

Information Sheet

Bullying in the Workplace

Most people think that they've left bullies behind when they leave school, but bullying is not restricted to the playground, it happens to people of all ages in all walks of life, in their personal life, and at work.

Having a difficult relationship with a colleague can be stressful, and make your work harder to manage, but it is important to remember that you are not alone.

According to a poll carried out by YouGov in 2015, 34% of women and 23% of men said they had been bullied at work. 36% of those who reported being bullied said they left their job because of it.

For some instances, learning better methods of managing your professional relationships or gaining the support of your manager may resolve the problem. In other cases, you may require the assistance of your union or the back up of workplace regulations to help.

Managing difficult relationships

Everyone, whether bullied or not, can face difficult relationships in their workplace. Knowing how to better manage these relationships can have a major effect on your overall working environment. Here are some first steps for managing difficult relationships:

- **Find similarities.** By finding something that you both like (hobbies, sports teams, favourite TV show), you can improve your rapport through this shared interest and generate a positive working relationship.

- **Don't gossip.** Whilst office gossip chat can feel like great bonding moments, it can quickly produce more problems than benefits by putting unnecessary strain on relationships. Best to give it a wide berth if at all possible.
- **Remain calm.** You won't always agree with your colleagues, but don't let yourself be drawn into an argument or confrontation. Find a diplomatic way to avoid unhelpful disagreements whilst still allowing all parties to input and work together.
- **Professional distance.** Everyone you work with will not turn out to be a life-long friend. It's important to remember that work is work and to retain a professional distance from those work colleagues who you find harder to relate to and work with.
- **Don't remain silent.** If a colleague says or does something that you find upsetting or offensive, make sure you find an appropriate time to speak with them in private about it.

Calmly explain the situation and your feelings – they may be totally unaware that their behaviour could be upsetting to others and if handled sensitively, this conversation should help you both. However, if their behaviour continues unchanged after your conversation, or you don't feel able to talk directly to your colleague, discuss your concerns with your manager.

What if my manager is the problem?

Having a good relationship with your manager can help you feel supported and involved in your role. However, a difficult relationship might make your working life feel harder. You could:

- > consider first if what your manager is requesting is unreasonable – *Is it in line with your job role? Are they being unclear about what they expect?*
- > make sure to communicate your issues and feelings to your manager. They may not be aware of how their requests/behaviour have been affecting you and this gives you both an opportunity to grow and improve. If you don't feel comfortable meeting with your manager alone, request to bring a colleague with you, or record your meetings by taking notes.
- > speak to another manager or someone from HR if you don't feel comfortable discussing the problem with your own manager. *Try to provide examples of difficult behaviour and discuss what you would like to change.*

Processes and procedures

Your employer is required to have policies in place to manage and support staff. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) gives the following advice to employers:

DO

- > encourage good, honest, open communication at all levels;
- > provide opportunities for social interactions;
- > provide support for staff who work in isolation;
- > create a culture where colleagues trust and encourage each other; and
- > agree which behaviours are unacceptable and ensure staff are aware of these.

DON'T

- > allow any bullying behaviour or harassment.

In the first instance employers should try to resolve any difficulties between staff informally and at the lowest possible level, however, employers are required to have a grievance procedure for when relationships are so strained you feel you have no other option other than to make a formal complaint.

If you feel you need to make a formal complaint about a colleague, then please get in touch on 01332 372 337 for further advice and guidance.

It's more than difficult relationships, it's bullying

Any unwanted behaviour that makes someone feel intimidated, degraded, humiliated or offended can be classified as bullying or harassment.

This behaviour can be:

- > between two individuals or it may involve groups of people;
- > obvious or it might be insidious;
- > persistent or an isolated incident; or
- > face-to-face, in written communications, by phone or through email.

Bullying and harassment of any kind should not be tolerated in the workplace

If you feel you are being bullied at work, it can be difficult to know what to do. You may fear that the bullying is subtle, and others won't perceive it as bullying and accuse you of overreacting. You might fear being perceived as incapable of managing it yourself or you may just feel so drained that you can't see how to resolve the situation. Bullying can have a significant impact on your mental health, but it is vital to remember that **you don't have to put up with it.**

The law provides some protection from bullying through the Health & Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999 which require employers to ensure, so far as is reasonably practical, the health, safety and welfare at work of employees.

Central to this is the risk assessment, which should identify potential risks in the workplace and preventative and protective measure which the employer can take to reduce or eliminate those risks.

More than this, your employer wants to support you and tackle bullying in the workplace – it's in their best interest to do so. When left unchecked or badly handled, bullying and harassment can create serious problems for any organisation:

- > unhappy, underperforming employees;
- > bad relations between staff and managers;
- > stress related absence;
- > resignations; and
- > tribunal and other court cases and payment of unlimited compensation.

It is therefore in every employer's interests to promote a safe, healthy and fair environment in which people can work.

If you experience bullying at work:

- Find out if your employer has a policy on bullying and what their grievance procedure is. (The policy should outline whether a behaviour is acceptable and how to address the problem).
- Discuss the problem with someone you feel comfortable with such as your manager, HR department, or colleague with suitable authority to manage your complaint.
- Keep a diary of all incidents, recording dates, times, witnesses etc. to help support your case.
- Keep any relevant letters, emails, notes etc. that might be required to prove your claim.
- With the support of a manager or senior colleague, if you feel able to, arrange to speak with the person who is bullying you with a view to resolve the issue informally where possible.
- If you still do not feel the situation is improving, your final recourse is to raise a formal complaint. You may be able to do this through formal grievance procedures in your workplace, or you can contact Voice to discuss your options.

What the law says

Harassment

Harassment is

“unwanted conduct related to a relevant protected characteristic, which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual”.

The Equality Act 2010 uses a single definition of harassment to cover the relevant protected characteristics. These are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex, and sexual orientation.

It is important to note that a person can claim harassment even if they do not have one of the above protected characteristics. Employees can complain of behaviour that they find offensive whether that behaviour is directed at them, or another. If you are associated with a person who has a protected characteristic, or are wrongly perceived to have one, or are treated as if you do, there may still be a harassment complaint.

Employees should not only expect their employers support and protection against harassment from their colleagues, but from anyone they encounter as part of conducting their job such as suppliers, parents or contractors. Once an employer has been made aware of any unwanted behaviour, they have a responsibility to take reasonable and proportionate action to address it.

Bullying

Bullying and harassment are often used interchangeably in the workplace and the impact of bullying on the individual can be the same as harassment, but legally, they are two separate things.

ACAS characterise bullying as **offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through means that undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient.**

However, unless bullying equates to conduct defined as harassment in the Equality Act 2010, it is not possible to make a complaint to an Employment Tribunal about it. Bullying is instead an issue that must be dealt with by the employer.

If you need support with workplace bullying, don't wait, contact Voice today and get the support you deserve.

Whistleblowing

You're a whistleblower if you're a worker and you report certain types of wrongdoing that are in the public interest. This means it must affect others, for example the general public.

As a whistleblower you're protected by law - you should not be treated unfairly or lose your job because you 'blow the whistle'. You can raise your concern at any time about an incident that happened in the past, is happening now, or you believe will happen in the near future.

You're protected by law if you report any of the following:

- > a criminal offence, for example fraud;
- > someone's health and safety is in danger;
- > risk or actual damage to the environment;
- > a miscarriage of justice;
- > the company is breaking the law, for example does not have the right insurance; or
- > you believe someone is covering up wrongdoing.

Complaints that do not count as whistleblowing:

- > Personal grievances (for example bullying, harassment, discrimination) are not covered by whistleblowing law, unless your particular case is in the public interest.

If you believe that you have an issue to whistleblow, then please get in touch with Voice on 01332 372 337 for further advice and guidance.

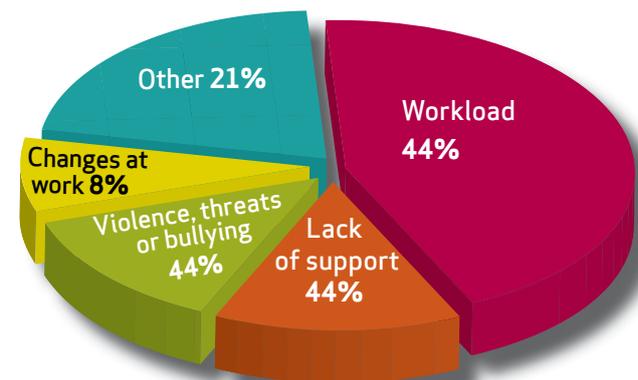
Stress and sickness absence

It is not uncommon for stressful situations caused by bullying and harassment at work to cause ill health.

In the year 2017-2018 over half a million people were diagnosed as suffering with work-related stress, depression or anxiety.

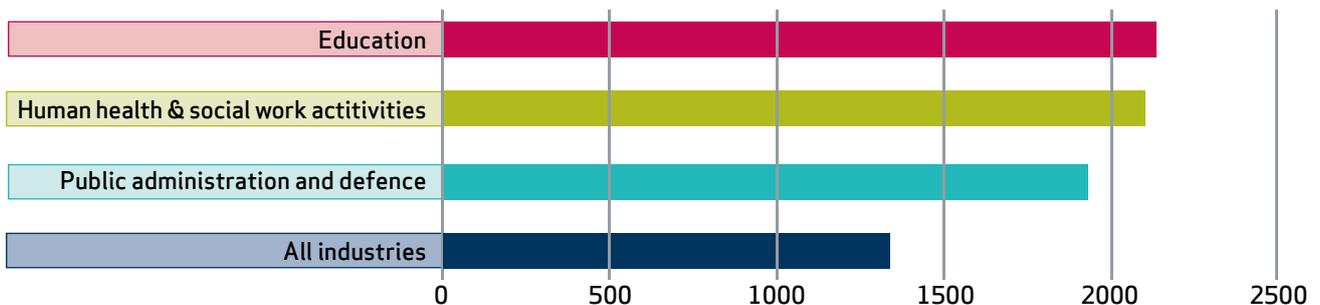
595,000	workers suffering from work-related stress, depression and anxiety (Labour Force Survey).
15.4 million	lost workdays due to work-related stress, depression and anxiety (Labour Force Survey).

Stress, depression or anxiety by cause:



(2009/10-2011/12 Labour Force Survey)

Recent research shows that the education sector is one of the worst sectors for rates of stress, depression and anxiety.



(Labour Force Survey)

Of course, there is an inherent amount of pressure within education employment, but when this spills over, or combines with bullying and harassment, then people need time off to recover.

Following any sickness absence, you are likely to be asked to meet to discuss the reasons for your absence and to consider what is necessary for you to make a return. Please seek advice from Voice if you are contacted so that we can support you in this process.

If you are suffering with stress, anxiety or depression you must seek medical advice from your GP, who may sign you as unfit for work.

Further reading

For further advice please see our information sheets on:

- > **sickness leave and absence management**
- > **stress: recognise and tackle workplace stress**