

## WHAT IS WORKPLACE BULLYING

**Workplace bullying is any kind of verbal, social, psychological or physical abuse by your manager/employer, a colleague or a group of colleagues. While it may happen primarily at or around the workplace, it can also occur beyond the confines of your worksite and follow you home or occur online.**

**The unfortunate truth is that workplace bullying happens to people everywhere - it can happen in a cafe or shop, an office or a construction site, and it affects everyone from volunteers and casuals through to permanent employees and managers.**

### **IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT PHYSICAL ABUSE OR SEXUAL ASSAULT**

Some types of workplace bullying are criminal offences and should be reported to Police.

Physical violence, assault, stalking or any kind of sexual assault or touching is against the law and should not be tolerated.

These behaviours may have occurred as a once-off or the workplace bullying may have escalated to this point from other types of non-criminal bullying tactics, but regardless, these types of bullying should be treated with the utmost seriousness - including by reporting to the Police.

### **What does workplace bullying look like?**

- repeated hurtful remarks, making fun of your work or you as a person (including about your family, gender, sexuality, race or culture, religion, education, or economic and social background.
- sexual harassment, especially any kind of unwanted touching or sexually explicit comments and innuendo as well as any requests that make you feel uncomfortable.
- excluding you or stopping you from working with people or taking part in activities that relate to your work or cutting you out of workplace social activities that everyone else is a part of.
- playing mind games, ganging up on you, spreading gossip or rumours about you, or other forms of psychological harassment.
- intimidation or stalking
- assigning pointless tasks to you that have nothing to do with your work
- assigning impossible tasks that can't reasonably be achieved with the time or resources provided.
- deliberately changing your work hours to make it difficult for you.
- holding back crucial information to make it harder for you to do your job.
- pushing, shoving, grabbing or touching you in the workplace.
- interfering with, damaging or defacing your belongings, property or your designated work area.
- attacking or threatening you with equipment, knives, guns, clubs or any other type of object that could be turned into a weapon or cause you to be fearful.
- initiation or hazing rituals, where you are made to do inappropriate or humiliating things in order to be accepted into the team.
- any other pattern of deliberate behaviour which undermines your reputation, your confidence, your relationships with colleagues or your capacity to do your work productively or effectively.



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### ***How bullying affects your work***

If you are being bullied at work, your mental health and wellbeing will likely be affected. You may find that you are:

- less active or productive at work.
- less confident in your work or within the workplace.
- stressed, anxious or depressed about going to work each morning.
- taking the stress of workplace bullying home with you, and it's affecting your family or social life.
- unable to trust your employer or your colleagues
- experiencing physical signs of stress, like headaches, back pain, high blood pressure or difficulty sleeping.

### ***The role of your Employer***

While sometimes it is your manager or employer who is bullying you, sometimes things which may seem unfair are in fact normal, reasonable actions by an employer.

Your employer is allowed to transfer, demote, discipline, counsel, retrench or sack you so long as their actions are justified and reasonable, and offer you due-process or procedural fairness.

They have a responsibility under Occupational Health and Safety and Anti-Discrimination Laws to provide you with a safe workplace.

An employer that perpetrates bullying or turns a blind eye when they know or find out it is occurring is failing to meet their lawful obligations to you, their employee.

### ***What to do if you are being bullied at work***

- Make sure you are informed about your rights and the responsibilities of your employer in this situation.
- Check to see if your workplace has a written policy for dealing with workplace bullying and handling complaints. This might be on the workplace intranet or you might need to contact HR to ask for a copy.
- Keep a diary of what has been happening. Document everything, including what you've done to try to stop it or when you've raised it with a manager or other colleagues. This can help if you make a formal complaint.
- Get support from someone you trust or contact an external support service. Even if you feel there is nobody you can turn to who will understand what is going on, you will find it beneficial to speak to an impartial or independent third-party about your experiences. This might involve speaking to your union or an EAP like HunterLink.
- Approach the bully or seek mediation with them, but only if you feel safe in doing so. Tell them their behaviour is unwanted or harmful and consider explaining to them the impact it is having on you.
- If you remain unsure about how to move ahead, seek advice from a manager, HR officer or even a senior colleague in another team you trust to be impartial.

