

Q&A Response: You Asked & We Answer



Photo by Olya Kobruseva

Systemic Barriers




» CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICE

We are getting some great questions in response to our Maintaining Effective Relations with your Supervisor microlearning series and we want to share these questions and their answers with you. Eventually some of this content may be incorporated into revised versions the modules, but for now they will be available separately. Our first question related to systemic barriers.

Your question:

While pursuing my MA at another university, I had a significant breakdown with my first advisor. I tried to work through it, but it seemed like the system was working against me. Concerns around tenure, research demands, and university policy all seemed to get in the way of my efforts to repair the relationship. Trying to work around these systemic barriers while also dealing with the impact of the power imbalance meant it all took a huge emotional toll on me. I eventually ended up leaving the student/advisor relationship and entered into a much better relationship with a different advisor.

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Here is the question we received:

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Photo by Olya Kobruseva: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/question-marks-on-paper-crafts-5428836/>

I passed this question along to Matt Erickson, Director of the Conflict Management and Human Rights Office. Here's what he shared

It appears, that despite the problems, the situation turned out as well as it could. There are situations that arise where efforts to resolve a matter or repair relationship difficulties are insurmountable. One of the key indicators that this is the case occurs when one party gets this sense that no cares about their situation or at least no one cares enough to take serious steps from a position of authority to effectively deal with it.



Photo by SHVETS production: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/female-talking-with-psychologist-during-session-7176296/>

We've dealt with several cases where the best move for the student or staff member was to leave the relationship. This is an extreme step that should only come after receiving counsel from a trusted and knowledgeable 3rd party.

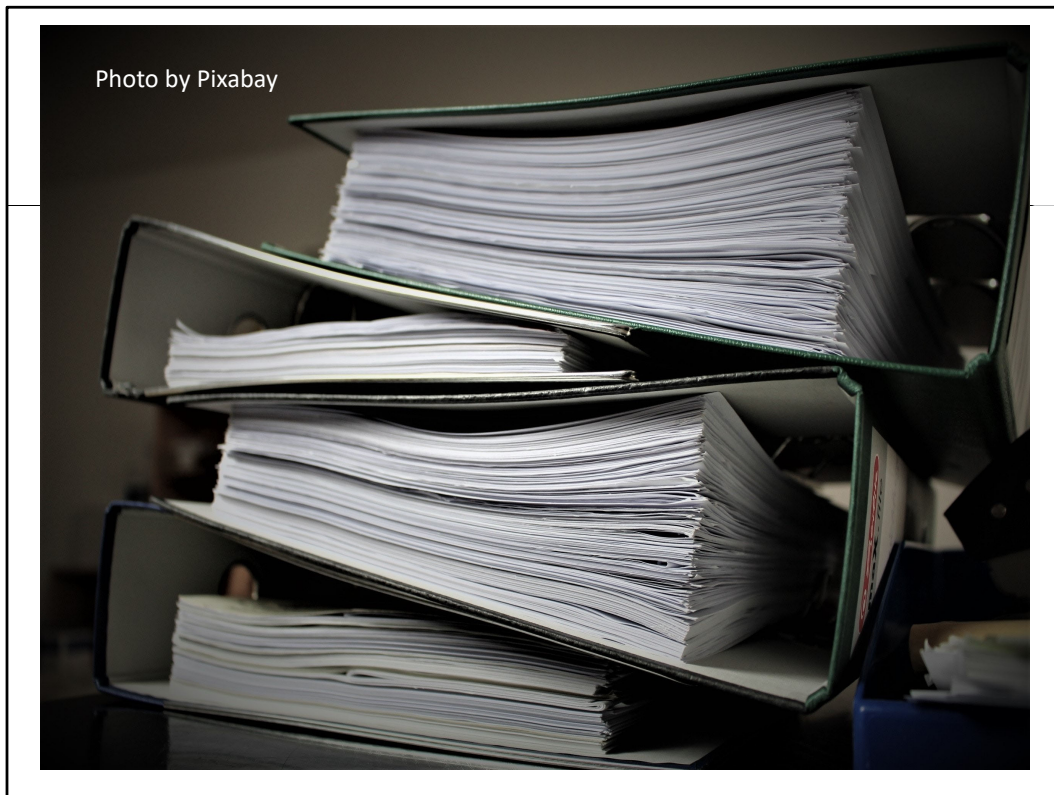


Photo by Pixabay: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/pile-of-folders-357514/>

One of the goals of this microlearning series is to provide students with the knowledge and skills needed to identify and respond to difficulties early. An early response is far more likely to be effective because fewer barriers will have developed so it is much more likely that total relationship breakdowns will be avoided. If it feels like *“University policy is getting in the way of efforts to repair the relationship”* make sure to reach out for help. The CMAHRO can work with other partners on campus like the GSA and help you navigate university policy and work toward the best possible solution in your situation.

If the best solution is to leave the relationship, CMAHRO staff can support you as you do this as well.

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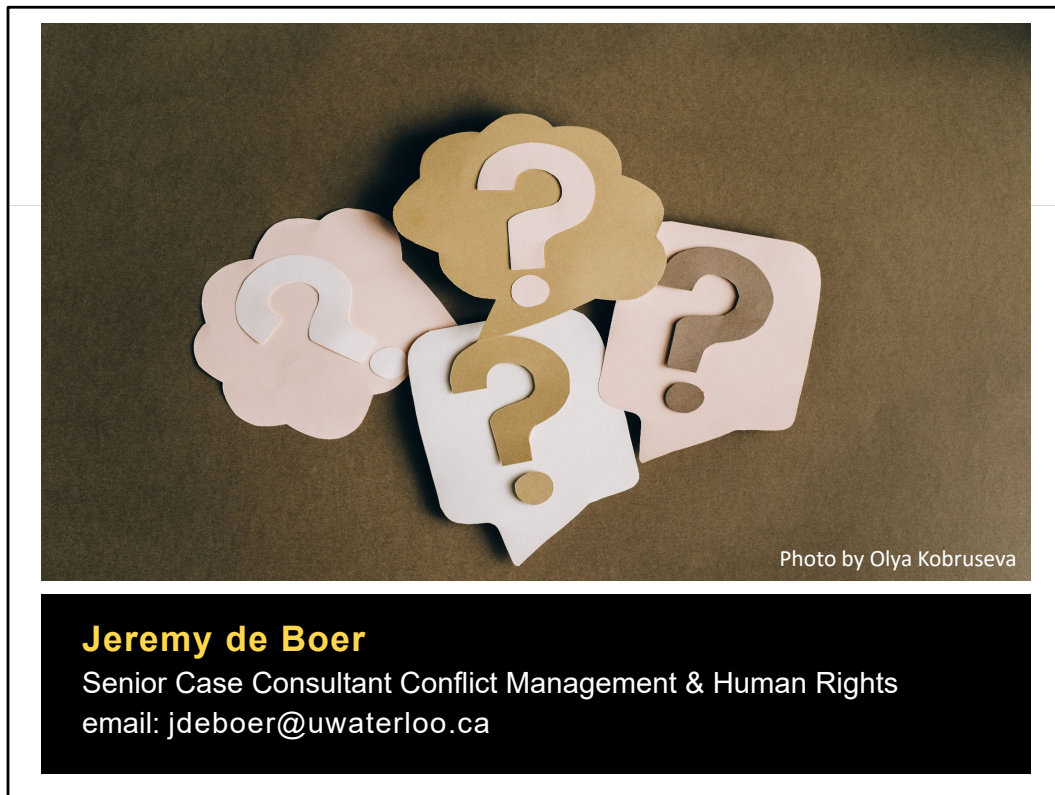


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If you would like to set up an appointment with the CMAHRO, contact Jeremy de Boer.