

Workplace Bullying

Bullying is a phenomenon that has gone beyond the school yard. It is an issue that employers have begun to take a much more serious look at, as the impact of workplace bullying on an organization and its employees can be quite serious. To better understand the problem, we need to define workplace bullying and identify the most likely perpetrators and victims.

“Workplace bullying, like childhood bullying, is the tendency of individuals or groups to use persistent aggressive or unreasonable behavior against a co-worker. Workplace bullying can include such tactics as verbal, nonverbal, psychological, physical abuse and humiliation. This type of aggression is particularly difficult because unlike the typical forms of school bullying, workplace bullies often operate within the established rules and policies of their organization and their society. Bullying in the workplace therefore takes a wide variety of forms such as:

- being rude or belligerent
- talking in a dismissive tone (“talking down”) to subordinates and/or peers
- screaming or cursing
- having an arrogant attitude in general, e.g., “I’m right and everyone else is always wrong”
- being quick to criticize and slow to praise
- destruction of property or work product
- character assassination
- spreading malicious rumors
- gossiping about others
- not providing appropriate resources and amenities in a fair and equitable manner
- social ostracism
- physical assault”¹

According to the Canada Safety Council, “Over 72 percent of bullies are bosses, some are co-workers and a minority bully higher ups. A bully is equally likely to be a man or a woman.”² Bullies “tend to be insecure people with poor or non-existent social skills and little empathy. They turn this insecurity outwards, finding satisfaction in their ability to attack and diminish the capable people around them.”³ The bully is always driven to control others.

¹ Workplace bullying, Wikipedia. The Free Encyclopedia.

² Bullying in the Workplace, , Canada Safety Council, Canada’s Voice and Resource for Safety. Safety Canada (September 2000).

³ Bullying in the Workplace, , Canada Safety Council, Canada’s Voice and Resource for Safety. Safety Canada (September 2000).

However, unlike childhood bullies who will often aim for children deemed weak or easily intimidated, workplace bullies will often aim for the more popular and skilled workers, viewing their talent and likeability as a threat.

Physical and emotional violence is one of the most serious problems facing the workplace in the new millennium. In fact, the Canadian Safety Council claims that it is more common than widely-known issues like sexual harassment and racial discrimination.

"A Canadian survey on workplace violence found that physical violence is often reported from outside sources, such as customers, students, and patients. Psychological violence is more often reported from within the organization. A U.S. study estimates 1 in 5 American workers have experienced destructive bullying in the past year."⁴ The evidence on bullying behavior and its relationship between job satisfaction and workplace productivity have a huge influence on a victim's job satisfaction. Employers end up bearing the direct cost of employee sickness, absenteeism, and lost work.

Leaders and managers play a crucial role in the identification of both bullies and targets, and can be very instrumental in decreasing and preventing bullying behaviors. However, when leaders or managers are bullies themselves, targets feel no other recourse than to fight back or to relocate to another position.

Bullying influences job satisfaction, which will have a direct effect on the productivity of those witnessing or experiencing bullying behavior. Workplace bullying causes stress, putting the employees at risk for health related problems and job burnout, forcing them to take more time off from work.

Bully behavior, whether committed by men or women, should be dealt with immediately in view of its long-term costs for both employees and the organizations for which they work. Many leaders and managers either fail to recognize the problem or are themselves the problem. "Leaders are responsible for the employees in their organizations and they must learn to identify and extinguish abusive behavior at an early stage before it suppresses their employees' innovation and productivity, drives out their best workers, or turns into workplace violence."⁵

⁴ Bullying in the Workplace, Canada Safety Council, Canada's Voice and Resource for Safety. Safety Canada (September 2000).

⁵ Workplace Bullying: Aggressive Behavior and its Effect on Job Satisfaction and Productivity, Judith Lynn Fisher-Blando, February 2008.

Below are the guidelines that you need to be aware of to avoid being subjected to bullying:

The following guidelines on dealing with workplace bullying are adapted from: "[Violence in the Workplace Prevention Guide](#)". CCOHS, 2001 and the "[Wellness in the Workplace](#)" Guide. CCOHS, 2002:

What can you do if you think you are being bullied?

If you feel that you are being bullied, discriminated against, victimized or subjected to any form of harassment:

DO

- FIRMLY tell the person that his or her behavior is not acceptable and ask them to stop. You can ask a supervisor or union member to be with you when you approach the person.
- KEEP a factual journal or diary of daily events. Record:
 - The date, time and what happened in as much detail as possible
 - The names of witnesses.
 - The outcome of the event.

Remember, it is not just the character of the incidents, but the number, frequency, and especially the pattern that can reveal the bullying or harassment.

- KEEP copies of any letters, memos, e-mails, faxes, etc., received from the person.
- 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 most certainly cause confusion for those responsible for evaluating and responding to the situation.

What can an employer do?

The most important component of any workplace prevention program is management commitment. Management commitment is best communicated in a written policy. Since

bullying is a form of violence in the workplace, employers may wish to write a comprehensive policy that covers a range of incidents (from bullying and harassment to physical violence).

A workplace violence prevention program must:

- be developed by management and employee representatives.
- apply to management, employees, clients, independent contractors and anyone who has a relationship with your company.
- define what you mean by workplace bullying (or harassment or violence) in precise, concrete language.
- provide clear examples of unacceptable behavior and working conditions.
- state in clear terms your organization's view toward workplace bullying and its commitment to the prevention of workplace bullying.
- precisely state the consequences of making threats or committing bullying acts.
- outline the process by which preventive measures will be developed.
- encourage reporting of all incidents of bullying or other forms of workplace violence.
- outline the confidential process by which employees can report incidents and to whom.
- assure no reprisals will be made against reporting employees.
- outline the procedures for investigating and resolving complaints.
- describe how information about potential risks of bullying/violence will be communicated to employees.
- make a commitment to provide support services to victims.
- offer a confidential Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to allow employees with personal problems to seek help.
- make a commitment to fulfill the prevention training needs of different levels of personnel within the organization.
- make a commitment to monitor and regularly review the policy.
- state applicable regulatory requirements, where possible.

What are some general tips for the workplace?

DO

- ENCOURAGE everyone at the workplace to act towards others in a respectful and professional manner.
- HAVE a workplace policy in place that includes a reporting system.
- EDUCATE everyone that bullying is a serious matter.
- TRY TO WORK OUT solutions before the situation gets serious or out of control.
- EDUCATE everyone about what is considered bullying, and whom they can go to for help.



- TREAT all complaints seriously, and deal with complaints promptly and confidentially.
- TRAIN supervisors and managers in how to deal with complaints and potential situations. Encourage them to address situations promptly whether or not a formal complaint has been filed.
- HAVE an impartial third party help with the resolution, if necessary.

DO NOT

- IGNORE any potential problems.
- DELAY resolution. Act as soon as possible.

We trust that the above guidelines will help in paving the way towards a more productive environment for both the employers and employees.