

Workplace Bullying: How to recognise and deal with bullying in the workplace

By Lyndsay Swinton

Bullying does not stop at the school gates. Workplace bullying is said to cost the UK anything from £2bn to £4bn a year in sick leave, law suits, lost productivity and replacing staff who've left after being bullied. What can you do if you are being bullied at work, or use bullying tactics yourself to get the job done? This workplace bullying article will help you recognise and deal with bullying at work.

How to recognise bullying

Admitting you're being bullied is the first positive step you can take in beating bullying. Bullying behaviour can come from your manager, peers, customers, colleagues or even staff. The key question to ask yourself is "would I accept this behaviour from a stranger?" If the answer is no, then you may be being bullied.

Sticks and stones may break your bones, but names can sometimes hurt, especially if the bullying lasts for a period of time. Bullying can take many forms, from actual or threatened physical harm to teasing, sarcasm and humiliation. Basically any prolonged behaviour which makes it unbearable for you to work can be considered bullying, and needs to be addressed.

How to deal with bullying if it's happening to you

Unfortunately, bullies are adept at knowing and exploiting your weak points. Confuse the bully by behaving in an assertive, strong manner, even if you don't feel that way inside. And no matter how hard they push, don't show them you're upset. It's no fun bullying someone who doesn't react, and so the bad behaviour often stops or is redirected elsewhere.

Not all bullies mean to be mean. Some [management styles](#) are closer to bullying than the person may be aware or comfortable with, so it's often worth talking to the person and [giving them feedback](#) on how their behaviour is affecting you and how you would prefer them to behave. If this scares you, then practice your lines to a

trusted friend or use visualisation to give leave you emotionally intact during the conversation.

If your initial attempts aren't working, it's worth stepping up your game to get a result. Talk to a person in authority and let them take responsibility for resolving the matter. Employers have a legal duty to stop bullying, and you have employee rights, usually through a formal complaints procedure, or even at industrial tribunal or court.

If a bullying culture is ingrained in the company, the best option may be to move on and find a company with a healthier culture.

How to deal with bullying if you see it happening to someone else

Alarm bells should ring if a colleague's behaviour changes drastically e.g. drop in performance, inability to concentrate, loss of confidence, withdrawal, using drink or drugs to get by, or difficulties sleeping. Don't approach the issue head on, maybe go for a quiet coffee together and say you've noticed something's up, and encourage them to talk. You never know, it may be next door's baby's teething problems keeping them awake at night!

The most important thing you can do is listen carefully, and offer practical help such as writing a diary detailing where and when the bullying happens. Recording events in a diary has two benefits; writing things down factually give emotional distance from the event, and the diary can support a formal proceeding against the bully. Resist the temptation to get angry at the bully, as this only adds to the victim's emotional burden, not lessen it.

Help your colleague with a plan of attack. Maybe you could act as an ally in meetings, when the bully most often strikes. Or you could go with your colleague to a person in authority and offer moral support, ensure they are taken seriously and promises kept.

How to deal with bullying if it's reported to you.

You will have either a moral or legal duty to act if bullying is reported to you at work. Make sure you know and follow your company's policy for dealing with bullying.

And regardless of the seriousness of the bullying, you need the victim to be involved and feel they are in control of the situation. Ask them how they want the matter to be resolved, and if they are unsure, offer them some options and let them choose.

For example, if you go steaming in and have a show-down with the bully, this may make things worse in the long-run. A better approach may be to offer [assertiveness training](#) to the victim and coach them through addressing the behaviour themselves. Basically, do what's right for the person, and they will no longer be a victim.

Whether you are the victim, the perpetrator or a spectator, there are many moral, social and economical reasons why workplace bullying needs to stop. Or else.

Further resources

[Assertiveness Training mp3 Download](#)

[The Andrea Adams Trust](#)

[Bully Online](#)

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