



“In a Nutshell”

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# Workplace bullying



## What is workplace bullying?

One of the difficulties in approaching the problem of workplace bullying, is that it may be hard to recognise and its effects may be attributed to something else as it creeps up on you long before you are able to appreciate what it is that is making you feel the ill effects.

Bullying is often a gradual wearing down process that makes individuals feel demeaned and inadequate, that they can never get anything right, and that they are hopeless, not only within their work environment but also in their domestic life.

## Euphemisms for bullying

A good deal of workplace bullying can be overlooked or excused because of a number of euphemisms which are frequently used to justify bullying behaviours: -

- Harassment
- Intimidation
- Aggression
- Bad attitude
- Coercive management
- Personality clash
- Poor management style

## Defining workplace bullying

There really is no simple definition of bullying because it can take so many forms, occur in a variety of situations and crosses gender, race, age and can involve one or a number of individuals. However, this type of behaviour is defined as: -

- Unwarranted humiliating offensive behaviour towards an individual or group.
- Such persistently negative malicious attacks on a personal or professional performance are typically unpredictable, unfair, irrational and often unseen.
- An abuse of power or position that can cause such anxiety that people gradually lose all belief in themselves, suffering physical ill health and mental distress as such a result.

Bullying can be regarded as the use of position or power to coerce others by fear, persecution or to oppress them by force or threat.

Bullying has been identified as a more crippling and devastating problem for both employees and employers, than all other work related stresses put together. Workplace bullying can range from extreme forms such as violence and intimidation to less obvious actions, like deliberately ignoring some at work.

## Strong management or bullying?

There is a fine line between strong management and bullying. That line is crossed when the target of bullying is persistently downgraded with the result that they begin to show signs of being distressed, becoming physically, mentally or psychologically hurt. It can be distinguished from all other work related problems, that it is not the intention of the perpetrator, but the deed itself and its impact on the recipient or target that constitutes as workplace bullying.

## How to tell if you are being bullied?

- You are being persistently 'got at'
- Your work is being criticised even though you know your standards have not slipped.
- You start beginning to question whether mistakes you are supposed to have made really are your fault or not.

If this is an accurate picture of what is happening to you at work, reflect on what has happened in the recent past and ask yourself, if everything was alright before, then why not now?

## What has changed?

- Do you have a new boss?
- Has pressure on your current boss increased?
- Are your objectives being repeatedly altered?
- Are you under more personal scrutiny?
- Are you feeling less involved?

## The physical effects of bullying behaviour:

- Sleeplessness
- Nausea
- Severe headaches/migraines
- Palpitations
- Skin complaints
- Sweating/shaking
- Stomach problems
- Backache
- Loss of appetite
- Lethargy

## The emotional effects of bullying behaviour

- Acute anxiety
- Feeling isolated
- Loss of confidence/self-esteem
- Depression
- Panic attacks
- Anger
- Mood swings
- Lack of motivation
- Suicidal thoughts

## Obvious bullying behaviour

- Repeatedly shouting or swearing in public or private
- Public humiliation
- Persistent criticism
- Constantly undervaluing effort
- Personal insults and name calling
- Persecution through fear or threats
- Dispensing unfair punishment out of the blue
- Increasing responsibility whilst decreasing authority

- Being overruled, ignored, marginalised or excluded

### **Less obvious bullying behaviour**

- Setting individuals up to fail
- Setting unrealistic deadlines for an increased workload
- Removing areas of responsibility and imposing menial tasks
- Deliberately sabotaging or impeding work performance
- Constantly changing guidelines
- Withholding work related information

### **Survival plan**

- Access support
- Make a conscious effort to eat a well-balanced diet
- Learn to relax
- Maintain contact with friends outside of work
- Think about contacting your GP if you are not sleeping or eating
- Make time to do things you enjoy outside of work
- Give yourself treats and keep your sense of humour