaviors:** In this scenario, a male Service member recalls an incident where a coworker (Darren) took several electronic supplies (computer monitors, a tower, and cords) from the supply section without going through the established protocols. The Service member explains that he reported the incident. He states that since reporting the event, Darren was reprimanded, and he feels his coworkers are blaming him for it. The Service member describes that his coworker's responses include removing him from a group chat and avoiding him, as now, no one will sit with him at lunch. The Service member likens the behaviors to being like high school and expresses that he does not understand why he is being treated poorly for doing the right thing.

### Video Participants

- **Targets:** Female Service member (subtle behaviors), male Service member (overt behaviors)
- **Perpetrator(s):** Other coworkers not featured (subtle behaviors), other coworkers not featured (overt behaviors)
- **Bystanders:** None featured



## Directions

1. Introduce yourself.
2. Validate: explain the purpose or objective of the discussion/training.
3. Set expectations and establish ground rules.
4. Introduce the topic (using the notes you created based on the topic).
5. Explain what ostracism is and what the subtle and overt behaviors of ostracism are.
6. Provide the handout (if used) to the participants.
7. **Read instructions:** You are about to watch a video that is made for awareness purposes only.
8. **Read instructions:** Answer the questions in your handout individually after watching the video. Then later, we will share your answers with the group.
9. Show the video.
10. Have participants answer the handout questions (5–10 minutes). Please encourage them to use critical thinking as they view the questions.
11. Lead a discussion based on the questions used.

## Facilitator Notes

*Suggestions:* Display the questions on a bulletin board, butcher paper, or PowerPoint, or prepare them in a handout. Explain to the participants that they will need a pen and paper (or handout) to answer the questions you will use during the guided discussion. **The anticipated responses (ARs) after each question can assist the EO professional in identifying potential discussion points.**

*\*Facilitator Note:* The facilitator should be prepared to discuss the questions (or similar questions) with the participants.

*\*Give students ample time to answer the questions.*

## Reflection Questions

*Think about questions you may wish to ask the participants.*

Question and AR:

Question and AR:



## Facilitator- Developed Questions

Below are potential questions and ARs for use in guiding the discussion. Before the session, the facilitator should review them and may develop their own. The provided handout matches the questions provided below. If you modify or add additional questions, modify the handout accordingly.

*\*Facilitator Note:* The facilitator should be prepared to discuss the questions (or similar questions) with the participants.

- What did you observe in the video(s)?

**AR:** In the *Ostracism- Subtle Behaviors* scenario, a female Service member tells her story of how she reported an incident of sexual harassment she experienced from another coworker. She also describes the treatment she received from coworkers in response to her report, stating that they began to make excuses for not engaging with her and she felt like, overall, most of her coworkers were avoiding her.

In the *Ostracism- Overt Behaviors* scenario, a male Service member describes an incident where he reported the actions of his coworker because they were against policy. He then describes the treatment he received from his coworkers in response to his report and the coworker getting into trouble as a result. He explained that he was removed from a group chat he had been in previously, and that his coworkers were avoiding him and would not sit with him at lunch anymore. He felt a general sense of blame for the trouble the coworker got into as a result of him reporting the infraction.

- Based on the scenarios, what are the concerning behaviors related to subtle and overt behaviors of ostracism and what are the possible impacts?

**AR:** Each Service member experienced a slightly different coworker response in the form of subtle and overt ostracism behaviors related to their actions in reporting an incident that is against DoD policy. The female Service member experienced isolation because of the general avoidance from her coworkers. This is particularly concerning because the practice of retaliation through ostracism can send a message to her and others that there are negative consequences for reporting sexual harassment. It could also possibly escalate into a climate where victims do not feel comfortable reporting concerns and issues. For the individual female Service member, this could also impact her mental health, feelings of satisfaction with her job, and feelings of connectedness to, and support from, her unit.

The male Service member also experienced similar treatment and isolation but in a more overt manner, highlighted by his removal from the group chat and no one sitting with him at lunch. These are obvious and visible behaviors. Others, who observe his situation, may be more reluctant to report incidents that violate policy in the future. Additionally, for the Service member, continuing to be ostracized by his coworkers may have mental health impacts, could affect his job satisfaction, and is likely to decrease his feelings of trust and support for his contemporary unit members. Further, if the ostracism is allowed to continue, he might also lose trust in his leaders and the organization for allowing the treatment.

- What are some of the risk factors related to retaliation and behaviors of ostracism?

**AR:** One risk factor in both scenarios is the organizational climate. It may be that those participating in the retaliatory behavior by way of ostracizing the victims is acceptable. A climate that encourages retaliation for holding offenders accountable is likely to see a decrease in reporting of policy violations. This, in turn, can lead to an increase in the perception that policy violations are not taken seriously, and personnel who are likely to offend may feel free to do so without fear of reprimand.



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Another risk factor is that Service members who are younger and of lower rank may not feel like they are able to report or address concerns about being ostracized, especially if the treatment is a retaliatory response to having already made a report of some kind or if the violation was conducted by a senior member.

- What are some of the protective factors that could come into play in a similar scenario?

**AR:** If a climate encourages holding offenders accountable for policy violations, including retaliatory behaviors like ostracism, this may decrease coworkers responding with negative behaviors toward those who make protected communications.

- How does the definition of ostracism, according to the *DoD Retaliation Prevention and Response Strategy Implementation Plan*, apply to these scenarios?

**AR:** In the first scenario, the Service member is experiencing treatment that meets the definition of ostracism based on the behaviors of exclusion and avoidance by coworkers in response to the protected communication she made regarding her experience of sexually harassing behavior from another Service member.

In the second scenario, the relation of the behavior to ostracism is not as clear, but the Service member's experience of being avoided in a social work context and being removed from the group text could still be considered ostracism, according to Section 2e of the DoD definition for ostracism, which states that ostracism can be in response to participating in investigations. It is unclear if the violator's equipment appropriation was a procedural violation or had criminal intent. None-the-less, by reporting the incident, the Service member experienced the ostracism behavior in response to a potentially reportable offense which would meet the criteria.

- As a leader, how could you support the victim in these scenarios?

**AR:** An important focus for a leader is to take any reports seriously. Both scenarios indicate that the leaders responded appropriately to the initial complaints by taking them seriously and following through with action. However, it was in the aftermath of making these reports that each target began to experience the negative reactions of peers by being ostracized. In addition to taking reports seriously, it is also the leader's responsibility to protect reporters. Leaders should be aware of how reporters are regarded after making a protected communication, including reports of law and criminal acts. It is important that leaders set a precedent that all behaviors that violate policy are unacceptable, including retaliation by leaders and peers in the form of subtle and overt behaviors of ostracism.





## Lead the Discussion

Open the discussion by asking volunteers to share their responses with the group based on the questions used. As you do so, keep in mind:

### General Considerations

- Ensure all participants have an opportunity to share their thoughts.
- Encourage open communication among participants.
- When applicable, ask clarifying questions.
- Use anticipated responses to help the group when needed.
- Avoid “why” and closed-ended questions.
- Remind participants of the ground rules when necessary.
- Remember to let participants know that you are listening.
- Take notes for your summary and conclusion.
- Paraphrase when participants are unclear with their answers/assist them in reaching the objectives.
- Let the discussion be fluid with little to no disruptions or corrections.

### Examples of Other Questions That Can Be Asked

- In your own words, how would you describe retaliation?
- In your own words, how would you describe behaviors of ostracism, both subtle and overt?

- What are some ways your organization can support individuals who report sexual harassment and criminal offenses?
- Where can a Service member go to report retaliation, including ostracism?
- As a leader, what behaviors can you demonstrate to create an environment where others feel open to report retaliation, such as ostracism?

## Close the Session

*\*Facilitator Note:* During the conclusion, paraphrase participant comments to show that they were heard. The provided conclusion is an example on how to close out the guided discussion. End your discussion by restating the objectives covered at the beginning and provide closing comments.

### Summary:

Restate the initial objectives:

- Define ostracism and subtle and overt behaviors.
- Discuss the video and the behaviors seen within it.
- Grasp how ostracism can affect the individual and the organization.
- Understand the impacts of ostracism if the behavior is not addressed.
- Discuss strategies to mitigate ostracism behaviors.



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### Potential Closing Comments

During this discussion, we explored what retaliation is and what subtle and overt behaviors of ostracism may look like. As seen in the scenario, victims of retaliation can experience distress, feelings of isolation, and confusion for why they feel they are being punished for reporting sexual harassment or reportable misdeeds. These effects can culminate in lower levels of trust between retaliation victims and for their coworkers, leaders, and, ultimately, the organization. This can be damaging not only to the individual experiencing the negative behavior, but it can also inhibit the overall unit and organizational mission readiness if the retaliation behaviors are not sufficiently addressed.

It is important for leaders to be aware of their subordinate's behaviors and to actively promote awareness and accountability. Leaders must create environments that protect individuals who report sexual harassment and other violations and to hold offenders accountable. Educating others about what subtle and overt ostracism behaviors may look like and the damage they may cause reinforces more appropriate behavior responses. All members want to feel that they are appreciated and valued. Ensuring that those who report sexual harassment or other violations are protected can build trust, confidence, and compliance in making the team and organization more successful.



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## Handout

# Video: Ostracism Subtle and Overt Behaviors

1. What did you observe in the video(s)?
2. Based on the scenarios, what are the concerning behaviors related to subtle and overt behaviors of ostracism and what are the possible impacts?
3. What are some of the risk factors related to retaliation and behaviors of ostracism?
4. How does the definition of ostracism, according to the *DoD Retaliation Prevention and Response Strategy Implementation Plan*, apply to these scenarios?
5. As a leader, how could you support the victim in these scenarios?