



ARE YOU BEING BULLIED AT WORK?

Many people are bullied, especially at work, and don't even know it. In some cases, bullying can have the effect of making a person doubt themselves and lose confidence. In severe cases, a person can become anxious and depressed.

In Australia, a 1998 Morgan poll showed that 46% of Australian employees have been verbally or physically abused by someone in the workplace. 50% of employees have experienced verbal abuse by members of the public. In 2001 a Vic. Health survey found that 91% of Victorians had been intimidated, teased, belittled, or verbally or physically abused to the extent that they could no longer tolerate it. In 2000, an ACTU anti-bullying OSH campaign in Australia, surveyed over 3000 people and showed that almost 70% were bullied by a manager or supervisor, but in only 18% of cases was something done.

What is under estimated is the effect of bullying on the victim and how common the problem is.

One definition of bullying could be "a repeated pattern of unprovoked, unwelcome, hostile behaviour that intentionally inflicts or attempts to inflict injury, hurt, humiliation or discomfort.

Bullying can be physical or psychological. Physical bullying can include touching, pushing, hitting, kicking, or worse.

Psychological bullying can be more complex, underhand, or tricky to identify and deal with. These include the following:

- Attacks on work performance, e.g. nit picking, unjustified criticism, goals changed without consultation, denial of adequate resources, training, removal of work, blocking promotion etc.
- Belittling movements, e.g. eyebrow lifting, eye rolling, heavy sighs, finger gestures, shoulder shrugging, arm waving.
- Denial or manipulation of leave.
- Emotional attacks, e.g. made to feel guilty, told you have lost the plot.
- Forced departure – manipulated into reluctant resignation, targeted for redundancy etc.
- Isolation – ignored or ostracised within the workplace, given the silent treatment, only communicated with by messages and memos.
- Sabotage – intentional exclusion from essential information or systems, tampering with work or equipment, given misinformation, etc.
- Threats of dismissal.
- Given too much work.
- Undermining.
- Verbal attacks, e.g. temper tantrums, shouting, irrational outbursts, insults, continued deliberate use of offensive language, spreading malicious gossip or lies, ridicule, humiliating or patronising comments made in front of others.

The different types of psychological bully are as follows:

1. Chronic or serial bullying. This is the most common type. Most chronic bullies victimise a succession of employees with the aim of eliminating or destroying them. These bullies usually are:
 - A split or dual personality, e.g. calculating and devious in private but friendly and pleasant in public.
 - Hypocritical, e.g. in contrast to their actual behaviour and treatment of others, they portray themselves as caring and thoughtful even to their bullies, before delivering a devastating criticism which confuses the victim.
 - Accomplished liars.
 - Chameleons – they are able to say with great skill what others want to hear and can be all things to all people.
 - Control freaks – they must be in control in all aspects of their lives and believe they are always right.
 - Devoid of emotion – they are inhumane, emotionally untrustworthy and lack empathy.
 - Inflated ego – they are narcissistic and delude themselves that they are good at their work and blame everyone but themselves for mistakes.
2. Opportunistic bullying. These bullies will bully any person that happens to be in the way of them manipulated their way to the top of the ladder. These people leave their bullying at work and behave normally in their private lives.
3. Self preserving bullying. These people will only bully when their job is under threat within the workplace.
4. "Sergeant major" bullying. Possibly the least harmful – this is the "sergeant major" who runs the company like a battalion and expects instant obedience and does not require creativity or initiative from the staff.
5. Organisational or corporate bullying. These people may be employers who make unreasonable demands knowing that workers need their jobs. This type of bullying could occur in any sized business and some examples include:
 - Being expected to work longer hours than the worker is paid for.
 - Poorly handled retrenchment or downsizing.
 - Sick workers feeling they need to keep working to prove their loyalty or worth.
 - Any worker suffering from stress or mental health conditions find themselves "restructured" out of their job because these conditions are seen as a sign of weakness.
 - Workers forced to "up-sell" to customers – try to sell an extra item after the initial sale has been made.

- Anxiety provoking workplace practises which create insecurity like listening in on employees conversations, tracking or reading their email without their knowledge, constant talk about cutbacks or retrenchment.
 - Workers asked to accept short term contracts instead of full time permanent positions. Because of high unemployment job applicants feel they have no choice but to accept this situation and lower wages.
 - Employers taking advantage of vulnerable workers by paying below minimum wage rates, e.g. students and other workers.
6. Client bullying. This is where the client or customer actually bullies the worker, e.g. teachers being bullied or assaulted by parents or students, nurses by patients. Workers in service industries are bullied by clients who are frustrated by limitations in service.
 7. Group/gang bullying. A group of bullies is often led by a chronic bully. Some members of the gang will bully because they get pleasure from it and enjoy being protected by the power of the group. Others may just wish to fit in with the group for fear of becoming victims themselves.
 8. Pair bullying. A chronic bully forms a strategic alliance with a colleague or subordinate to obtain power and control. One might bully while the other observes quietly – the active person could be being manipulated by the passive partner.
 9. Secondary bullying. This can occur when:
 - Those working with a chronic bully copy what they see as the established pattern of behaviour and also bully the same victim.
 - A colleague of the bullied worker is coerced, e.g. for fear of becoming a victim or losing their job, into supporting fabricated complaints against the victim.
 - The victim is pressured by rehabilitation providers to return to work as soon as possible even though the bully is still there or the workplace culture remains the same, thus forcing the victim to return to the stressful situation. This can cause an aggravation of trauma or resignation from the job.
 10. Financial bullying. This may occur when the victim's complaint is not upheld, thus causing financial detriment.
 11. Cyber bullying (sometimes called cyber stalking). This is inappropriate use of email to send abusive messages.
 12. Text message bullying. This is the inappropriate use of text message to harass a victim.

Why bullies bully:

1. Increased stress in life or work. Any person will become more at risk of bullying if there is inherently more stress in their private life or workplace. As workplaces are becoming more stressful, overloaded and demanding, workplace bullying may become more apparent.
2. There is something wrong with the bully.
 - Inadequate socialisation – emotional support by family, etc. as the child is growing up may not allow the development of compassion, ability to share or cooperate and may influence poor social and/or communication skills.
 - Poor role models in childhood.
 - Poor parenting.
 - Violence overload – this is a theory which exposes the media.
 - Being a victim as a child may increase the risk of this person becoming a bully.
 - Personality disorder – a serious psychological disorder where the person may be sociopathic, narcissistic or lack empathy or remorse. These days, known as the corporate psychopath. Figures are up to 6% of people in the workplace.
3. Aspects of the work environment:
 - Hiding the worker's lack of performance and using an opportunity at work to cover for this.
 - Dysfunctional or abnormal workplace culture/behaviour.
 - Most bullies know that they are bullying.
 - Those who don't know they are bullying may be the small percentage who suffer from personality disorders.

What you should do if you suspect you are being bullied.

- Keep a record of all events, no matter how trivial they seem
- Ask others if they have noticed similar behaviour from the person concerned
- Get support from your manager
- If the bully is your manager, get support from someone you trust.