

Workplace Bullying

Workplace Bullying exists in various forms, but ultimately is unwelcome and uninvited. It is usually unreciprocated conduct by one person or a group of people. It can affect all staff members at all levels of employment.

What is Bullying?

Bullying involves behaviour that can intimidate, degrade or humiliate an employee. The behaviour creates a risk to health and safety. It can be overt or covert. It may occur once or be a series of incidents and can be perpetrated by an individual or a group.

What is not Bullying?

A manager can make decisions about poor performance, take disciplinary action and direct/control the way work is carried out. Reasonable management action that is carried out in a reasonable way is not bullying. Reasonable management action may include:

- Performance management processes
- Disciplinary action for misconduct
- Informing an employee about unsatisfactory work performance or inappropriate work/conduct/behaviour
- Directing an employee to undertake duties in keeping with their job
- Maintaining reasonable workplace standards and goals

How is Bullying different to discrimination?

Discrimination occurs where there is 'adverse action' such as sacking or demoting an individual because of an individual's characteristics such as gender, culture or religion.

Bullying occurs when someone in the workplace repeatedly behaves unreasonably towards another individual or group of persons causing a risk to health and safety. This behaviour does not have to be related to an individual's or group's characteristics and adverse action does not have to have occurred.

Who is protected from Bullying in the workplace?

Australian anti-bullying laws cover all employees as well as:

- Outworkers
- Students gaining work experience
- Contractors or subcontractors
- Volunteers

How does Bullying affect an employee?

Though impacts may vary, the most commonly reported effects are:

- Stress, tension, anger, anxiety and depression
- Feelings of social isolation at work
- Loss of job satisfaction
- Loss of confidence
- Insomnia
- Having to take sick or recreation leave
- Physical symptoms of stress such as headaches, backaches, stomach cramps, tiredness and depression
- Loss or damage to personal relationships

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Workplace Bullying

Workplace Bullying examples:

- Offensive physical contact or coercive behaviour
- Insulting or threatening gestures
- Non-work related interference with a person's workspace, work materials, equipment or property
- Repeated unjustified and unnecessary comments about a person's work or capacity for work
- Pictures, posters, graffiti or written materials which are offensive or obscene
- Phone calls, letters, messages, e-mails, and downloads from the internet which are threatening, abusive or offensive
- Persistent following or stalking within the workplace, or to and from work
- Ongoing exclusion of a person/group from work assignments, normal conversation, work related social activities and networks in the workplace

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is the use of internet blogs, email, instant messaging, chat rooms, pagers, cell phones, or other forms of information technology to deliberately harass, threaten, or intimidate someone.

The problem is compounded by the fact that individuals and groups can hide behind an electronic veil, disguising their identity, making it difficult to trace the source, and encouraging people to behave more aggressively than they might face-to-face.

What you can do about Bullying

Informal

- If you can, approach the person when their behaviour is inappropriate
- Make a diary note of any ongoing inappropriate behaviour
- Have a third party involved for support or as a witness – e.g. a peer, co-worker
- If you don't feel able to confront the person, go to your manager or supervisor
- Contact your organisation's Human Resources representative for advice and support
- Seek advice and support from your union
- Seek support from reputable organisations, such as EASA (www.easa.org.au)

Formal

- Speak to Human Resources / Harassment Contact Officer about internal processes to address these matters, e.g. complaints, grievances or bullying and harassment policies
- Inform the manager when a problem is not resolved
- Request mediation – mediation can be considered at any stage of a grievance.
- Contact the Fairwork Ombudsman (www.fairwork.gov.au)

Workplace bullying is always inappropriate and unacceptable behaviour, it should not be tolerated.