

Workplace bullying

What is bullying?

- * Any behaviour that intimidates, offends, degrades, insults and humiliates;
- * Can also include physical or psychological behaviour;
- * Rarely an isolated incident;
- * Actions/tactics can be obvious and subtle;
- * A pattern of behaviour where one or more incidents show that bullying is taking place.



Examples of bullying behaviour

- *Aggressive or frightening behaviour: includes swearing, shouting, and intimidation by threatening, violence;
- *Spreading false accusations which results in the person being ostracised;
- *Criticism, isolation and exclusion; humiliation, invasion of privacy; slanderous comments, undermining, destructive rumours or gossip and making unreasonable demands;
- *Rudeness, belittling and sarcastic comments, such as, “you’re hopeless”;
- *Abusive, belittling or intimidating phone calls, and emails;
- *Baiting or unreasonable teasing, such as singing derogatory songs and inserting the person’s name;
- *Nasty practical jokes;
- *Deliberate and unreasonable isolation or exclusion from work discussions, communication or other work related activities;
- *Removing areas of responsibility without cause.

What is NOT bullying?

- *Many studies acknowledge a fine line between management and bullying. Comments that are objective and are intended to provide constructive feedback are not usually considered bullying. They're meant to assist the employee with their work;
- *Fair and legitimate urging or encouragement by management for staff members to give their best;

*Occasional, one-off incidents, i.e. losing your temper, shouting or swearing;

*If you are not sure actions or statements are considered bullying, you can use the “reasonable person” test: would most people consider the action reasonable? Would most people consider the action unacceptable?

Workplace bullying can remain largely unreported for various reasons

- * People who are bullied may lack the confidence to speak up, or feel too intimidated or embarrassed to complain;
- * People may feel a sense of powerlessness due to their position in the organization;
- * It has become the 'culture' of workplaces and people are encouraged to not make waves;
- * There may be cultural constraints that prevent people from speaking up;
- * People may be unaware of their rights or established procedures at the workplace;
- * People may be prone to give in to peer pressure;
- * They fear denial of future advancement.

If you are being bullied, what can or should you do?

- * If you're comfortable doing so, tell the person his or her behaviour is unacceptable and ask them to stop. Ask a supervisor or union steward to be with you when you approach;
- * Speak to your union steward;
- * Keep a factual journal or diary of all events. Record the date, time and what happened in as much detail as possible. Record names of witnesses and any outcomes of the event;

- * Remember, it's not just the character of the incidents, but the number, frequency, and especially the pattern that can reveal the bullying behaviour;
- * Keep copies of any emails, letters, memos received;
- * Report the bullying to the employer and your union steward;
- * Find out what the policy is of the employer on bullying and what is in the collective agreement;
- * Do not retaliate. You could end up looking like the perpetrator and will most certainly cause confusion for those responsible for evaluating and responding to the situation. It can also inflame the bully to stronger action against you and it could result in physical harm.

What should the employer do to address bullying?

- * A policy should be developed to address bullying behaviour that applies to all employees, clients, contractors and anyone who has a relationship with the workplace;
- * Ensure everyone is made aware of the policy and procedures;
- * If there's language in the collective agreement, it shouldn't conflict with the policy. It is best to involve the union in policy development;
- * Appoint a contact person and ensure everyone is aware of who it is. The person should be trained

- to effectively deal with complaints;
- * Ensure the policy states the consequences and that there will be no reprisals to employees who come forward;
- * Offer an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or counselling to victims;
- * Make a commitment to monitor and regularly review the policy;
- * Ensure the policy is written in plain English.

What should the union/steward do?

- * Know the collective agreement language (if there is any) and the employer's policy;
- * Work with the employer to develop and review the policy if possible;
- * Ensure members know they can contact you for assistance;
- * Until the issue has been properly investigated, the alleged bully may also require support/ union representation. You do not support both — another steward will be required;
- * Listen to the issue, make notes and support the member in whatever capacity they require;
- * Assist in ensuring all union members are aware of the policy/ collective agreement language.