

## Bullying in the workplace

Bullying is a common concern within the legal community, around 30% of callers to LawCare's helpline complain of being bullied in the course of their work. Bullying at work can occur in many different ways, but if you feel you are experiencing bullying in the workplace it can be very distressing and affect your mental health.

### WHAT IS BULLYING?

Bullying in the workplace is a type of abusive behaviour where an individual or a group of people create an intimidating or humiliating work environment for another. This can make those subjected to it anxious, depressed and it can have an impact on family life too.

#### Examples of Bullying

- ▶ Excessive monitoring of work
- ▶ Exclusion with negative consequences
- ▶ Verbal abuse or insults
- ▶ Repeatedly manipulating the person's job specification and targets
- ▶ Blame for things beyond the person's control
- ▶ Menacing behaviour, intimidation or aggression
- ▶ Being treated less favourably than colleagues, including constant criticism of work.

#### What bullying is not

Many organisations fail to see the effect that a bully can have on an individual and will try to legitimise bullying, or position it in such a way that it is not an issue. You may hear managers describe bullying as many things, but it is not:

- A personality clash** if you are being regularly excluded, belittled or intimidated, you are not clashing with someone, this is bullying.
- Character building** negative remarks and behaviour towards you will not build your character, the effects can be very distressing and affect your mental health.
- Leadership style** dominant or aggressive managers may try and pass off this behaviour as their management style, but if you feel threatened, this is bullying.
- Provoked** bullying is never your fault.

## What are the effects of bullying?

### On you

Bullying can make you feel anxious and humiliated, and can make you frightened, demotivated and unproductive. You may feel very low and anxious about going into work and facing the individual or group that are causing you to feel this way. You may feel like you have no option but to leave the organisation you work for.

### On the organisation

Bullying can lead to a reduction in staff job performance and cause relationships in the workplace to deteriorate. The cost to the business can include low morale, poor staff relations and a potential loss of valuable staff.

## WHAT DO IF YOU ARE BEING BULLIED

- ▶ Talk to someone about your problem, a colleague, friend, family member or LawCare.
- ▶ Keep a diary of all incidents, noting dates, times, any witnesses and the impact of the bullying behaviour on you. Keep copies of relevant documents, e.g. malicious emails.
- ▶ If you feel comfortable and safe to do so, talk to the person who is bullying you informally and explain the impact their behaviour is having on you. They may not have been aware that you perceived their behaviour as unacceptable. Let them know that if the situation does not improve you will be taking an official route to resolve it. Try not to let the situation become threatening or confrontational. Keep detailed notes of the conversation and “debrief” with a supportive friend or colleague if you can.
- ▶ For many though, informally talking with the person who is bullying you is not an option, in which case take this up with your manager or supervisor and ask them to help you take the necessary formal steps to resolve the issue.
- ▶ If you feel that you are left with no option but to resign, it may be open to you to claim that you have been constructively dismissed. Before proceeding with such a claim you should exhaust all internal remedies or procedures, and seek specialist legal advice.
- ▶ If you are feeling low and anxious seek help from your GP, counselling or medication may help.

## GOOD PRACTICE IN ORGANISATIONS

Organisations should have detailed policies on bullying and behaviour in the workplace which should be applied at every level by management and communicated to all staff. If a member of staff reports bullying, take the complaint seriously and work with the individual to find a solution.

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