

Bullying at Work

What is workplace bullying?

Bullying is repeated behaviour that intimidates, offends, degrades or humiliates a particular person or group of people in a workplace.

Examples of workplace bullying include

- excluding a person from conversations or activities
- withholding information needed for a person's work
- undervaluing a person's effort
- spreading rumours or gossip
- taking credit for other people's ideas
- constant criticism
- preventing applications for training, leave or promotions
- yelling or swearing
- physical abuse or threats of physical abuse

If you have experienced bullying, you should know that you are not alone. Twenty one per cent of employees report being bullied at work. You should also know that you did not cause the bullying to happen. One reason bullying occurs so often in the workplace is that there is no law in Manitoba that

How can bullying affect you?

If you are bullied at work, you may experience the following reactions:

- ◆ shock
- ◆ anger
- ◆ feelings of frustration and/or helplessness
- ◆ increased sense of vulnerability
- ◆ loss of confidence
- ◆ difficulty concentrating
- ◆ difficulty sleeping
- ◆ loss of appetite
- ◆ headaches
- ◆ stress
- ◆ anxiety
- ◆ physical and emotional illnesses

specifically deals with bullying. Yet bullying is more common than either sexual harassment or racial discrimination.

How does bullying affect the workplace?

Bullying in the workplace leads to low morale, fear, anger and depression. This results in many negative effects including:

- increased absenteeism
- increased turnover
- increased stress
- increased benefit costs
- decreased productivity and motivation

What can you do if you witness bullying at work?

If you witness bullying at work you may not want to get involved. You may feel loyal to the bully or you may fear becoming the next target. But you have a responsibility to try to stop the bullying. Some of the responses you may try, if you feel safe, include:

- refuse to participate in the bullying
- do not repeat the rumour
- do not laugh at the put-downs or offensive jokes
- support the person being bullied, publicly or privately
- invite an isolated coworker to lunch or coffee break
- direct the person being bullied to help
- report the bullying to the appropriate person at your workplace

What can you do if you are being bullied at work?

If you are being bullied you can try to stop it by:

- Firmly tell the person that his/her behaviour is not acceptable and ask them to stop.
- Keep a factual journal or diary of daily event. Record
 - ✍ date, time and what happened in as much detail as possible
 - ✍ names of witnesses
 - ✍ outcome of the event
- Keep copies of any letters, memos, emails, or faxes sent by the bully.
- Report the harassment to the appropriate person in your workplace, your supervisor or manager. If your concerns are not taken seriously, take them to the next level of management and inform your union, if you have one.
- Get medical attention if you need it.
- Find support. Get professional counselling to assist you cope with the bullying and determine your best course of action. Use your Employee Assistance Program if you have one, or ask your family doctor for a referral to a professional counsellor.

What can your employer do?

Your employer is responsible to provide a healthy work environment. Every worker needs to be treated with dignity and respect.

Bullying should not be dealt with as a conflict, it is not a conflict. Bullying is more closely related to workplace violence and harassment where the bully has a basic disregard for the other person as a human being.

Employers can prevent workplace bullying by implementing the following practices:

- ensure the workplace has a Violence Prevention Policy developed by the workplace

health and safety committee. Make sure the policy covers bullying behaviour and has a system for reporting complaints

- raise awareness about what is considered workplace bullying
- ensure supervisors and management are trained in how to identify bullying and how to investigate and resolve complaints
- deal with all complaints promptly and confidentially
- establish clear consequences for inappropriate behaviour and hold all employees accountable
- have an impartial third party help with the resolution of complaints if necessary
- provide an Employee Assistance Program to offer confidential support and counselling to employees who are dealing with bullying
- develop a Respectful Workplace Policy that provides clear expectations for workplace behaviour

This fact sheet is adapted in large part from the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety's Answer sheet on "**Bullying in the Workplace**".

For more information on bullying visit the following websites:

No Bully for Me
www.nobullyforme.org

Bully Free At Work
www.bullyfreeatwork.com

Bully Online
www.bullyonline.org

The Workplace Bullying Institute
www.bullyinginstitute.org

If you need more information contact the

Occupational Health Centre, Inc.
102-275 Broadway
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 4M6
Phone: (204) 949-0811
Fax: (204) 956-0848
Toll Free: 1-888-843-1229 (Manitoba only)
Email: mflohc@mflohc.mb.ca
Website: www.mflohc.mb.ca

September 2009

Healthy Workplaces Healthy Workers Healthy Communities