

# Overview of Bullying in the Workplace: Stop the Pain and Violence

by  
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## What is the Definition of Workplace Bullying?

Bullying is a form of health-harming behavior (physical, verbal, written, social and/or electronic) by one or more individuals that is intentional, hurtful (physical and/or psychological) and persistent (repeated). Since there is an imbalance of power (physical or psychological – real or perceived), it is often threatening and creates a hostile workplace. The person's safety is at risk and their job or career is jeopardized, as well as their relationships. (Beane, 2012)

What are we talking about?

- Mistreatment
- Victimization
- Abuse
- Dehumanization
- Bullying

## What does workplace bullying look like?

### *10 Most Common Workplace Bullying Behaviors\**

- Falsely accusing someone of “errors” not actually made (71%)
- Nonverbally intimidating and showing hostility with stares and glares (68%)
- Discounting the person's thoughts or feelings (“Oh, that's silly.”) in meetings (64%)
- Using the “silent treatment” to socially isolate (64%)
- Making up her/his own rules on the fly that even she/he does not follow (61%)
- Exhibiting uncontrollable mood swings in front of the group (61%)
- Disregarding satisfactory or outstanding quality of completed work despite evidence (58%)
- Harshly and constantly criticizing someone - holding them to a different standard than others (57%)
- Starting, or failing to stop, destructive rumors or gossip about a person (56%)
- Encouraging people to turn against the person being bullied (55%)

*\*2010 WBI U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey*

## **What does research tell us about bullying in the workplace?**

- Approximately 37 percent of U.S. workers have reported being bullied on the job
- 49 percent say they have witnessed a bully in action
  - *This represents a staggering 86% of the workforce being affected by bullying in the workplace.*
- Over 71.5 million Americans are affected by bullying in the workplace
- Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI), Washington State-based non-profit group serving the U.S. and Canada
  - 40% of targets never tell their employers
  - 43% of targets are bullied by co-workers
  - 36% are bullied by supervisors
  - 38% of bullies are women
  - 62% of bullies are men
  - 58% of targets are women
  - 42% of targets are men
- Employer Involvement
  - A 2010 survey found 33% of employees believe their employer is “very engaged” in preventing bullying.
  - The same survey revealed 43% believe their employer is “unengaged” and were unaware of any employer activity.

Reference: 2010 WBI U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey

## **Who are At-Risk of Being Targeted?**

- Competent, intelligent, and high-performing employees - bullies see them as threatening
- Good natured employees who are not assertive - the bullies see them as weak
- New employees
- Anyone who appears to be “different”
- Anyone they can have power and control over, hurt, and manipulate

## **Why Don't Employees Report It?**

- Embarrassment and shame
- Observed others reporting it and nothing was done
- Fear they will be blamed
- The bully is their superior and fear they may be forced to leave their job

- Fear leadership will be mad because reporting it has created a problem that needs to be addressed
- Fear retaliation
- Fear being ostracized by coworkers

### **Why Must Workplace Bullying Be Prevented and Stopped?**

- More prevalent today and in more serious form
- A violation of civil rights in some cases
- Occurs in every workplace
- Creates a fearful workplace
- Contributes to violence in the workplace

### **What is the Cost of Bullying? (Impact on Businesses and Individuals)**

- Bullying causes stress and it is costing businesses
  - Everyday, 1 million workers in the US are absent from work due to stress.
  - Stress is costing American businesses [\\$300 billion a year](#) in terms of diminished productivity, employee turnover and insurance.
  - [If 37% of workers are bullied](#), the potential cost to American businesses would be around \$111 billion annually.
- Impact on Businesses
  - Workplace bullying leads to 18 million lost working days per year (*Hazards Magazine, Issue 70*)
  - Increased turnover (*Keashly & Jagatic, 2003*)
  - Increased cost of recruitment and training
  - Low workforce morale (*Rayner & Hoel, 1997*)
  - Poor customer relations (customers bullied or observe behavior of bully)
  - Decreased productivity and performance (*Field 2001*)
  - Decreased employee commitment (*Hoel et. al., 2003*)
  - Potential litigation (*Earnshaw and Cooper, 1996*)
  - Adverse media attention - negative impact on corporate image

*The bottom line is that workplace bullies are just far too expensive to keep.*

- Impact on Individuals
  - Top 12 Health Consequences (Symptoms) for Bullied Employees\*
    - Severe anxiety (94%)
    - Sleep disruption (84%)

- Loss of concentration (82%)
- Feeling edgy (jittery, nervous) (80%)
- Obsession over bully's motives and tactics (76%)
- Stress headaches (64%)
- Avoidance of feelings and/or places (49%)
- Shame and embarrassment causing a change in routine (49%)
- Racing heart rate (48%)
- Flashbacks (46%)
- New muscle or joint aches (43%)
- Diagnosed depression (41%)

\*Namie, G. Namie, R., *The Bully at Work*. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, Inc. 2000, p. 61.

### ***Bullying:***

- Weakens the mind
- Weakens the heart
- Weakens the body
- Weakens the spirit

DRAINS THE SOUL!

### **What can you do to protect yourself from people who bully?**

Though you cannot go back and make a brand new start, my friend, you can start now, and make a brand new end. - *Unknown*

Every situation is different. How you respond to the bullying depends on the extent/level of bullying, how it affects you, your company's policies and leadership quality, and your particular situation.

You could take an *informal* approach or follow a more *formal* approach.

Take Action!

Help Yourself!

- Major goals for yourself:
  - To protect yourself from future bullying.
  - To briefly explore why you are being bullied. (Don't spend much time on this. *No one deserves it.*) Too much time on "Why" can cause you to

think too much about your own doubts and insecurities and prevent you from moving forward to solutions to the problem

- To develop a plan for managing the hurt and the stress to minimize the impact on bullying

- Don'ts

- Don't appear hurt or cry
- Don't let the bully sense he/she has power and control over you
- Don't deny it is happening to you
- Don't constantly complain to your co-workers about the bully's behavior – not constructive, it's disrespectful, and adds fuel to the fire
- Don't ignore or minimize the bullying - act immediately to stop it
- Don't write it off as interpersonal conflict or a misunderstanding – it's Bullying!
- Don't waste energy having a breakdown on account of a bully Don't retaliate

- What to Do! (A Seven-Step Process)

- Step #1: Acknowledge, State, and Understand the Problem
- Step #2: Consider Assertively Confronting the Bullying
- Step #3: Develop a Safety Plan
- Step #4: Check Company Policies and Procedures
- Step #5: Document Incidence
- Step #6: Seek Advice and Report (If Desired)
- Step #7: Empower Yourself
  - Develop a Wellness Action Plan (Cope with the Stress)
  - Enlist Support
  - Develop Your Strengths
  - Increase Your Options
  - Build decision-making skills
  - Develop Assertiveness Skills

## Step #1: Acknowledge, State, and Understand the Problem

- *Recognize that you are being “bullied” and it isn’t right – call it what it is – Say, “I’m being bullied.” Don’t make excuses for the bully – excuses permit the bullying to continue*
  - “She’s just having a bad day.”
  - “He’s under a lot of stress.”
- *Recognize that the person may not be evil, just unhappy, insecure, arrogant, jealous, etc.*
  - If you do this, you will feel less intimidated and wronged by the person.
- *Recognize why the bully has picked you - this may help you find solutions*
  - You are kind, loving, sensitive, and will not be assertive
  - You communicate a lack the confidence so you won’t confront the bully
  - You are an excellent professional –very productive - high-performer)
  - Very intelligent
  - Very attractive
- *Recognize that the mistreatment is not about you, it is the bully who has a problem – trying to meet their unmet needs*
- *Seek to understand how it impacts you*
  - Journaling - Write down (honestly expressing your thoughts and feelings regarding your bullying situation) – *documents impact on you:*
    - Physical Symptoms
    - Emotional Symptoms – (Note: Be sure to admit and appropriately express your anger)
    - Mental Symptoms
    - Behavior Symptoms
      - Journaling reminds you that the bullying is real and must stop
      - Journaling gives you insight and control over your behavior that may spill over with friends and family

## **Step #2: Consider Assertively Confronting the Bully**

- *If you feel safe and comfortable to do so, make it quite clear to the bully as soon as possible that the behavior is unwanted and unacceptable and that you will not tolerate it.*
  - Consider asking the appropriate person (e.g. supervisor, line manager, trusted colleague or site-based grievance contact person) to approach the bully on your behalf or to mediate or facilitate face-to-face discussions and find a resolution that is acceptable to everyone involved.

## **Step #3: Develop a Safety Plan**

- *Immediately develop a Safety (Protection) Plan for yourself. Identify what you can do so you aren't such an "easy target" or "sitting duck."*
  - When possible, avoid the bully
  - Never go to the bathroom alone
  - Don't have routines – such as using the same hallway and stairwell – keep bully guessing where you are
  - Report each day to someone you trust
  - Try to have responsible co-workers with you when you interact with the bully
  - Consider reporting it, but have your facts written down in a log
  - Ask your supervisor to increase his/her monitoring of your interactions with the bully
  - Consider leaving your job or asking for a transfer, be prepared if this becomes a choice

## **Step #4: Check Company Policies and Procedures**

- *Examine the company's health, safety, and harassment policies to determine if the bully has violated any of them.*
- *Make sure you follow the policies and procedures, if you decide to report the bullying (or file a complaint).*
- *Make sure the company follows their policies and procedures, including personnel policies. For example, is your supervisor responsible for holding employees accountable for their behavior?*

## Step #5: Document Incidences

- Keep a log of what happens (facts only, not opinions)
  - Why a Log?
    - Forces you to look at the situation objectively
    - Helps you to avoid blowing it out of proportion or from minimizing or ignoring it
    - Will prove helpful when you report the bullying.
    - Will help you improve your personal safety plan
    - Documents the facts
  - What should be included?
    - Date and time
    - Location
    - Witnesses and their response
    - Your response to the mistreatment
    - Bully's response to your response
  - Log of Incidences
    - If the bullying has been going on before you start your log:
      - record what happened as accurately as you can
      - make a note of the date you're making your recollection
    - Also include a record of your reports of the bullying and meetings with superiors

## Step #6: Seek Advice and Report (If Desired)

- Seek advice from the individual in the company who is responsible for receiving health and safety complaints.
- Consider filing a formal complaint
  - You may decide, or be required to lodge a written complaint to your employer.
  - If a formal investigation does occur, an impartial person who is not involved in the particular situation should carry this out.
  - After filing a complaint, don't make allegations about bullying behavior or harassment to people who are not involved in handling complaints in your workplace.
    - The alleged bully is protected by confidentiality provisions in law and may be able to take action if the complaint is not handled properly.



- The investigator should document your report and keep a record of information gathered in the course of the investigation and you should be advised of the outcome.

### **Step #7: Empower Yourself**

- *Develop a Wellness Action Plan (Cope with the Stress) – Take Care of Yourself!*
  - Keep a journal (honestly expressing your thoughts and feelings regarding your bullying situation)
  - Improve your health habits to help you deal with stress
  - Good eating habits
  - Exercise at least 30 minutes daily
  - Get at least 8 hours of sleep
  - Listen to instrumental music (no words)
  - Have fun doing what you enjoy
  - Laugh every day (comedy DVDs, books, etc.)
  - Drink plenty of water daily (ounces of water should be 10% of your body weight)
  - Breathe deeply for five minutes five times a day
  - Meditation (Quiet Time and Prayer)
  - Try Tai Chi and/or Yoga, etc.
  - Etc.
- Seek balance in your life – target top 3 areas listed below that need improvement and then take action
  - Spiritual Health
  - Mental/Psychological Health
  - Physical Health
  - Family
  - Social\
  - Financial
  - Career
  - Enlist Support from friends and family – people you can trust and depend on to listen, to encourage you, and to guide you – don’t wait for people to offer help
    - Develop a “Best Friend” you can trust
    - May help you have fewer resulting emotional problems and control your anger.

- Build your self-confidence, self-esteem, and body strength (weight lifting, individual sports such as golf, softball, hiking, running, swimming, Tai Chi, etc.)
- Positive Self-talk – focus on your strengths, praise yourself for work well done, accomplishments, etc.
  - Reject the thought you deserve to be mistreated
- Develop skills (especially of social value)
- Get involved in helping others in your community
- Learn to make good decisions
- If needed, seek professional counseling
- Develop Assertiveness Skills

*Note:* After using the following strategies, you should, if possible, start a conversation with someone, or walk off confidently, or walk into a group of co-workers.

- *General Assertiveness Strategies*
  - Look confident (assertive body language) by standing tall and holding your head up.
  - Don't appear hurt or angry. Keep your facial expressions neutral but serious.
  - Move closer to the bully, turn sideways and have non-threatening eye contact. Maintain good balance by keeping your feet shoulder-width apart.
  - Hold your arms beside your body. Don't hold your arms up like you want to fight.
  - Don't put your hands in your pockets.
- *Specific Assertiveness Skills*
  - Assertive statements. With a serious face and a strong but calm voice say, “*This is a waste of my time, I don't have to listen to this. I'm out of here.*”
  - Fogging. Admit the characteristic. Soft verbal comebacks.
  - Exhaust the topic. Repeated questioning about putdown.
  - Admit the Obvious. Indicate the bully sees the obvious—”Wow! He notice noticed I'm bald.”
  - Broken record. Repeat “What did you say?” or “That's your opinion.” or “So.”
  - Expose ignorance of bully. Share facts regarding a medical problem or disability.

- Give permission to tease. “Well, it’s okay to say what you want. It doesn’t bother me.”
  - Use sense of humor. Do not make the bully feel like he/she is being laughed at. When the bully says, “You sure do have big ears.” You could say, “Your right, sometimes I feel like an elephant.”
  - Make an asset of the characteristic. Well, I guess Michael Jordan and I are alike, we both don’t have hair.
- Consider your own behavior that may be triggering the mistreatment – you may do something that irritates the bully or make them jealous.
  - Remember, you do not deserve to be mistreated – they never have the right to mistreat you.
  - Determine what your response is that may be rewarding the behavior – crying, pouting, being passive or non-assertive (allowing it).
- To develop your confidence in responding differently, engage in emotional rehearsal.
- Find a place outside work (non-work activities/organizations) where you can feel accepted and have a sense of belonging.
- Increase your involvement in work activities that the bully doesn’t attend.

## Summary

- Workplace bullying is widespread.
- The impact of bullying is costly for both the business and the individuals involved.
- Workplace bullying should be viewed as an organizational problem, not just an individual problem.
- Therefore, the interventions need to be targeted at **both** the individual and organizational level.

If You Are Bullied, Remember!

- It’s not you, it’s the bully who has a problem.
- You are not alone, we know how to help you.
- You are not helpless in facing the problem of bullying.
- You can reclaim your energy.
- You can reclaim your love for your work.
- You can reclaim your positive self-esteem.

**Together We Can Make Your Workplace More Peaceful and Safer**

*The Bullying Prevention Workplace Program*

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