



BULLYING

What is bullying?

There are many definitions of bullying. Bullying can be described as offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse of power that undermines, humiliates or injures the recipient.

Examples are:

- Spreading malicious rumours or insulting someone
- Copying emails about someone to others who do not need to know
- Picking on someone or setting them up to fail
- Physical intimidation
- Overbearing supervision or overloading someone with work
- Making threats about job security
- Using abusive and humiliating language
- Exclusion or victimisation or any unfair treatment.

Why is it the employer's business?

Bullying is not only unacceptable on moral grounds, but if left unchecked, it can also result in the employer breaching their obligations under the Health & Safety Act and the Employment Relations Act.

And the impact on productivity?

Bullying is bad for business.

It impacts on productivity in the following ways:

- Poor performance
- Increased absence
- Low morale
- Loss of company reputation
- Resignations and difficulty in recruiting
- Poor customer service and/or product quality.

How can bullying be recognised?

Bullying can be hard to recognise. It can sometimes be confused with "firm management".

Bullying can occur at all levels. It is not just limited to cases where managers deliberately pick on their staff. It can exist between colleagues and staff can also engage collectively in bullying their manager.

Bullying may not be obvious to others and the recipient may think that "it is normal behaviour in this organisation". They may be anxious that others consider them weak or simply "not up to the job" if they raise a complaint. Other work colleagues may be scared to support them for fear of retribution.

What should employers do?

Bullying is most effectively dealt with when employers make it clear that it is simply not acceptable.

This involves leading by example and setting up formal policies and procedures for dealing with bullying. These need to be clearly understood by both workers and management and included in staff training programmes at all levels.

Employers should also establish a neutral representative who staff can consult on a confidential basis.

What should employees do?

If you think you're being bullied, keep a diary of the incidents of bullying behaviour and if it seems there is a pattern, bring the problem to your employer's attention. Follow up any discussion with a formal letter outlining what has been discussed and any proposed actions. This will provide you with valuable support if the problem persists.

In many cases of workplace bullying, the victim becomes isolated and is not supported by their co-workers or colleagues. Employees need to look out for each other. Just because bullying doesn't affect you directly, doesn't mean that it's OK. Be ready to help your colleagues and encourage them to raise the issues with their employer. A little friendly support is often all that is needed to turn a situation around.

What do I do if I don't trust my employer?

If you are not comfortable approaching your employer, seek advice from either your Union or the health and safety officer where you work.

What happens if discussions fail?

If an employee or employer feels that discussions have failed, they can seek advice on what to do next, including information about what services are available as an appropriate next step, by contacting the Department of Labour on 0800 20 90 20. This is a free service and is available to both employers and employees.

Visit: http://ers.govt.nz/problem/first_steps.html for further information.

