Strategies to Prevent Retaliation

Retaliation and reprisal have precise definitions that outline behaviors that meet the criteria for each term. Specifically, the negative behaviors that many might consider retaliation or reprisal must meet specific requirements outlined in DoDI 1020.03, DoDI 1020.04, and DoDD 7050.06. For negative response behaviors to be considered retaliation or reprisal within DoD organizations, they must relate to a target's involvement in making a protected communication or in relation to a criminal action, sex-related offense, or sexual harassment. More complete definitions and criteria for determining if a behavior meets these requirements can be found in the policies above. However, leaders should still take action against negative behaviors that do not necessarily meet the criteria for retaliation or reprisal behaviors, but which can still harm individual team members and the workplace climate.

Leaders' Actions	
Leaders should promote a positive climate by conducting themselves in a way that encourages others to model their behaviors. (Binder et al., 2018; Lieber, 2011; Marine Corps Community Service, 2016; Zheng, 2020)	- Calls out retaliatory behaviors such as bullying, name-calling, and unwarranted negative performance evals, labeling them as unacceptable - Encourages and models proactivity and intervention instead of reactivity
By using ethical decision making, leaders can promote fairness and equality. (Fragouli, 2019)	- Identifies the conflict - Determines what factors (personal or contextual) are influencing the conflict - Evaluates potential options/decisions and their consequences - Chooses the solution that provides the best outcome for all involved
Leadership Styles	
Leaders who adopt a positive leadership style in which they convey trust while challenging and developing their personnel can have a positive impact on the well-being of the unit. This, in turn, helps counter risk factors associated with retaliation. (Jacobs et al., 2013)	- Focuses on positive feedback over criticizing - When criticism is necessary, ensures it is constructive with a plan for improvement - Actively and visibly seeks perspective, including opposing views, and does not squash dissent
Reporting Methods	

Promote measures that can increase feelings of comfort and safety around reporting incidents of retaliation or retaliatory behavior. (Bergman et al., 2002; Meyer & Zelin, 2019)	▪ Provides anonymous reporting methods such as a phone number (where reports can be called in or texted in) or a website where an anonymous report can be filed ▪ Emphasizes that reports are taken seriously by leaders and consequently handled with due diligence and care
Training	
Organizations should ensure that written policies regarding retaliation are visible in the workplace.	▪ Provides clear and specific understanding for policies, including the definition of what constitutes retaliatory behavior ▪ Ensures that educational materials (posters, fact sheets, etc.) are informative, visible, and readily available to the unit ▪ Provides clear instructions on how and where to report retaliation such as IG.
Scenario-based training (Mehall, 2022)	▪ Provides real interactive scenarios where participants receive real-time feedback for decisions, responses, and interactions ▪ Allows for practice of optimal methods for addressing subtle retaliation behaviors
Bystander intervention (Elliman et al., 2018)	▪ Trains individuals to recognize and intervene in harmful situations, preventing further escalation of negative behaviors ▪ Builds a supportive culture where individuals actively look out for each other's well-being, creating a sense of group responsibility for the climate and culture of the organization
Behavior identification	▪ Identifies ambiguous behaviors that are considered "unprofessional, inappropriate, and potentially harmful" (e.g., isolation, exclusion, or ostracism by peers) but may fall short of the threshold for harassment or sexual assault behaviors (Breslin et al., 2022) ▪ Identifies and reduces subtle slights to apply intervention strategies before they progress to discrimination, harassment, and subsequent retaliation, e.g., using the VIDI framework (Smith & Griffiths, 2022)

For more resources, check out the links below:

- For more on bystander intervention, visit the EO Toolkit (deomi.mil). Navigate down the page to the Bystander Intervention ribbon.

- For information on retaliation awareness and prevention videos created by DEOMI: Harassment Prevention and Response (deomi.mil).

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