

# Workplace Bullying

## Asserting Power through AGGRESSION

*Bullying, a form of aggression, is usually described as repeated incidents or a pattern of behaviour intended to intimidate, offend, degrade or humiliate an individual or a group. These negative acts, comments (both obvious and subtle) or negative physical contact can psychologically damage or isolate a person in the workplace.*

Workplace bullying can include:

- threatening work status by removing responsibilities without cause
- threatening personal standing by ageist or sexist comments
- spreading malicious, untruthful rumors
- withholding information and excluding individuals from social outings, opportunities, etc
- belittling or criticizing constantly
- blocking transfers, training, leave or promotion
- setting impossible deadlines and undue pressure
- undermining or deliberately impeding work by constantly changing guidelines
- belittling work standard, not giving credit, setting up projects to fail, constant reminders of mistakes
- violating privacy by pestering, spying or stalking
- yelling or using profanity



Virtually all employees have experienced, at some point, unkind words or behaviors from coworkers or superiors. But to qualify as workplace bullying, such verbal and behavioral abuse must be persistent, unwanted by the person at whom it is directed, and harmful to that individual. Objective comments intended to provide constructive feedback are not usually considered bullying, but rather attempts to assist the employee with their work.

Sometimes it is hard to determine whether bullying is happening in the workplace. A number of studies acknowledge that there can be a fine line between strong management and bullying. If you are unsure whether an action or comment could be considered bullying, you can use the reasonable person test: *Would most people consider the action unacceptable?* It is not just the character of the incidents, but the number, frequency, and especially the pattern that can reveal bullying or harassment.

### What to Do If You Are Being Bullied?

If you feel you are being bullied, discriminated against, victimized, or harassed-

- **Review** your employers policies and procedures for reporting bullying.
- **Record** the date, time, location and situation in as much detail as possible, along with witnesses names and the outcome of the event. Include what you have done to try to stop it. Keep copies of any letters, memos, emails, faxes, etc, received from the person.

- **Speak** to colleagues as they may be experiencing the same thing. You may not be the only one targeted.
- **Inform** the person, in the presence of a supervisor or union member, that their behaviour is offensive and ask them to stop or you will take further action.
- **Report** the harassment to the person identified in your workplace policy, your supervisor, or a delegated manager. If your concerns are minimized, proceed to the next level of management.
- **Do not retaliate.** You may end up looking like the perpetrator and will certainly cause confusion for those who have responsibility for evaluating and responding to the situation.

**80% of bullies are bosses, some are co-workers, & fewer still are higher-ups.**

*Canada Safety Council*

## Effects of Bullying

People who are bullied can experience serious psychological and physical ailments, disrupting both work and home life. They may feel less confident and plagued by self-doubt, fear, anxiety, and depression. Usually they suffer from sleep difficulties, low self-esteem and irritability. Demeaned and feeling inadequate, bullied people doubt their ability to do anything right. Some individuals use alcohol or other substances to cope with the effects of bullying in the workplace.

In addition to having serious effects on the health of both the individual and the workplace, workplace bullying can have serious consequences on productivity. Research suggest that bullied employees waste up to 50% of their time at work thinking about their situation, defending themselves, and networking for support. As they become more obsessed by the situation, their daily stress and breakdowns cause suffering for colleagues, family and friends.

**An employee survey of more than 500 organizations found 25% of employees reported they had been victims of workplace bullying**

*The National Institute for Occupational Safety & Health*

Bullying can have wide-spread effects-

Workplace environments suffer from low morale and productivity, fear, anger, depression, stress, risk of accidents, and poor customer service.

- The cost to the health system increases as bullied individuals increase their visits to doctors, obtain prescriptions for anti-depressants, and even seek psychiatric care.
- Employers pay millions yearly for absenteeism, stress leaves, high turnover, severance packages, counselling, and even lawsuits.

Bullying clearly contaminates a workplace and, if unaddressed for any period of time, establishes a culture of disrespect that breaks down the process of mutual accommodation between employees, employees and management, work teams, and even departments.

**Healthy, productive workplaces do not tolerate bullying. They are characterized by- respect for the other person, open communication between employees and supervisors, recognition of the employees' attachment to their work, and acknowledgement of the contributions employees make to workplace productivity.**

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**For confidential assistance  
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