

# TALKING ABOUT RELIGION AND POLITICS: What is Acceptable in the Workplace?

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## TIPS

1. Have a well-publicized and consistently-applied anti-harassment policy. Define how employees should file complaints, and investigate complaints thoroughly.
2. If you find that harassment has occurred, take steps to end the offensive behavior, even if you do not think the complaint rises to the level of unlawful harassment. Conduct that may not be unlawful can become severe or pervasive if it is allowed to continue.
3. Even if no official complaint is made, you should intervene if you learn of possible Title VII violations.
4. Allow religious expression among employees to the same extent that other personal expression is allowed, making sure the expression is not harassing or disruptive.
5. Make sure supervisors avoid religious expression that subordinates might perceive as coercive.
6. If harassment is perpetrated by a nonemployee, the supervisor should demand that the contractor stop the harassment and take disciplinary action if it continues.

*Discussions about religion and politics can be passionate and interesting, but sometimes they cross the line and become annoying or even disruptive in the workplace. Let's break them down separately:*

### Religious Discussions

Although Title VII prohibits discrimination against an employee because of his/her religion, beliefs, or practices and requires employers to make "reasonable" accommodations for someone's religion, it does not give employees the right to share their religious beliefs or practices with their co-workers if the behavior is disruptive. As the employer, you have the right and obligation to maintain a safe, productive, and respectful workplace for all of your employees. If someone is bringing in religious literature, discussing religious beliefs, engaging in a religious practice, etc., and these activities are making co-workers feel uncomfortable or are disruptive to others, you can ask them to please refrain from these activities at work.

Be sure to be as consistent as possible when intervening. If you are placing limitations on one person's religious

discussions/practices, those same limitations must apply to other religions as well. Diplomacy and tact are the rules of the day. The bottom line is: you can control the work environment and this includes managing any

discussions or behavior that is disruptive to the workplace.

### Political Discussions

Political discussions are bound to pop up around the water cooler. If those discussions are respectful and free from harmful attacks, political discourse can be enlightening and educational. Again,

common sense, tolerance, and tact are the rules to follow. If the discussions become all-consuming, destructive, or disruptive, the employer has the right to maintain a professional, productive environment and can restrict discussions of ANY kind that distract its employees from working. ■

Discussions about religion and politics can be **passionate** and **interesting**, but sometimes they cross the line and become **annoying** or even **disruptive** in the workplace.