

# Factsheet

## Bullying in the Workplace



One in four people are bullied in the workplace and research shows that up to half of all stress related illnesses arise as a result. It can have an equally serious impact on employers in terms of working days lost, low morale and damaging reputation.

### **What is bullying?**

Bullying is a gradual wearing down of someone so that they feel demeaned and inadequate. It can have an affect on home life too, with the victim having a feeling of hopelessness.

Bullying occurs in a wide variety of situations and can take many forms. It is often associated with highly competitive environments where many individuals regard it as an acceptable way of motivating staff. However, there is a fine line between this management style and bullying.

If you genuinely feel that you are being singled out for unfair treatment you are probably being bullied.

### **Who gets bullied?**

Bullies most commonly target their victims by

- Constantly criticising an employee, often in front of others.
- Spreading malicious rumours and remarks about an employee, or continuously making him or her the butt of jokes.
- Using aggressive, threatening language or behaviour towards an employee.
- Shouting at, intimidating and harassing an employee.
- Taking away the employee's authority and areas of responsibility without good reason.
- Setting the employee trivial and menial tasks which the s/he is not normally responsible for.
- Withholding important information from an employee which the s/he needs to do their job.
- Isolating an employee by ignoring him/her and excluding him or her from discussions and communications, which are relevant to his/her work.
- Passing off an employee's ideas and work as his/her own.
- Expecting an employee to perform unrealistic tasks, giving an unmanageable workload and deliberately setting him or her up to fail.
- Blaming an employee for his or her own mistakes.

## **Who is a bully?**

Workplace bullying is carried out by a range of individuals, with line managers being cited most often. A bully is equally likely to be a man or a woman.

The common stereotype of a bullied person is someone who is weak, an oddball or a loner. On the contrary, the target chosen by an adult bully will very often be a capable, dedicated staff member, well liked by colleagues.

Bullies tend to be aggressive and anxious, often with low self-esteem. They may be jealous or threatened by another person's popularity, success or effectiveness at doing their job, and be determined to put them down in order to boost their own self esteem.

## **Health Problems associated with bullying**

Bullying can severely affect mental and physical health and put an intolerable strain on an employee's well-being. Many victims suffer depression, chronic stress, anxiety and panic attacks. Other effects include, loss of confidence and self-esteem, tiredness an inability to sleep, lack of appetite, irritable bowel syndrome, high blood pressure, tearfulness and a dread of going to work.

## **Employers' responsibilities**

Bullying is recognised as a major cause of stress in the workplace and by law, stress must be dealt with in the same way as any other health and safety hazard.

Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, employers have a duty under to ensure the health, safety and welfare of their employees, and if they don't they are breaching an individual's contract of employment. There may also be a breach of sexual harassment and racial discrimination legislation as well as the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

- Employers who fail to tackle bullying can pay a high price:
- in absence and wasted time – because staff are affected by stress and ill-health
- lost incentive – because morale is low
- reduced productivity and quality of service
- lost resources – when trained or experienced staff leave the organisation
- financial penalties in the form of fines and compensation if a case goes to Employment Tribunal or to court.

## **What to do if you are being bullied**

- Check whether your employer operates an Anti-Bullying Policy.
- Get support and advice. Speak to other people in your workplace - colleagues, supervisor, personnel department, trade union representative. Take advice on the options available such as by making a formal complaint through the grievance procedure.
- Keep a diary of all events with dates and times and copies of any notes, from the bully, which you feel constitute bullying, intimidation, harassment etc.
- Speaking or writing to the bully citing examples of behaviour that you find unacceptable, may help, but it could also aggravate the situation and could result in increased vindictiveness.

- It may be possible to speak to the bully's manager, but again you will need evidence, so take a diary of events. Keep calm and focussed.
- Try to look at ways of being assertive and standing up to the bully.
- Ask other colleagues who have witnessed any incidents of you being bullied whether they would be willing to write a statement relating to what they saw.
- If you have to take time off sick due to being bullied at work ask your GP to record this on your certificate.
- Talk to friends and family for emotional support. Professional counselling could also be a help if you are feeling unhappy about yourself.

Bullying is an offence and must be dealt with. If you are being bullied at work, seek help and advice. Remember that you are only the target because your ability or popularity threatens the bully.

### **Agencies which provide support and information**

- **SupportLine: 020 8554 9004**, email [info@supportline.org.uk](mailto:info@supportline.org.uk) - Telephone Helpline providing confidential emotional support to Children, Young Adults and Adults on any issue. Particularly aimed at those who are vulnerable, isolated, at risk groups and victims of any form of abuse. Also provides details of counsellors and support groups across the UK.
- **The Andrea Adams Trust: 01273 704900**, email [mail@andreaadamstrust.org](mailto:mail@andreaadamstrust.org), [www.andreaadamstrust.org](http://www.andreaadamstrust.org) - Telephone helpline providing emotional support specifically for anyone being bullied in the workplace with suggestions on what you can do.
- **Freedom To Care: 01978 750583**, email [freedomtocare@aol.com](mailto:freedomtocare@aol.com), [www.freedomtocare.org](http://www.freedomtocare.org) - The UK's first whistleblower support group.
- **ACAS: 08457 474747**, [www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk) - For information and advice on employment rights/bullying at work.

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This information is intended as a guide only. For advice on your specific situation, please phone our helpline. We will then put you in touch with our legal helpline which can provide individual advice on your particular situation.