



AOP Grievance Policy

Introduction: Values and Approach

Every participant in the AOP – students, faculty, administrators, and *mashpi'im/ot* – is committed to bringing their best selves to all the work we do. We affirm that our learning environment rests on the foundation we build of appreciative inquiry, trust, kindness, and respect. However, we acknowledge that even within a community dedicated to cultivating these values, mistakes, miscommunications, and conflicts can arise. In such instances, our AOP community values fairness, openness, and effective communication to address any harm that may occur.

The professional staff at AOP holds educational ethics in high regard. Our primary focus is on ensuring our students' learning and safety within the AOP. Additionally, we are dedicated to fostering a healthy and positive work environment for our staff.

Therefore, with the aim of fostering a safe environment for everyone involved, we expect that in instances of miscommunication, missteps, conflicts, concerns, or grievances, all parties engaged in the process of exploration and resolution will communicate respectfully, avoiding inflammatory language, and approach the situation with an inquiry-oriented mindset. We encourage individuals to utilize their best skills to genuinely seek resolution.

Examples of grievances that students may encounter include but are not limited to interpersonal conflicts such as harassment or discrimination based on protected characteristics such as race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation, disputes over academic accommodations for disabilities, challenges related to course content or curriculum, disputes with faculty, staff, or other students, concerns about a hostile or unwelcoming academic or work environment, allegations of academic misconduct, allegations of breaches of confidentiality or privacy, etc.

NOTE: Circumstances in which an illegal or actionable ethical violation has occurred can result in an ethics complaint being brought under the [ALEPH Professional Code of Ethics](#), [ALEPH Harassment Policies](#) or the [OHALAH Professional Code of Ethics](#).

If you are experiencing or think you are experiencing sexual harassment or abusive behavior, please consult with the Ombudsperson Susan Willson susan@togetherworksrc.com for guidance or go to the online [Ethics Complaint Guidance and Form](#) to be connected to the Chair of the ALEPH Ethics Committee, Rabbi Susan Shamash polskyshamash@gmail.com.

Definitions

Mediation

Mediators facilitate a process of exploration and resolution with the following principles:

- Establish a safe environment for open dialogue.
- Provide the opportunity for both parties to be heard, ensuring that:
 - All are given the opportunity to describe the conflict from their point of view.
 - Each party is given the opportunity to understand the other's point of view in an environment of safety and respect, so that the parties can begin to work together.
- Foster an atmosphere of safety and respect and mutual understanding.
- Assist in identifying the key issues at hand.
- Encouraging creative thinking to generate potential solutions.
- Involve all parties in the determination of the outcome, promoting a collaborative resolution process.

Ombudsperson

An important function in the mediation of conflicts can be the ombudsperson. An ombudsman is a neutral third party appointed to be available to individuals with grievances, often working independently to ensure fair treatment and resolution of conflicts.

ALEPH/AOP has retained Susan Willson as Ombudsperson. Susan holds a Master of Science degree in restorative practices from the International Institute on Restorative Practices and is a restorative practices trainer who has implemented restorative practices with adolescents and adults in her professional and personal life. The role of the Ombudsperson in the AOP is to be a neutral third party capable of providing guidance and mediation to facilitate a resolution of a conflict or grievance. The [International Ombudsman Association code of ethics](#) has four pillars: Independence, informality, impartiality and confidentiality.

At any point, the person with a complaint, or anyone else involved in the process, may request the guidance or involvement of the AOP Ombudsperson, susan@togetherworksrc.com.

Restorative Process

A restorative process is a structured approach to addressing conflicts and harm in a way that promotes healing and reconciliation. It involves bringing together all parties involved, including those who have been harmed and those responsible for the harm, to engage in open dialogue, share their perspectives, and work towards finding mutually acceptable solutions. The process focuses on repairing relationships, acknowledging the impact of the harm, and rebuilding trust through dialogue, empathy, and accountability. Restorative processes often emphasize active listening, empathy-building, and collective problem-solving to address underlying issues and prevent future harm.

Restorative Circle

A Restorative Circle is an impartial grievance hearing committee made up of three individuals – two members of the AOP staff (Vaad, DOS, teaching, or *hashpa'a/h* faculty) and one member of the student body. The convening of the Restorative Circle is facilitated by the Ombudsperson, who may delegate responsibilities as deemed appropriate, and the composition is determined by

mutual agreement of the parties involved. The Restorative Circle meets with the individuals involved with the complaint, including the Ombudsperson, to further discover the picture of the problem and adjudicate the matter.

ALEPH Professional Ethics Committee

The ALEPH Ethics Committee is a committee of the ALEPH Board whose duties are to investigate and rule on ethics complaints, periodically review the ethics code, make recommendations for ethics education for the ALEPH community and provide guidance to the ALEPH Board when required.

Ethics Complaint

An ethics complaint is a formal allegation or charge of unethical behavior or misconduct against an individual or organization. An ethics complaint is based on a violation of the [ALEPH Professional Code of Ethics](#) or the [OHALAH Professional Code of Ethics](#). Guidance for filing a complaint and a complaint form can be found [here](#).

Initiating a Grievance Process and Seeking Resolution

There are different ways to navigate the grievance process, depending on the nature of the grievance and the relationship between the parties concerned. *If at any point in the grievance process the party raising the concern does not feel safe, they are encouraged to seek additional support, as described below.*

The following three principles guide the grievance and resolution process.

1. The AOP grievance process endeavors to involve as few people as possible while providing the necessary support to reach a beneficial outcome for all parties involved.

Out of respect for all parties, the AOP strives to resolve grievances within a process that maintains confidentiality to the extent appropriate according to law and ethics and limits the number of people involved. At the same time, the AOP recognizes that any party to the process, including those involved in mediation, may find it necessary to seek additional guidance or support to navigate the process effectively and reach a resolution that benefits all.

2. Anyone with a grievance is encouraged to first evaluate whether they feel they have the confidence and skills to address the matter directly with the person that they believe has offended them. When additional support is desired, a variety of resources are available to facilitate a resolution.

As clergy-in-training, handling sensitive interpersonal matters will likely be part of future professional responsibilities. If the student feels comfortable doing so, they are encouraged to handle the matter directly with the source of the grievance. If the student wishes to seek support from AOP staff, they are encouraged to begin by contacting their *mashpi'a/h*, DOS, or the Ombudsperson. At times, additional support may be needed as described in the section “How to Bring a Grievance.”

3. When a grievance is brought, a resolution process will be created that is designed to discover the picture of the problem, identify a path to resolution, and reach a mutually accepted resolution which may have the form of a restorative process.

Depending on the nature of the grievance, and the needs of the parties involved, there are several forms a restorative process can take. The following are some examples, in order from simplest to most involved.

1. The aggrieved party discusses and resolves the issue directly with the source of the grievance.
 2. The aggrieved party seeks support to discuss the issue directly with the source of the grievance.
 3. A mediator is identified to facilitate communication and resolution.
 4. Multiple mediators / interested parties are involved.
 5. A restorative circle is convened.
 6. An ethics complaint is brought under the ALEPH or OHALAH Professional Code of Ethics.
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How to bring a grievance

1. **Directly.** When a person has a grievance, the first step is to self-evaluate whether they are able to address the matter directly with the source of the grievance, and if so, to treat the situation as an opportunity for learning and growth for both parties. If, due to the nature of the grievance or other circumstances, this doesn't feel like a suitable course of action, or if addressing the matter directly was not satisfactory, the person is encouraged to seek support.
2. **Seek Support – Tier 1.** The person with the grievance may use their judgment in contacting a support person in this first tier:
 - a. *Mashpi'a/h*
 - b. DOS
 - c. Ombudsperson

The student may feel more comfortable or safe to seek support from their *mashpi'a/h* or DOS and can make the choice they find most appropriate. The student may also first contact the Ombudsperson.

The *mashpi'a/h* may be a good first choice since the *mashpi'a/h* can assist the student in examining the psycho-spiritual dynamics of the circumstances. Understanding these dynamics may give the student more clarity about which aspects of the situation are arising from the other party involved and which aspects are arising from the student. It is not the role of the *mashpi'a/h* to 'take sides' in this situation. Most importantly, the *mashpi'a/h* gives the student the opportunity to speak about this issue in an environment of love, acceptance, and support. Hopefully, this can lead to the student feeling more comfortable speaking with the source of the grievance. The student may also discern the desire to take a different approach. In either case, the *mashpi'a/h* provides a safe and confidential container for the student to discuss and explore what is happening as the process proceeds.

The student may have an issue that their DOS would be the more suitable person to consult with. Or the student may have a strong positive relationship with their DOS which can provide a strong sense of safety.

If the student would like a neutral third party to consult with, then the Ombudsperson would be the primary point of contact.

3. **Seek Support – Tier 2.** If seeking first tier support was not satisfactory, or if the first-tier support person was the source of concern, the person with the grievance may contact a support person in this second tier:
 - a. Dean of Students
 - b. Dean of Faculty
 - c. Program Director (or Co-Director)
 - d. Assistant Director
 - e. *Mashpia* Supervisor
 - f. Department Head
 - g. Ombudsperson

Some faculty hold multiple positions such as instructor, DOS, Program Director, etc. If that is the case, the person with the grievance should consult a second-tier support person who can be independent and objective. ***Most importantly, the person with the grievance should contact someone with whom they feel safe speaking about the situation and whom they trust to provide appropriate guidance in the effort to resolve the grievance.*** The person contacted will work with the student to identify the next steps and, where appropriate, design and implement a resolution process.

As an alternative, one can always seek the guidance of the Ombudsperson or seek guidance in the third tier of support.

4. **Seek Support – Tier 3.** If seeking the second-tier support was not satisfactory, the person with the grievance may contact a support person in this third tier:
 - a. Dean
 - b. Ombudsperson

If the issue is with the Dean, the student should seek the Dean of Students or the Ombudsperson. The Dean of Students or Ombudsperson may then bring the Chair of the Board of Governors into the process.

How a grievance resolution process is created

At each stage, the person with the complaint will work collaboratively with those they have engaged for guidance to identify suitable next steps. If it emerges that a more formalized process is necessary to a) discover the picture of the problem, b) identify a path to resolution, and c) reach a mutually accepted resolution, the Ombudsperson will be consulted to design a process that is acceptable to both parties and adheres to the values and guiding principles described in this document. The steps of the process and people involved will vary according to the circumstances of the grievance.

Restorative Circle. When appropriate, a Restorative Circle may be convened. A Restorative Circle is an impartial grievance hearing committee made up of three individuals – two members of the AOP staff (VAAD, DOS, teaching, or *hashpa'a/h* faculty) and one member of the student body. The convening of the Restorative Circle is facilitated by the Ombudsperson, who may delegate responsibilities as they deem appropriate, and the composition is determined by mutual

agreement of the parties involved. The Restorative Circle meets with the individuals involved with the complaint, including the Ombudsperson, to further discover the picture of the problem and adjudicate the matter.

Parties who may be involved in resolving a grievance.

Guiding Principle: The AOP grievance process endeavors to involve as few people as possible while providing the necessary support to reach a beneficial outcome for all parties involved.

Additional parties will be brought into the process only when deemed necessary to provide additional support, advice, or guidance to ensure the welfare of all parties involved, including the school. Third-party advisors and mediators will strive to maintain confidentiality to the extent possible, taking into account the circumstances. It is important to note that in situations involving illegal actions, full confidentiality may not be achievable or advisable due to legal obligations and considerations.

Student - A grievance begins when a student encounters an issue they perceive as problematic and seeks resolution through appropriate channels. The student is encouraged to draw on their inner resources and training to navigate the process with compassion and good faith and to aspire to a resolution that creates safety and growth for all involved.

Source of the Grievance - In many cases, addressing the issue directly with the involved party should be the initial step, fostering an open and supportive dialogue aimed at resolving the matter. Typically, an honest and considerate approach to discussing concerns is met with receptivity, leading to constructive engagement, reflection, self-assessment, and a collaborative effort to find a satisfactory resolution. If a satisfactory resolution cannot be reached, then the concern or grievance can go beyond the parties involved, for example, to the student's *mashpi'a/h* or DOS.

***Mashpi'a/h* (Tier 1)** - Students who are concerned about communicating directly with the source of the grievance might find support by discussing the issue with their *mashpi'a/h*.

Given the relatively small size of the AOP Community, it is conceivable that the student may wish to pursue a grievance against someone who is sufficiently close to the *mashpi'a/h* that the *mashpi'a/h* feels that they cannot be objective and provide the spiritual support to the student appropriate to the *hashpa-itic* container. In such a situation, the *mashpi'a/h* will immediately inform the student and one of the *Hashpa'ah* Supervisors of this, and together, the three of them will arrange for the student to be able to receive appropriate *hashpa-itic* support during the process.

DOS (Tier 1) – Alternatively, the student may wish to begin the process with their DOS or may find that the concern is not resolved through an exploration in a way appropriate to *hashpa'ah*. The DOS will work with the student to understand, clarify, and process the concern. The DOS may wish to consult with the student's *mashpi'ah*.

Program Co-/Director, Assistant Program Director, Department Chair, *Mashpia* Supervisor, Dean of Students, Dean of Faculty, Ombudsperson (Tier 2) - For students in the Cantorial, Rabbinic Pastor, and *Hashpa'ah* programs, they may have one faculty member filling several roles, such as instructor, DOS, Department Chair, Program Director, etc. If the concern is

with someone in one of these roles, the Supervisor, Co-Director, etc., is available to be consulted in lieu of the DOS. A Tier 2 support person may contact the student's *mashpi'a/h* or DOS and other Tier 2 support persons.

AOP Dean (Tier 3) - If a concern reaches a Tier 3 person, they may consult with all parties, including seeking advice from Dean's Cabinet, the ALEPH Executive Director and may reach out to the Ombudsperson, if warranted.

Chair of the Board of Governors - The AOP Dean may consult the Chair of the Board of Governors for advice and counsel. If the grievance is with the AOP Dean, the Dean of Students or the Ombudsperson may reach out to the Chair of the Board of Governors for advice and counsel or for mediation.

Ombudsperson - The AOP Ombudsperson, [Susan Willson](mailto:susan@togetherworksrc.com) (susan@togetherworksrc.com), holds a Master of Science degree in restorative practices from the International Institute on Restorative Practices and is a restorative practices trainer who has implemented restorative practices with adolescents and adults in her professional and personal life. The role of the Ombudsperson in the AOP is to be a neutral third party capable of providing guidance and mediation to facilitate a resolution of a conflict or grievance. The [International Ombudsman Association code of ethics](#) has four pillars: Independence, informality, impartiality and confidentiality.

Conclusion

As stated in the introduction to this document, it is the intention of every participant in the AOP – students, faculty, administrators, and *mashpi'im/ot* – to bring our best selves to all the work we do. We affirm that our learning environment rests on the foundation we build of appreciative inquiry, trust, kindness, and respect.

We hope that the concerns that may arise will be navigated with dignity, respect, and compassion, and be resolved to the benefit of all parties and of our school.