



BULLYING

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WHAT IS BULLYING?

Bullying is repeated, unreasonable behaviour directed towards a worker or group of workers, that creates a risk to health and safety. A poor workplace culture that permits and even encourages negative behaviour can lead to workplace bullying. To promote respectful conduct and prevent bullying from becoming normalized, it is critical to identify and address bullying and other workplace conflicts early on.

The Fair Work Ombudsman also provides information on workplace bullying, including resolution process, responding to bullying claims, conciliation and applications for orders to cease bullying:

<https://www.fwc.gov.au/issues-we-help/bullying>

EXAMPLES OF BULLYING

Workplace bullying can take many forms and can be either direct or indirect. Some examples of workplace bullying include:

- Verbal abuse, such as shouting, swearing, or insulting, belittling or patronising language.
- Intimidation or threats of violence.
- Deliberately excluding someone from workplace activities or social events.
- Excessive monitoring or micromanaging of an employee's work.
- Spreading rumours or gossiping about an employee.
- Undermining an employee's work or reputation.
- Withholding important information or resources that are needed to perform the job. Sabotaging an employee's work or projects.
- Setting unrealistic or unachievable goals for an employee and then punishing them for failing to meet them.
- Cyberbullying or harassment through emails, texts, or social media.
- Lack of support and information provided during changes.



Indicators include situations where there is:

- A negative work atmosphere or a tense working environment.
- Employees being targeted or excluded from workplace activities.
- Management or supervisors not taking complaints seriously or ignoring reports of bullying.

The *model code of practice* identifies things that can increase the likelihood of workplace bullying:

The presence of other psychosocial hazards, including:

high job demands, low job control, low support, organisational change, such as restructuring or significant technological change, lack of role clarity, poor organisational justice

Leadership or management styles:

autocratic behaviour that is strict and directive and does not allow workers to be involved in decision making behaviour where little or no guidance is provided to workers or responsibilities are inappropriately and informally delegated to subordinates

abusive and demeaning behaviour that may include inappropriate or derogatory language, or malicious criticism and feedback, and tolerance of this behaviour

Systems of work or lack of resources or training

inappropriate work scheduling, shift work and poorly designed rostering

unreasonable performance measures or timeframes

poor workplace relationships

poor communication

isolation

low levels of support

work group hostility

IMPACTS OF BULLYING

The impacts of bullying on both workers and organisations is numerous. Some impacts to consider are:

ON WORKERS

Emotional and psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms, including flashbacks and hypervigilance.

Reduced job satisfaction and motivation.

Increased absenteeism or sick leave taken by an employee.

ON ORGANISATIONS

Decreased employee morale, motivation, and productivity.

Higher rates of absenteeism and staff turnover, leading to recruitment and training costs.

Increased costs associated with stress-related illnesses, mental health issues, and workers' compensation claims.



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Difficulty concentrating and reduced productivity.

Relationship problems, both at work and at home.

Sleep disturbances and insomnia.

Increased risk of suicidal ideation or suicide attempts.

Financial stress due to inability to work.

Physical health problems, such as headaches, back pain, and stomach issues.

Damage to the organisation's reputation and brand image. Decreased customer satisfaction due to reduced quality of service or products.

Decreased teamwork and collaboration among employees

Increased risk of legal action or claims for damages from employees who have been bullied.

Decreased profitability and financial performance due to increased costs and reduced productivity.

Difficulty attracting and retaining talented employees due to a negative workplace culture.

RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk Management involves identifying potential risks, assessing their likelihood and impact, and developing strategies to mitigate or control them. It is a proactive process that seeks to prevent risks from occurring or minimise their impact if they do occur.

No person should be injured in their workplace, including psychological injury. To meet their duties to ensure health and safety, employers must identify and eliminate or minimise psychosocial risks so far as is reasonably practicable. How long (duration), how often (frequency) and how significantly (severity) workers are exposed to psychosocial hazards impacts the level of risks. Hazards interacting or combining with each other may also impact this. Further guidance on the risk management process is available in the Code of Practice: [How to manage work health and safety risks](#). For more information on the risk management process for psychosocial hazards, please view [Section 2 of the Model Code of Practice](#).

Mind Your Head advocates for *prevention* – that is, identifying risk, implementing or changing systems to prevent worker harm or injury *before it occurs*.

Examples of Risk Management Strategies for Bullying include:

Prevention

- Conduct a workplace culture survey to identify potential risk factors for bullying.
- Review HR policies and practices to ensure they are robust and promote a respectful workplace.
- Conduct risk assessments for high-risk positions or departments.
- Provide training to managers and employees on identifying and addressing bullying behaviour.



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- Implement reporting mechanisms for employees to report incidents of bullying .

Intervene Early

- Address any complaints of bullying immediately and seriously, whilst allowing both parties involved equal opportunity to express their viewpoints.

Support Recovery

- Providing support to employees who have experienced bullying, including access Employee Assistance Programs and other resources to help them recover.
- Support timely and sustainable recovery at work (RAW) or return to work (RTW) through effective consultation, addressing any remaining work-related hazards and risks that may exacerbate the existing work-related psychological injury or cause a new injury.

WAYS TO MANAGE RISKS

Consult workers and HSRs. Establish Health and Safety Committees with at least 50% representation from workers. Encourage feedback, especially on any changes.

Consider how long, how often and how severely workers are exposed to hazards. The longer, more often and worse the low job control, the higher the risk that workers may be harmed.

Utilise surveys and tools to assess psychosocial risks in the workplace, particularly for businesses with over 20 employees who may find the People at Work assessment tool beneficial.

Establish a system for workers to report their concerns, while ensuring anonymity and treating their concerns with respect and seriousness to encourage reporting.

Observe work and behaviours, such as prolonged work duration, excessive paperwork, or customer frustration, which may indicate low job control.

Review available information, including employee retention, incident reports, complaints, time-off records, injuries, incidents, and workers' compensation to identify potential hazards.

Identify other hazards present and evaluate how they may interact or combine to create new, heightened risks. For instance, low job control could pose a greater risk in workplaces with high job demands if workers are unable to take breaks or switch tasks to manage fatigue. Finally, consider the duration, frequency, and severity of workers' exposure to hazards, as prolonged and severe exposure to low job control could increase the risk of harm.



CONTROL MEASURES

Control measures are specific actions or procedures that are put in place to manage or mitigate identified risks. They are reactive measures that are implemented after risks have been identified and assessed as part of the risk management process. Control measures are designed to reduce the likelihood or impact of risks, and they can take many forms, including administrative controls, engineering controls, and personal protective equipment.

Developing and implementing a clear anti-bullying policy, which sets out expectations for employee behaviour and outlines the consequences of bullying behaviour.

Providing training to managers and employees on what constitutes bullying behaviour, how to identify it, and how to respond appropriately.

Encouraging employees to report any incidents of bullying in a safe and confidential manner, and providing multiple avenues for reporting. Investigating all allegations of bullying promptly, thoroughly, and impartially, and taking appropriate action to address any substantiated claims.

Promoting a positive workplace culture that values respect, diversity, and inclusion, and provides support for employees who may be experiencing bullying.

Encouraging open communication and fostering a supportive work environment that values feedback and encourages collaboration.

Regularly monitoring the workplace for signs of bullying behaviour and taking steps to address any identified issues.

Encouraging bystanders to speak up when they witness bullying behaviour and provide support to the targeted employee.

Reviewing and updating anti-bullying policies and procedures regularly to ensure they remain effective and relevant.

Train managers and employees on how to appropriately address bullying behaviour.

Take disciplinary action against employees who engage in bullying behaviour.

DO

provide education on work-related bullying, violence and conflict resolution.
define what is acceptable behaviour within the workplace (e.g. code of conduct) and ensure all workers and managers understand this

DO NOT

allow unacceptable behaviour to continue
leave conflict unresolved
delay acting on any complaints received



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promote communication within and between teams provide information on support services available and how to access them

put processes in place which address action to be taken in the event behaviour is unacceptable (e.g. complaints handling and investigations, potential disciplinary actions)

treat each case individually and ensure that it is addressed in a fair and just manner