BULLY In the Workplace

What Is Workplace Bullying?

Bullying usually involves repeated events or a pattern of behaviour that is meant to threaten, offend, insult, or embarrass a particular person or group of people. Sometimes bullying can also involve negative physical contact. Workplace bullying targets people while on the job.

Bullying in the workplace is a serious issue, but is sometimes hard to detect. The list below identifies some behaviour to watch for.

Bullying may include:

- Spreading rumours and gossip;
- Making offensive jokes or comments;
- Using insults or put-downs;
- Blaming, scolding, criticizing, and belittling;
- Excluding or isolating;
- Intimidating by standing too close or making inappropriate gestures;
- Constantly changing guidelines, making unreasonable demands, setting impossible deadlines; and interfering with work:
- Discrediting achievements and stealing credit for ideas or work:
- Disciplining or threatening job loss without reason;
- Withholding information or giving the wrong information:
- Taking away work or responsibility without reason;
- Denying requests for training, leave, or promotion;
- Using offensive language, or yelling and screaming;
- · Pestering, spying, stalking, or tampering with personal belongings and equipment; and
- Physically abusing or threatening abuse.

When the source of the potential bullying is a supervisor, workers need to distinguish between firm management practices and inappropriate behaviour.

Are You Being Bullied at Work?

If you can answer yes to the following questions, you may be the target of bullying behaviour:

- Would most reasonable people consider the behaviour unacceptable?
- Are you spending a lot of time defending your actions and seeking support from your co-workers?
 (Employees who feel bullied spend about 10% to 50% of their time engaged in defending their own actions to co-workers.)



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What Can You do if You are Being Bullied?

If your workplace has an anti-bullying policy in place, follow it. If your workplace does not have an anti-bullying policy, refer to the suggestions below:

- Tell your Supervisor.
- Keep doing your job to the best of your ability. Keep performance appraisals and references to show that you can do your job.
- Document events. Record the date, time, witnesses, what happened (in as much detail as possible), and the outcome. A record of the events helps establish a pattern of bullying.
- Keep all emails, letters, memos, etc. sent to you from the bully.
- Stay connected with your co-workers; do not let the bully isolate you.
- Try to avoid being alone with the bully. When you communicate with this person, stick to the issues and stay as calm as possible.
- Walk away if the bully makes threats, scolds, or puts you down.
- Tell the bully that you want the behaviour to stop. You can have a supervisor accompany you when you approach the bully.
- Resist the desire to retaliate.

What Should Employers do to Ensure a Bully-free Workplace?

- Implement an anti-bullying policy that includes a reporting system.
- Encourage everyone in the workplace to act in a respectful and professional manner towards others.
- Educate your employees: bullying is a serious matter.
- Identify what behaviour constitutes as bullying, and where workers can go for help.
- Treat all complaints seriously, and deal with them immediately and confidentially.
- Train supervisors and managers on how to deal with complaints and potential bullying instances. Encourage them to address situations immediately whether or not a formal complaint has been filed.
- Have an unbiased third party help with the resolution, if necessary.
- Do not ignore any potential problems.
- Do not delay resolution. Act as soon as possible.

See: Occupational Health and Safety Regulations - Section 34. Harassment Resources: Government of Alberta website – Tip Sheets; CCOSH - OSH Answers Fact Sheets

