

# Escalation & Severity Criteria

Document Owner: Employee Relations Specialist, People Operations — Northbridge Advisory Partners Approved By: HR Director, People & Culture Last Updated: Current policy review cycle Classification: Internal — HR and Management Use Only

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## Purpose

This document defines the severity levels and escalation triggers used to classify employee relations cases at Northbridge Advisory Partners. All case risk assessments must reference these criteria. Severity levels drive response timelines, approval requirements, and reporting obligations.

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## Severity Levels

### Critical

**Definition:** A case involving an immediate risk to employee safety, a credible allegation of unlawful conduct, or a situation that could result in significant regulatory, legal, or reputational exposure for the firm.

**Examples:**

- Allegations of harassment, discrimination, or retaliation
- Whistleblower complaints involving potential fraud or regulatory breach
- Any case involving threats of physical harm or self-harm

**Response Timeline:** Immediate — investigation must commence within 24 hours. HR Director must be notified within 4 hours of the case being opened.

**Approval Required:** HR Director and Legal Advisor must review all case actions before implementation.

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### High

**Definition:** A case involving a significant policy breach, a pattern of repeated concerns, or a situation that could escalate to Critical if not addressed promptly.

**Examples:**

- Formal grievances where the respondent is a senior leader (Practice Head or above)
- Performance or disciplinary cases where required procedures have been bypassed
- Cases where multiple employees have raised similar concerns about the same individual or practice

**Response Timeline:** Investigation commences within 5 working days. HR Director is briefed within 2 working days of the case being opened.

**Approval Required:** Employee Relations Specialist and HR Director must jointly approve investigation scope and any corrective actions.

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### Medium

**Definition:** A case involving a single policy concern, interpersonal conflict, or procedural issue that does not currently pose significant regulatory or reputational risk but requires documented resolution.

**Examples:**

- Workplace conflict between peers that has not escalated to formal grievance
- A manager's first-time failure to follow a documented procedure, where the failure has been acknowledged and no harm has resulted
- Pay equity concerns where the discrepancy is within the market range tolerance

**Response Timeline:** Investigation or resolution commences within 10 working days.

**Approval Required:** Employee Relations Specialist may manage independently with periodic updates to the HR Director.

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### Low

**Definition:** A case involving an informal concern, a minor procedural clarification, or a query that can be resolved through guidance rather than investigation.

**Examples:**

- An employee seeking clarification on a policy provision
- A minor scheduling or workplace accommodation request
- An informal concern that has been resolved through conversation and requires documentation only

**Response Timeline:** Documented within 15 working days. No formal investigation required.

**Approval Required:** Employee Relations Specialist manages independently.

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## Escalation Triggers

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The following triggers require automatic escalation to the next severity level:

Trigger	Escalation Action
A second formal complaint naming the same respondent within 12 months	Escalate to High (if currently Medium) or Critical (if currently High)
A case remains open beyond twice the response timeline without resolution	Escalate one severity level and brief the HR Director
The subject of a case is a senior leader (Practice Head or above)	Minimum severity level is High
A case involves cross-practice or cross-departmental parties	Minimum severity level is Medium; HR Director is notified
Media, regulatory, or external legal inquiry related to a case	Immediate escalation to Critical regardless of current level
An engagement survey flag correlates with documented case evidence	Note the correlation in the case file; consider escalation if the pattern involves two or more employees

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## Reporting Requirements

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Severity	Reporting To	Frequency
Critical	HR Director + Legal Advisor	Daily until resolved
High	HR Director	Weekly status update
Medium	HR Director	Monthly summary
Low	None (documented in case management system)	Quarterly aggregate

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## Notes

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- These criteria were last reviewed in a prior policy cycle. The Meridian acquisition in the current integration window introduced approximately 140 employees whose prior employer used a different severity framework. Former Meridian managers may not be familiar with these criteria.
- The escalation trigger for engagement survey correlation was added in a recent policy update following the prior engagement survey results but has not yet been applied to any active case.