



Bullying in the Workplace

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What is workplace bullying?

Bullying at work occurs when:

- an individual or group of individuals repeatedly behaves unreasonably towards a worker or a group of workers at work, and
- the behaviour creates a risk to health and safety.

Behaving unreasonably can include behaviour that is: victimising, humiliating, intimidating or threatening.

Bullying behaviour can include:

- malicious pranks
- physical, verbal or emotional abuse
- belittling comments
- ganging-up
- isolation and exclusion
- rumour-mongering
- mocking
- discrimination
- harassment on social media

Effects of bullying

Workplace bullying often results in significant negative consequences for a worker's health and wellbeing.

The following can often be an indication of the effects of bullying on a worker:

- depression
- anxiety
- sleep disturbances
- nausea
- musculoskeletal complaints and muscle tension

What is not workplace bullying

A single instance of unreasonable behaviour

This does not constitute workplace bullying but can have the potential to become bullying if it is repeated or escalates, which is why it's important to keep a diary or record of the instances of the unreasonable behaviour.

Reasonable management action taken in a reasonable way

An employer may take reasonable management action to effectively direct and control the way work is carried out. It is reasonable for managers and supervisors to allocate work and give feedback on a worker's performance. These actions are not workplace bullying if they are carried out in a lawful and reasonable way, taking the particular circumstances into account.

Workplace conflict

Generally what is also not considered to be workplace bullying are differences of opinion and disagreements. People can have differences or disagreements in the workplace without engaging in repeated, unreasonable behaviour that creates a risk to health and safety.

There are also times that someone might take offence at action taken by management, but that does not mean that the management action in itself was unreasonable.

However, in some cases conflict that is not managed may escalate to the point where it becomes workplace bullying.

Bullying in the finance sector

As we all know, in the finance sector performance targets and objectives are a common feature of working in the industry.

Setting targets is itself not a feature of bullying behaviour – but unreasonable management action carried out in an unreasonable manner could constitute bullying behaviour, if it is repeated and is a risk to your health and safety. For example, anxiety that results from unreasonable expectations and targets that were not agreed, or were unachievable, being placed on you by your manager, could be seen as the result of bullying behaviour.



Taking action to stop bullying

What to do if you think you are being bullied in the workplace

If you believe that you are experiencing bullying it is your employer's duty to quickly respond to and address any risks to health and safety of its employees.

You can bring it to your employer's attention by raising a complaint or grievance to report what you feel is bullying through your workplace's complaint policy or procedure.

Or speak to your health and safety representative (HSR) in the workplace about raising bullying on your behalf.

If you think you are being bullied it is possible that others are also experiencing the same issues, so talk to your workmates about what is happening so that you can support each other and also take collective action.

You can also speak to your union representative or call the FSU for assistance and advice.

Keep a bullying diary

Importantly, because bullying involves repeated, unreasonable behaviour it is important to keep a diary that records each instance of unreasonable behaviour. This means that you can provide evidence to your employer that you have been experiencing repeated unreasonable behaviour at work.

Record details such as:

- Date, time and location of the incident
- A brief description of what happened
- Details of the other person, or people, involved
- Were there any witnesses?
- How did the incident affect you or make you feel?

See bullying diary at the end.

Contact the FSU

At any time you can call your Union for information, advice and support. The contact number for the Member Rights Centre is 1300 366 378 or you can email info@fsunion.org.au

Your employer's obligations

While everyone has a work health and safety duty in the workplace under work health and safety laws, an employer has the primary duty to provide a safe workplace and to minimise exposure to health and safety risks.

This means, for example, putting in place measures to identify and minimise the risk of workplace bullying, which can include:

- providing training and information about what bullying is
- having in place a workplace policy or procedure that defines bullying and outlines how it will deal with bullying
- having a code of conduct which set standards and expectations of behaviours in the workplace and what the possible consequences can be for any breach in relation to bullying

Work health and safety laws

The various work health and safety laws impose an obligation on an employer to provide and maintain a workplace that is without risks to health and safety. The laws also provide that the relevant regulator can investigate and prosecute breaches of the work health and safety laws in relation to bullying.

Bullying Diary

Date, time and location	What happened?	Who was involved?	Were there any witnesses?	Effects of the incident on you?