

Are you being bullied?

Most people when they think of the word 'bullying' conjure up an image of playground thugs picking on the weak or vulnerable and those who are in some way different from them. However, sadly there is mounting evidence to suggest that bullying is not confined exclusively to a child's world, it also happens at work to adults. Although it can be physical in nature, in the workplace it is more likely to take the form of verbal or psychological abuse. Moreover, those who are targeted are unlikely to be the poorest performers or inadequate individuals. It is often the popular, enthusiastic and well-motivated workers who are good at their jobs that are singled out. Their tormentors come in many guises, but there are commonalities and patterns of behaviour that appear consistently over time. Below is a list of ten warning signs to spot if you are being bullied.

Ten Warning Signs (Scott Hayden, 2008)

1. Being screamed at especially in front of an audience.
2. Being asked to make eye contact by an aggressive supervisor when he or she is talking, but when you speak their eyes divert in another direction.
3. Requests for a leave of absence are ignored.
4. Other employees who once enjoyed socializing with you have ceased to make any kind of contact — verbal or otherwise.
5. Adverse physical symptoms start to arise when the bully confronts you; panic attacks and an increased heartbeat are among the most common.
6. During a meeting your comments and feedback are passively dismissed.
7. If you try to make a case against a bully to those who are at higher levels in a company, your complaints will generate little or no action at all.
8. Exhaustion follows you wherever you go even on weekends.
9. If problems arise at work the bully can be quite skillful at making it look like you are the cause.
10. You are unable to get anything done because your work is being repeatedly criticized.

Effects of Bullying

The effects of bullying are wide and varied. It can affect your physical and mental health; depression, sleep disorders, chronic fatigue and thoughts of suicide are some common results of bullying. In rare cases a bullied employee will lash out and start to behave violently. The effects of bullying can have an impact on your finances, you may feel you have to stay off work as you can not deal with the situation; you may only be entitled to statutory sick pay. Corporate costs include; prolonged absenteeism, low productivity, and lost revenue.

What you can do for yourself

1. Report what is happening to a member of HR.
2. Keep a diary of 'bullying behaviours' and record what you did/said
3. Speak about it to a trusted friend, colleague or family member
4. Don't think it will go away-it rarely does
5. Remember to stay in control
6. Do not retaliate and 'join in'
7. Seek counselling or other support
8. Do not become the victim
9. Ask to see the anti-bullying policy and grievance procedures
10. Follow the guidelines for reporting grievances
11. Seek representation from a union member or ACAS

Ten Top Tips for Managers

Managers are not immune to being on the receiving end of bullying and harassment type behaviours from their superiors and/or peers/staff. If you are a manager and you recognise any of the above signs of bullying then you need to follow the guidance above. It is also important that you are on the look out for signs of bullying and harassment behaviours, not only within your team but with all colleagues.

Below is a manager's guide on how to maintain good anti-bullying practice:

1. Managers need to look to their own behaviour. They must treat employees, customers and clients with dignity and respect
2. They must be aware of what is acceptable behaviour and what is not, and be alert to the signs. Since much of what goes on is not always immediately apparent as bullying, they must be particularly vigilant to some of the more covert warning signs
3. They must ensure that employees are familiar with the anti-bullying/harassment policy and know what to do
4. As new employees join the company, the policy should form an integral part of their induction training
5. Managers need to ensure that staff who make a complaint about bullying or harassment are fully supported before, during and after complaints are investigated
6. Complaints must be dealt with promptly, fairly and with total confidentiality. The rights of all parties should be respected at all times
7. Managers should be aware that it is the impact that the behaviour has on the victim or claimant which determines bullying or harassment, *not* the intent
8. Many problems in the past have been put down to 'personality clashes'. Managers should not fall into this trap and be dismissive of an allegation; they should investigate the situation thoroughly
9. Support for the complainant is vital. It is the managers responsibility to ensure that the complainant is not victimised or retaliated against for bringing a complaint forward
10. Managers need to make sure that the policy is fully implemented