



# The Effects of Workplace Bullying

## Systems of Work

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Workplace bullying is defined as persistent mistreatment that occurs in the workplace. It can include behaviours such as verbal criticism, personal attacks, humiliation, belittling, and exclusion.

According to a survey by the Workplace Bullying Institute, 30% of workers have directly experienced bullying while at work. People who work remotely were more likely to report such bullying, with 43.2% responding that they had been bullied on the job.

Workplace bullying has a negative impact on the health and well-being of employees. It can also have a negative impact on workplace productivity and performance.

This article discusses some of the signs and effects of workplace bullying. It also covers the impact that it has on the workplace and what people can do to help prevent this type of behaviour.

## Signs of Workplace Bullying

If you are a target of bullies in the workplace, you start each week with a pit of anxiety in your stomach. Then, you count down the days until the weekend or next vacation.

Inappropriate behaviour by adult bullies may include:

- Berating people.
- Coercing people to do things they do not want to do.
- Dismissing someone's efforts.
- Embarrassing people in front of their employer, co-workers, or clients.
- Excluding others.
- Intimidating people.
- Lying to others.
- Making snide remarks.
- Minimizing their concerns.
- Taking credit for other people's work.
- Threatening others.
- Unfair criticism.

Workplace bullying is not always overt or openly hostile. It can also take more subtle forms, including gaslighting where the bully engages in abusive behaviours but then denies the abuse. The goal of gaslighting is to make the victim of bullying doubt their reality and experiences.

## Effects of Workplace Bullying

Workplace bullying can have a range of negative effects. Research on bullying in the workplace quantifies the personal consequences for the victim and fiscal consequences that affect the company's bottom line.

## Health Risks

The effects of workplace bullying do not end when you leave the office. Being a victim of bullying can cause physical and psychological health problems, including:

- Higher blood pressure
- Mood changes
- Panic attacks
- Stress
- Ulcers
- Worry

People who are bullied at work may also experience other physical symptoms such as headaches, muscle tension, and changes in appetite. It can also impact sleep quality and duration.

Workplace bullying can also contribute to increased stress, low self-esteem, and feelings of anxiety and depression.

Researchers at the University of Helsinki Department of Public Health found the co-workers of those who are bullied also experience negative effects.<sup>6</sup> Their results show victims of bullying and those who witness it are more likely to receive a prescription for psychotropic medications such as antidepressants, tranquilizers, and sleeping pills.

## Recap

Bullying in the workplace can increase the risk for negative physical health effects and lead to decreased mental well-being for both the victims of bullying and their co-workers.

## Effect on Job Performance

Bullied workers cannot perform their jobs to the best of their ability. Performance issues include:

- An incapacity to work or concentrate.
- A loss of self-esteem.
- Having trouble making decisions.
- Lower productivity.

Bullied workers not only lose motivation, they lose time because they are preoccupied with:

- Avoiding the bully.
- Networking for support.
- Planning how to deal with the situation.
- Ruminating about the situation.
- Trying to defend themselves.

What's more, targets of bullying feel a sense of isolation. In fact, workplace bullying can leave the victim so traumatized that they feel powerless, disoriented, confused and helpless.

## How It Affects the Workplace

Workplace bullying has detrimental effects on employers, not just the victim and their co-workers who witness it. In addition to disrupting the work environment and impacting worker morale it can also:

- Create a hostile work environment
- Impact workers compensation claims
- Promote absenteeism
- Reduce productivity
- Result in costly, and possibly embarrassing legal issues

Other costly effects on the employer include:

- Additional costs to recruit and train new employees
- Erosion of employee loyalty and commitment
- Increased use of sick leave, health care claims, and staff turnover<sup>4</sup>
- Increased risk of legal action
- Poor public image and negative publicity
- Coping With Bullying in the Workplace

There are strategies that you can utilize to help cope with workplace bullying.

Actions that you can take:

**Set boundaries:** When a bully engages in abusive behaviour, tell them what they have done and that such behaviour is unacceptable. Let them know that their behaviour will not be tolerated and that if it occurs again, you will take action. Setting boundaries lets others know what type of behaviour you are willing to accept.

**Confront the behaviour:** Once you establish a boundary, it is essential to follow through with the consequences. If the abuse, call out the behaviour the next time it happens. Ask them to leave until they can behave in a professional, work-appropriate manner.

**Keep track of the abuse:** Whenever you feel that you have been bullied at work, document the details including the time and exactly what happened. Write down any witnesses who were present and save any documents or records that can corroborate the abuse.

**Talk to management or human resources:** If you have tried resolving the bullying on your own without success, it is time to involve your employer. Check with your workplace employee handbook to learn more about what steps you will need to take to file a complaint.

In addition to taking decisive action to protect yourself from bullying, it is also important to take steps to care for yourself. Seek out social support, practice relaxation strategies for stress, and consider talking to a mental health professional if you are experiencing symptoms of depression, anxiety, or distress.

## Recap

Creating boundaries and directly confronting the behaviour are two strategies that may stop bullies from targeting you. Recording and reporting the bullying is also important. You can also help care for yourself by seeking social support and talking to a therapist.

## **What Can Employers Do?**

It is always in your best interest to confront workplace bullying and maintain a bullying-free workplace because prevention is more cost-effective than intervention or mediation. It is also the right thing to do if care about your employees.

Employers must offer education opportunities for managers, supervisors, and other authority figures because the majority of workplace bullying comes from bullying bosses. Strive to create a workplace environment that cultivates teamwork, cooperation, and positive interaction instead.

## **Recap**

Employers should also take steps to reduce bullying in the workplace. Educate employees and managers about bullying and outline steps that workers can take if they are experiencing abuse in the workplace.

## **A Word from Verywell**

It is important to be able to recognize the signs of workplace bullying so that you can take action to protect yourself. Organizations can also take steps to reduce bullying, including helping employees learn how to respond when they witness someone being bullied at work.

# How to Confront a Workplace Bully

## FAQ

### How can you deal with workplace bullying?

Calling out the behaviour and making it clear that it will not be tolerated are important actions, but it is also critical to care for yourself outside of the workplace. Talk to friends and loved ones, spend time doing things you enjoy, and look for ways to help relax. Talking to a therapist can also be helpful.

### How do you report workplace bullying?

Check your employee handbook to see if it describes steps you should take to report bullying. This may involve talking to your manager or reporting the behaviour to human resources (HR) so they can investigate. If your manager is the one engaging in bullying, you might need to report the behaviour to HR or to someone who is a position higher up the chain of command.

### What constitutes workplace bullying?

Workplace bullying can involve a range of damaging actions that can involve verbal, nonverbal, psychological, or physical abuse. Examples can include threats, humiliation, excessive monitoring, unjustified criticism, intentionally lying about work duties, and intimidation.

### How can you prevent workplace bullying?

Employers can help prevent bullying by making it a priority to create a supportive workplace and refusing to tolerate bullying behaviours. Co-workers can help by being supportive and speaking up if they witness abuse in the workplace.