

# Stop workplace bullying

It's not normal — it's unreasonable.



## What everyone needs to know about workplace bullying

### What is workplace bullying?

Workplace bullying is a pattern of behavior that harms, intimidates, undermines, offends, degrades or humiliates an employee, possibly in front of other employees, clients or customers. It is a serious health and safety issue. The targets of bullying may suffer from physical and mental health problems that can last for many years.

Bullying situations may involve:

- Bosses or supervisors against their subordinates.
- Employees against their peers.
- A group of co-workers targeting another worker (mobbing).
- Corporations/institutions, when bullying is entrenched in an organization and becomes accepted as part of the workplace culture.

Workplace bullying often involves an abuse or misuse of power. Bullying behavior creates feelings of defenselessness and injustice in the target and undermines an individual's right to dignity at work.

"Tough" or "demanding" bosses are not necessarily bullies as long as they are respectful and fair and their goal is to get the best performance by setting high yet reasonable expectations for working safely.

### Targets of bullying experience significant physical and mental health problems:

- Stress and depression
- Sleep disorders
- Financial problems from missing work
- Reduced self-esteem
- Musculoskeletal problems
- Illnesses, accidents and injuries

### Bullying is costly for organizations too:

- Loss of productivity
- Unable to retain good staff
- Increased medical costs
- Possibility of investigations, grievances, and lawsuits
- Replacement recruiting, hiring, and training
- Loss of reputation

## What are some examples of bullying behavior?

- Unwarranted or invalid criticism; unjustified blame
- Being treated differently from others in your workgroup
- Being sworn at, shouted at or humiliated
- Exclusion or social isolation
- Excessive monitoring, micro-managing or being given unrealistic deadlines

## What can an employer do?

First and foremost, employers must recognize and prevent workplace bullying. If you are an employer, supervisor or manager who is aware of bullying in the workplace and do not take action, then you are accepting a share of the responsibility for future abuses. Take steps to:

- Educate all employees on respectful professional behavior and company code of conduct.
- Create a zero tolerance anti-bullying policy and train supervisors on how to intervene constructively.
- Encourage witnesses to report any incidents immediately.
- Investigate the extent and nature of problems in a timely manner.

Reporting and investigating incidents needs to be handled sensitively and respectfully, with assurance that there won't be retaliation or negative job consequences.

Individuals are less likely to engage in bullying behavior when it is understood that the organization does not tolerate such behavior and that the aggressor is likely to be punished.

## What can I do if I'm being bullied?

Regain control! Recognize that you are being bullied and that you are not the source of the problem. Bullying is about control, and therefore, it has nothing to do with your performance. Here's what you can do:

- Keep a detailed diary of the bullying incidents (dates, times, places, what was done or said and who was present).
- Keep documents that contradict the bully's accusations, such as timesheets, audit reports, etc.
- Expect the bully to deny and even misconstrue your accusations; have a witness during meetings with the person.
- If possible, report the behavior to an appropriate and safe person.
- Find support from trusted people at work, outside of work and at home.

## Is bullying against the law?

Bullying in general is not illegal in the U.S. unless it involves harassment based on race/color, religion, national origin, sex, age (over 40), marital status, disability, sexual orientation/gender identity, Veteran/military status or any other protected class. Check if your organization has a workplace violence program that addresses intimidation or harassment at work.

## Where can I learn more?

Additional resources for employers, workers and organizations are available at [www.NoBullying.Lni.wa.gov](http://www.NoBullying.Lni.wa.gov).

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