

The St Vincent's Ethos program



FAQs

What is the Ethos program?

The Ethos Program is a peer led early intervention program designed to recognise staff who exhibit positive behaviour and/or are exceptional role models, remove barriers to speaking up about behaviour that undermines patient and staff safety, and respond quickly, fairly and transparently to all staff. The Ethos program encourages a culture of speaking up and feedback. As part of the program, staff receive training about how to 'speak up', and there is an online reporting tool for staff to submit reports about observed positive or negative behaviour.

When a negative report about a staff member is made in the Ethos reporting tool, unless the report suggests conduct that is sufficiently serious to warrant disciplinary action, the staff member will receive feedback about how their behaviour was perceived in the form of an Ethos message. The feedback is delivered in a confidential and respectful manner by a trained Ethos Messenger.

Staff members can also enter positive reports which will be shared with the subject of the report and their line manager. Positive reports can also be directed toward the organisations reward and recognition programs where they exist.

The Ethos Program applies to all staff including volunteers and students. The Ethos program is endorsed by the SVHA Board and Executive Leadership Team.

What is an Ethos message?

An Ethos message is an informal, respectful and confidential conversation between an Ethos Messenger and a staff member who has been the subject of an Ethos report. The aims of an Ethos message are to inform an individual about how their behaviour has been perceived by another staff member and to offer an opportunity to reflect and think about ways they may behave differently next time. An Ethos message is not in any way disciplinary or punitive in nature, it is not part of a formal process or investigation, and it is not coaching or counselling. No records about an Ethos message are kept except that one has taken place.

What is an Ethos Messenger?

An Ethos Messenger is a member of the Ethos team who delivers informal feedback to staff when there is a negative report in the Ethos reporting tool. Ethos Messengers are carefully selected and trained to deliver an Ethos message which is informal, respectful and confidential and aims to provide staff with the opportunity to reflect on behaviours that may be perceived negatively by others and self-regulate.

How are Ethos messengers selected and trained?

Ethos messengers are selected according to their demonstrated commitment to staff and patient safety, their high degree of maturity and resilience, excellent verbal communication skills, discretion and respect for sensitive issues and they are widely respected in the organisation. All Ethos messengers are endorsed by a member of the Executive and complete Ethos messenger training.

How is an Ethos Messenger chosen to deliver an Ethos message?

It is important that an Ethos Messenger is impartial. An Ethos Messenger will be chosen who:

- does not work very closely with the staff member they are delivering the message to
- does not have a hierarchical relationship to the person
- does not have a personal relationship with the person

When an Ethos messenger is asked to deliver an Ethos message, they can decline to do so and the Ethos message will be allocated to another Ethos Messenger.

Are line managers involved in an Ethos message?

Line managers are involved in an Ethos message when the report submitted through the Ethos reporting tool is categorised as being level 2 on the Ethos accountability pathway. The Ethos message remains informal, but it is delivered by a line manager rather than a peer. Level 2 is reached if this is the fourth report about an individual within a 3 year period.

Should staff stop having 'conversations' with people and submit Ethos reports instead?

No, Ethos is not designed to replace discussions between staff. The Ethos program includes training on how to speak up, to help foster a culture of speaking up and providing feedback in a respectful manner. Ethos is designed for those staff who feel unable to speak up for whatever reason.

We already have disciplinary procedures. Why do we need the Ethos program?

The Ethos program does not replace the disciplinary process. Instead, the program recognises that early intervention can achieve positive behavioural outcomes and provides staff with an opportunity for behavioural change, to avoid future complaints and/or avoid a formal complaints process or disciplinary procedure. Evidence indicates that workplace conflicts or minor inappropriate behaviours can easily escalate into more serious behaviours such as bullying or harassment if left unchecked. Early intervention can prevent this.

The Ethos program equips staff with the training and information to respond to inappropriate or unsafe behaviours at an early stage to prevent them from re-occurring or escalating into more serious behaviours. The Ethos program provides training to Ethos messengers and managers in the skills they need to respond to behaviour of concern early, before minor issues escalate.

How does the Ethos program align with existing disciplinary processes?

The Ethos program is designed to supplement, not replace, existing disciplinary processes. The Ethos program will apply to reports of behaviour that require an informal or low-level intervention. This gives staff an opportunity to reflect on their behaviour, and potentially avoid a disciplinary process. If a report to the Ethos reporting tool is assessed as being of a serious nature, it will be referred to HR and the usual disciplinary processes will apply.

How does the Ethos program align with existing enterprise agreements?

SVHA have a number of enterprise agreements covering our employees. Where the disciplinary procedure clause in any enterprise agreement is invoked, it will be complied with. The Ethos program is not intended to substitute that procedure.

How does the Ethos program comply with the principles of procedural fairness?

The recipient of an Ethos message is informed of the substance of the report made about how their behaviour was perceived. The recipient is not required to respond to the report, or take any further action. Ethos messages are:

- confidential and have not been discussed with anyone other than the recipient;
- not documented anywhere;

- given for the purpose of providing feedback to the recipient and offer them the opportunity to reflect; and
- an opportunity to encourage the staff member to access support services if they need them.

Procedural fairness gives a staff member an opportunity to respond to a proposed action that may have adverse consequences for them. Given the nature of an Ethos message - that there is no outcome from the conversation, there is no record of the conversation except that it has taken place, and the focus of the conversation is on checking in with the staff member and offering an opportunity for reflection - procedural fairness is not relevant.

How do staff know if there is a complaint made about their behaviour through the Ethos reporting tool?

Staff will receive a request for a catch up with an Ethos messenger who will deliver an Ethos message.

Does the person who submitted a report find out the outcome of the report they made?

No. Staff who submit a report using the Ethos reporting tool, are provided with the following message upon submission of their report:

“Thank you for submitting a report via the Ethos reporting system. All reports are treated seriously, respectfully and confidentially. Please note that you will not receive any further information about the outcome of this report”.

Where does the delivery of the Ethos message take place?

The Ethos Messenger will facilitate a location for the meeting that is mutually agreed with the recipient. In extenuating circumstances, it may be necessary to conduct an Ethos conversation over the phone - this would be the exception though.

How does the Ethos program support work health and safety?

Ethos messages provide an informal opportunity for staff to reflect on and address behaviours that might, if not identified early, escalate to risks to health and safety.

Ethos messengers receive training in a range of strategies to deal sensitively with the possible responses to Ethos messages. Ethos messengers are also trained to allow the recipient time to reflect upon the conversation and offer support where needed.

What support is offered to staff who receive a complaint about their behaviour through the Ethos reporting tool?

When an Ethos message is delivered, the Ethos messenger offer support to the recipient of the message, who will also receive information about the Ethos program, strategies to reflect on their behaviour, and contacts for support services.

Can a member of staff bring a support person to a meeting with an Ethos messenger?

Yes, if they want to. Staff are not encouraged to bring a support person, as this often gives the conversation a more formal tone. If the recipient of a message suggests they would like to bring a support person the Ethos messenger is trained to respond along the following lines: “this is an informal conversation and I have not spoken to anyone else about it. The purpose of the conversation is to provide you with feedback about how your behaviour was perceived by another staff member. Nothing further will eventuate from the conversation. There is no outcome following the conversation and no records will be kept about the conversation, except that it occurred. So it is not necessary to bring a support person, but if you would like to do so, you can.”

How are records kept within the Ethos program?

Each report made in the Ethos reporting tool is kept for three years and then deleted. Reports are kept for three years because, if an individual receives more than three level 1 negative reports within a three year period then this triggers a level 2 conversation. One of the underlying principles of the Ethos program is to be able to identify staff members whose behaviour is consistently less than that expected by their peers and St Vincent's values.

While records are kept about the number of Ethos reports about an employee's behaviour, no record is kept about the Ethos message except that it has taken place.

Reports within the Ethos reporting tool which are categorised as requiring an informal response (level 1 or 2) are not taken into account and cannot be referred to in any disciplinary proceedings involving the employee.

Only members of the triage team and the super administrator of the system have access to the reports within the Ethos reporting tool. If a report is allocated to an Ethos messenger, the messenger can access the report allocated to them only.

If a person is involved in an HR process, will the HR consultants be able to seek information related to Ethos reports about a person?

No, informal interventions are not referenced or made available to any formal intervention.

How are anonymous reports dealt with?

Staff are encouraged to identify themselves when making a report. However it is understood that there are times when staff may not feel comfortable to do so. When making a report in the Ethos reporting tool, staff are given the option to provide their name or remain anonymous.

If staff choose to identify themselves, their identity is treated confidentially at all times and is known only to the triage team and the Ethos messenger handling the report.

If staff choose to remain anonymous, their login details, and therefore their identity, is encrypted, and they are identified only as 'anonymous'. Unless an anonymous report raises such serious concerns that they must be addressed through a formal investigation or disciplinary process, an anonymous report will be treated as a Level 1 report.

There are some exceptional circumstances where the identity of an anonymous reporter can be 'un-encrypted' to ensure a fair and safe system. These are if the report:

1. alleges behaviour which is illegal, extremely serious or may be subject to mandatory reporting under law or is of such seriousness that disciplinary action is required
2. indicates concerns for the safety of a staff member and confidential follow up is necessary
3. indicates a pattern of reporting suggesting a vexatious intent by the reporter

Under these circumstances, the nominated representative in the organisation, has the authority to 'un-encrypt' the reporter's identity. The reporter's identity will always be treated as confidentially as possible.

How are reporters protected from retaliation?

SVHA does not condone retaliation or action taken against any person who reports behaviour that undermines our culture. If there is any allegation of retaliation, this will be dealt with formally through the applicable disciplinary processes.

How does the Ethos program prevent vexatious or anonymous complaints?

As with other processes and systems, it is not possible to prevent vexatious complaints. However, the Ethos reporting system is designed to identify unusual patterns of reporting and this will be investigated if necessary. The experience of other organisations who have implemented similar programs suggests vexatious reports are rare.

How are serious complaints such as sexual harassment dealt with through the Ethos program?

Any a report of a serious nature that is reported through the Ethos reporting tool, will be immediately referred to HR and the usual processes will apply.

How can I find more information about the Ethos program.

Go to your organisation's intranet page or contact your CEO a member of the Executive team.