

Guidelines for respectful interaction at TROPOS

As of 27 January 2026

Preamble

At the Leibniz Institute for Tropospheric Research (TROPOS), we investigate physical and chemical processes in the troposphere, particularly the formation and development of aerosols and clouds and their impact on health and climate. Through this research, we contribute to countering current and future challenges such as the climate crisis.

Research is a collaborative process – our work is based on learning together. To realise our full potential, we promote an open, inclusive and respectful environment.

This code of conduct was developed to create such an enabling, non-discriminatory atmosphere. It serves as a guide to raise awareness among employees.

Diversity has many faces

We are united by our desire to advance atmospheric research. At the same time, we differ in many ways, for example in:

- Gender identity and expression
- Age
- Social and ethnic background
- Religion and world-view
- Individual physical and mental abilities and aptitudes
- Sexual orientation
- Language
- Education and professional experience
- Marital status and care work
- Economic situation

When we talk about diversity, we mean both visible characteristics and those that are not immediately apparent – such as different educational backgrounds, communication styles, life situations or cultural influences.

Our research can benefit from these different perspectives. For this to succeed, we need a respectful and open atmosphere in which different views can be heard and discussed without prejudice.

Guidelines

The guidelines are intended to create a working environment in which all people are treated with respect and can feel safe. Both the organisation and each individual are responsible for this.

1. Respectful interaction

We treat each other with respect. The decisive factor here is **the effect of our actions**, not just the intention behind them. If something is hurtful, we talk about it and work together to find a good solution.

2. Responsibility and role model function

All employees are responsible for their own behaviour. Managers are expected to set an example of good behaviour. Contact persons such as equal opportunities officers, confidential advisors or the works council provide support in the event of conflicts or uncertainties.

3. Clear and mindful communication

We strive to use language that is understandable and respectful. This includes:

- Being mindful of possible misunderstandings or hurtful wording,
- Explaining technical terms or internal abbreviations,
- Using names and pronouns correctly.

4. Tolerance of mistakes and a culture of learning

Mistakes can happen – even when communicating about sensitive topics. It is important to be open about this: we give constructive feedback, listen to each other and see criticism as an opportunity to learn. No one should be afraid of embarrassment or sanctions if something goes wrong unintentionally.

5. Recognising and avoiding microaggressions

Microaggressions are brief remarks or actions that can hurt people – often without conscious intent. Examples include disparaging questions ('Where are you *actually* from?'), constant interruptions or derogatory gestures. We take feedback on this seriously and reflect on our own behaviour.

6. Questioning stereotypes and prejudices

Stereotypes are generalised ideas about groups. They can be discriminatory and devalue people. Examples:

- 'Women are not assertive.'
- 'Older people can no longer learn.'

We avoid such statements and question our own thought patterns.

7. Clear boundaries: behaviour that will not be tolerated

The following behaviour is expressly unacceptable:

- Violence, threats or intimidation,
- Physical assault,
- Sexual harassment (e.g. unwanted touching, comments, images),
- Discriminatory actions and insults,
- Repeated disrespectful or aggressive communication,
- Racist or group-related disparagement,
- Stalking or similar forms of harassment.

8. Breaking down barriers

Barriers can exclude people – whether through structural obstacles, complicated texts or conversation situations in which a person is prevented from contributing fully. We address such obstacles and work together to break them down.

9. Reflect on your own role and privileges

Some people have advantages that they are often unaware of. Recognising these privileges allows you to act more sensitively and help reduce disadvantages for others.

10. Shared responsibility

Fair and inclusive coexistence can only be achieved if everyone actively contributes to it: through awareness, support, respectful communication and standing up for others.

What to do in the event of inappropriate behaviour

For those affected:

- Your perception and feelings are valid.
- It is acceptable to discuss this with someone you trust, e.g. colleagues or friends.
- Make a note of where and when your personal boundaries were violated.
- If you wish, you can file an official complaint. This can also be done anonymously, e.g. via the complaint box in the library. In any case, your data will be treated confidentially.

You can find help here:

- AGG complaints office (complaints@tropos.de)
- Works council (betriebsrat@tropos.de): The works council offers a mediation process according to works council agreement on social interaction.
- Equal opportunities officer (gleichstellung@tropos.de)
- PhD representatives (doktoranden-vertretung@tropos.de)
- Antidiskriminierungsbüro Sachsen (<https://www.adb-sachsen.de/en>)
- Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency (<https://www.antidiskriminierungsstelle.de/EN/homepage/homepage-node.html>)
- Leibniz advice centre (<https://www.leibniz-gemeinschaft.de/en/about-us/leibniz-integrity/guide-for-dealing-with-conflict/advice-centre-for-conflict-guidance-and-prevention>)

For observers:

- If you perceive someone's behaviour towards another person as disrespectful or discriminatory, it is often difficult to react in the moment. However, you can address the issue with the person afterwards. Please be sensitive and only talk to the person about it if they want you to.
- You can also contact the above-mentioned organisations and seek their advice.