Appropriate Attire and Personal Neatness
Quick Reference Guide

If you manage employees, chances are you will need to hold a difficult conversation with an employee about their inappropriate dress or hygiene.

Does Boise State University have a Dress Code Policy?
Boise State University does not have a standardized dress code for the entire university. In general, the University’s culture is that of “business casual” which means clothes that are professional in appearance and ironed and unstained. However, each department is free to determine the nature of the clothing they will allow in their work area.

What Five Steps can I Follow to Facilitate a Difficult Conversation?
1. Seek permission to provide the feedback
2. Use a soft approach
3. Tell the employee directly what the issue is as you perceive it
4. Reach an agreement about what the employee will do to change their behavior
5. Be sensitive to other cultures

Be Practical and Consistent with your Dress Code Standards
Be sure to establish a fair dress code and hygiene standard for your department and communicate it to all your employees. Then, hold those who violate the standard accountable. Remember it may make perfect sense for a manager to have a fairly stringent policy for employees who meet the public on Boise State University’s behalf, regularly deal with the public, and are otherwise your department’s face. However, it may not make sense to have that same standard for employees who work in Facilities Operations and Maintenance or Parking and Transportation. Remember that some discrimination claims that arise out of dress codes issues arise out of their inconsistent application. Discipline for violations of dress code standards should be applied consistently and full documented. Be aware that discharges based on personal appearance factors will be closely scrutinized by the courts and government agencies.

How do I Avoid Discrimination Claims that can arise out of Employee Dress Code Standards?
Discrimination claims occasionally arise out of dress code policies. Discrimination claims can be related to sex or gender, religion, or race. Be sure to look closely at the impact your dress and hygiene rules may have on minorities, women, members of religious groups, or people with disabilities. If your rules are not based on social norms, differ greatly between men and women, or impose a greater burden on women, then you may be opening yourself up to discrimination claims. If your rule is likely to have a disparate impact on a protected class, you must be prepared to show a business reason for the rule and make reasonable accommodations for employees put at a disadvantage by it.

How should I Address Tattoos and Body Piercings?
A common issue many managers face in today’s culture is whether to allow tattoos and body piercings. Under the law, employees have no legal right to show body art in the workplace because it isn’t considered a religious or racial expression. While employers have the legal right to require employees to cover tattoos or remove piercings, a reasonable approach would be to base your standards on the nature of your workplace and set the grooming standards accordingly.