Toolbox Talk:

Fairness Inclusion and Respect: Acceptable Language

Prepare: Location? Distractions? Talk aids?

Reason: Awareness of acceptable language for working on site.

Why: Workplaces are more productive and healthy when workers, staff and visitors feel safe and not threatened.

Outline: The talk will cover what is inappropriate language and why it is disrespectful. It will raise awareness of the issues which can affect good working relationships.

What is Inappropriate and Disrespectful Language?

Most of us will swear at some time but workers have sometimes been heard to use bad and/or abusive language amongst each other in places where they can be clearly heard by people nearby. Consideration needs to be given to your environment and those around you.

Language evolves and changes and individuals may consider their use of expletives as such a change and an acceptable part of everyday conversation. In some cases between two like-minded people it could be viewed as acceptable.

‘Banter’ is a way of communication on many sites and in offices, and ‘good banter’ is one of the things many people go to work for; it can make a hard job enjoyable. However, when banter is aimed at a particular person’s personal characteristic it can lead to them feeling different and excluded from the group. Comments made by one individual once a day, can be repeated by many individuals over the course of that day. This is when banter turns from a fun exchange of comments to a negative aspect of work for some people.

This tool box talk is about is the effect on those people who do not find these types of language acceptable if directed at them or those people who overhear loud, sometimes shouted, inappropriate language.

If you think the way you use this type of language is acceptable ask yourself – Why am I doing it?

Is it?

- I will appear more adult and streetwise and gain respect from my mates
- I always use this language and it has nothing to do with anyone else
- Because I can’t express myself without using such language
- It is a habit I have got into and I can’t help it

- My family are happy for me to use abusive language to and around them so I can't see why I should not use it

Ask yourself: - What effect could it have on the people who hear bad or inappropriate language?

Will it?

- Make them less likely to want to return
- Intimidate the person who hears it or make them feel uncomfortable
- Make a person who was considering working here, change their mind
- Have a negative effect on young or impressionable people e.g. if you're working in a community or on a school etc

What effect will it have on you?

Will it?

- Lose the respect of others
- Show you are someone they do not want to be around
- Hold you back from forming good working relationships with colleagues or employers
- Jeopardise your career

What effect will it have on your employer?

Will it?

- Make your organisation look unprofessional
- Put people off employing your company to do a job
- Upset the clients or partner companies you are working with and therefore affect repeat business

What has this got to do with Fairness, Inclusion and Respect?

The underpinning foundation of fairness inclusion and respect is that everyone is treated with respect and consideration and is not threatened or intimidated by the words or actions of others. There is not a sector of the community that will not have members that will feel at least one of those emotions when hearing inappropriate language. People are protected by law from this type of harassment. In particular any language used to put down and disrespect them (or others) because of, for example, age, race, religion, sex or sexual orientation.

Managers are instructed to challenge the use of bad language by workers and it could result in disciplinary action.

Everyone has the right to challenge inappropriate language by whoever and whenever it is used, so make a stand and challenge it.