



## EEO Reprisal Focus Group Questions

**Note:** The questions below have been developed to assist leaders in identifying and understanding the organizational impacts of reprisal. Select those that fit your situation or modify or add to them as desired. These questions are designed to provide you with a better ability to address this important issue.

Facilitator Note: Within the scope of the Department of Defense (DoD), there is a difference between *retaliation and reprisal*. According to DoD Instruction 1020.04 (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2020), *reprisal* is a form of retaliation that involves taking, threatening, or recommending taking an unfavorable personnel action (demote, separate, treat unfairly, etc.); or withholding, threatening, or recommending withholding a favorable personnel action, for making, preparing to make, or being perceived as engaged in the antiharassment process. See DoD Instruction 1020.04 for the definition of retaliation.

Leaders must understand the concept of protected communication to better identify and address reprisal issues and effectively uphold employee rights. A summary of a protected communication is provided below. The full definition can be found in DoD Directive 7050.06 (Inspector General of the DoD, 2021).

Policies can be found at <https://www.esd.whs.mil/DD/>

**Protected communication** includes the following:

- Any communication made to a Member of Congress or an inspector general
- Many types of reports that are made through one's chain of command, to an audit agency, law enforcement organization, and so forth, including:
  - Reporting of evidence of a violation of law or regulation (e.g., sexual harassment/assault or discrimination)
  - Whistleblowing (e.g., reporting gross mismanagement of funds, abuse of authority, or a danger to public health or safety)

### **Introduction:**

Facilitator Note: Facilitators must prepare themselves to ensure a productive and insightful focus group session. Preparation resources include using the Focus Group Guide (found at [www.deomi.mil](http://www.deomi.mil)) and preselecting questions from the list below. Also, consider developing follow-up questions when additional clarification is needed.

- How do you define reprisal?
- How is reprisal different than other imposed disciplinary consequences or actions?
- What kind of behaviors would you consider to be reprisal?
- Who can be affected by reprisal?
- What does the term 'protected communication' mean to you?
- How does your understanding of reprisal compare with the DoD's definition?





- How does this understanding differ from the DoD's definition of reprisal?
- Describe the influence your organization's culture has on reprisal.
- What organizational factors might contribute to a fear of reprisal?
- What factors might make someone hesitant to report reprisal?
- How can a fear of reprisal inhibit others from reporting criminal or harassing activity?
- What are some behaviors that you would consider to be reprisal?
- How comfortable are you in expressing concerns if you were aware of behavior(s) in your organization that might constitute reprisal?
  - What must your leadership do to ensure these behaviors do not occur?
- From your perspective, do others fear reprisal from leaders in your organization?
  - What makes you believe this?
- From your perspective, does your organization hold leaders accountable for reprisal behavior?
  - What makes you believe this?
- What does it mean to hold leaders accountable regarding reprisal prevention?

### **Risk Factors:**

Facilitator Note: An organization that promotes competitiveness between peers without regard for individual improvement is an environment where retaliatory behaviors are likely to occur (Melgar et al., 2021; Meyer & Zelin, 2019). Additionally, leaders who experience uncertain or high-stress environments are more likely to exhibit negative emotions toward subordinates (Kakarika et al., 2022). Reprisal is a type of retaliatory behavior that entails withholding privileges, promotions, and other job-related opportunities or taking or threatening to take unfavorable personnel actions as a response to a protected communication having been made.

- Describe your current work environment.
- Does your work environment or supervisor(s) promote high competitiveness between peers?
- Does your work environment or supervisor(s) promote personal and professional growth and development for all individuals?
- How do you successfully cope with high stress in your current work environment?
  - How does your supervisor/leader respond to or support you?
  - Are you comfortable in turning to your leader for support?
- Does your supervisor/leader promote a work environment where professional opportunities and tasks are distributed fairly?
- Does your supervisor/leader promote a work environment where constructive feedback and disciplinary action are distributed appropriately and in line with the severity of mistakes, misconduct, or policy violations?

### **Individual Experiences:**

- Have you ever experienced reprisal?





- What is an example of when you felt you were the target of reprisal or observed someone else being the target of reprisal?
  - What were the behaviors you experienced or observed?
  - How was the situation addressed?
  - How did your experience affect your job or work environment?
- Have you ever refrained from reporting an issue for fear of reprisal?
  - What was it that prevented you from reporting?
- Have you ever felt compelled or pressured into participating in behaviors that could be considered reprisal against a peer or subordinate?
  - If so, what factors influenced this feeling?
  - What influenced you most?
  - How did you abstain? Did you experience any negative feedback or consequences for not participating?

### **Impacts:**

Facilitator Note: Retaliatory behavior, such as reprisal, impacts the workplace by critically undermining trust, job satisfaction, and productivity through counterproductive work behaviors. Counterproductive work behaviors are intentional actions contrary to the organization's interests and often emerge as a direct consequence of retaliatory practices (Gruys & Sackett, 2003). A leader's role in either endorsing or failing to address retaliatory behaviors—including reprisal—can determine an organizational climate that either condones or discourages retaliation (Kartolo & Kwantes, 2019).

- Are there counterproductive work behaviors occurring in your workplace?
  - If so, what are these behaviors?
  - How do these behaviors meet the definition of reprisal?
  - How do these behaviors affect you or your team's productivity?
  - How do they affect team cohesion?
- Do leaders in your organization endorse reprisal actions?
  - If so, how do they do this?
  - What specific ways do leaders convey these expectations or support reprisal?
- From your perspective, is there an implied expectation of reprisal actions through your organization's culture?
  - If so, what are they?
  - What specific ways does your organization convey these expectations or support reprisal?
- Do you feel comfortable going to your supervisor about disagreements or concerns in the workplace?
  - If so, what does the supervisor do to make you feel comfortable?
  - If not, what specific behaviors or actions does your supervisor display to make you feel uncomfortable?





- Do you feel comfortable talking to your peers about concerns or differences in perspectives?
  - If so, in what ways do your peers offer support?
  - If not, what behaviors or actions do your peers display to make you feel unsupported?

**Additional Factors:**

- Do you feel you would be safe to report a reprisal incident?
- What can your leaders do to foster a safe reporting environment?
- Are you aware of your organization's reprisal prevention policies and where you can go or to whom you can report reprisal?
- Are the organization's current prevention policies and procedures effective?
  - If not, what makes them ineffective?
- Do you find that reprisal actions are affecting your organization?
  - If so, what behaviors do you observe?
- In your experience, do your leaders support and encourage others to report reprisal behaviors?
  - If so, how do they demonstrate their support?
  - If not, what causes you to think that they don't or wouldn't support reprisal reporting?





## References

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