

Dealing with bullying in the workplace

Introduction

While some incidences of bullying are clear cut, other incidences may seem to fall into 'grey areas'. What one person considers firm management, may be considered bullying by another.

This page will help you identify and act on bullying in the workplace from the employer and employee perspective.

- Bullying in the workplace is not acceptable
- Standing up to bullying takes courage
- Employers hold a duty of care towards their employees

Please **contact us** with any feedback you may have on this content.

Forms of bullying

Bullying and harassment can often be insidious and hard to recognise. These are some examples outlined by the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service ([ACAS](#)).

- Repeated criticism often in front of others
- Spreading rumours
- Using aggressive/threatening language
- Removal of responsibilities without due reasons
- Asking the employee to do trivial/menial jobs they are not responsible for
- Withholding information
- Isolation or exclusion
- Overbearing supervision or misuse of power
- Taking credit where it is due to someone else
- Unrealistic/impossible timescales
- Misplaced blame
- Harassment – based on sex, sexual orientation, race, age, gender, belief, **disability**, marital status, being **pregnant** or on maternity leave
- Making threats or comments about job security
- Preventing individuals from progressing by blocking training/promotion opportunities

Bullying may be face to face or via e-mail, letter, phone, social media.

It is good practice for employees to have an anti bullying policy and give examples of what is unacceptable behaviour in their organisation. Further information on discrimination can be **found on the government website**.

What to do about bullying?

If you feel you are being bullied in the workplace it is important to seek support.

It is easy to feel isolated and vulnerable. Speaking up can feel like a huge step, but it is essential to moving forward. You should take action quickly.

You should consider:

- talking to others within the workplace – colleagues, supervisor, personnel department
- talking to your union rep
- speaking to a counsellor or health and wellbeing team (Occupational health)
- speaking to Human Resources.

You should find out if your place of work has an anti-bullying policy and grievance procedure.

You may want to consider:

- keeping a diary of all the incidents/dates/times you felt bullied
- talk to others within the workplace – colleagues, supervisor, personnel department, trade union representative. Take advice on the options open to you to deal with this e.g. by making a formal complaint through the grievance procedure.
- keep a diary of all incidents with dates and times and copies of any notes, memos etc. from the bully which you feel constitute bullying, intimidation, harassment etc.
- write to the bully clearly saying that you find their behaviour is unacceptable and amounts to bullying and set out the reasons why you believe this. Keep copies of any letters you send to the bully.
- if it is possible to tape conversations where you are being bullied then do so
- try to look at ways of being assertive and standing up to the bully
- if other colleagues witness any incidents where you are being bullied ask them whether they would be willing to write a statement relating to what they witnessed
- if you have to take time off sick due to being bullied at work ask your GP to record this on your certificate.

Be firm, not aggressive. Be positive and calm. Stick to the facts.

Follow your employer's grievance procedures.

Where harassment is unlawful under the Equality Act 2010, you can take the claim to an employment tribunal.

Why employers need to take action

Bullying is unacceptable. Progressive management of bullying is essential to the success of organisation.

Incidences of bullying in the workplace can lead to:

- increased absences
- poor morale
- reduced productivity
- loss of respect for managers/supervisors
- resignations
- tribunals
- loss of reputation

Employers have a duty of care towards their employees and in law are responsible for the acts of their workers. Further information can be found in the [Equality Act 2010](#).

Employers should have relevant, policies and procedures and provide appropriate training to supervisors/managers.

National legislation and guidance

- [Equality Act \(2010\)](#)
- [Health and Safety at Work Act \(1974\)](#)

Resources

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Useful contacts

- **ACAS** – for information and advice on employment rights/bullying at work
- **Citizens Advice Bureau**
- **Equality Advisory and Support Service**
- **Employee Assistance Professional Association** (EAPA) – information on Employee Assistance Programmes
- **Equality and Human Rights Commission**
- **Gov.uk** – workplace bullying and harassment
- **Unite**
- **SupportLine** – 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. Tel: 01708 765200

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