

Implementation and communication

For a policy to be effective and to raise awareness levels, employees should contribute to it in both the development and implementation stages.

The policy must be clearly communicated and kept in the forefront of employees' minds. Effective channels of communications include:

- staff handbook/induction programme
- staff briefings
- posters/leaflets
- information and training seminars
- intranet/email bulletins
- employee surveys

Measures to raise awareness and develop a more open culture may initially result in an apparent increase in bullying as victims feel more able to report it.

Training is an essential component of tackling bullying and may include:

- awareness training for all employees - enabling them to identify the signs of bullying and talk about the issues. It can also help individuals to identify elements within their own behaviour which may be perceived by others to constitute bullying
- assertiveness training, which may reduce the likelihood of employees becoming victims
- behavioural training can be beneficial in helping the perpetrator to recognise the offensive elements of their behaviour and to change that pattern
- counselling/mediation training can be offered to provide an internal resource
- general management skills – many manage others without any formal people management training and there are many development opportunities which can help managers understand their impact on others

Handling complaints

If an employee makes a complaint, there must be clarity as to how to proceed, who to turn to, what to expect and when – both for the complainant and for the individual accused of bullying.

Complaints should always be treated seriously, but this does not necessarily mean going straight to the formal procedure. Informal methods of dealing with grievances are often an important first step and should be encouraged whenever appropriate. To cool emotions, it is important to encourage managers and staff to apologise immediately if comments or behaviour – perhaps unintentional or made when under stress – are interpreted as bullying. In cases such as this, the early instigation of the formal grievance procedure may make matters worse.

Mediation is a useful approach when the investigation shows no cause for formal disciplinary action or in cases where there is some doubt about the validity of the complaint. It can have a calming effect on any situation. Mediation sessions can be handled by independent services or by someone within the organisation - larger organisations may find it beneficial to train one member of staff in mediation.

There are statutory minimum requirements for both grievance and disciplinary procedures, and employers are advised to ensure that their own procedures comply with this statutory minimum.

A formal grievance procedure may be necessary where an incidence of perceived bullying is sufficiently serious or a situation has escalated to the point where it cannot be resolved informally. The procedure should be operated as fairly and objectively as possible. For further information see the Acas handbook *Discipline and grievances at work* at www.acas.org.uk/publications/h02.html

Useful Organisations and Support Networks

- Acas www.acas.org.uk
- The Andrea Adams Trust www.andreaadamstrust.org
- Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development www.cipd.co.uk
- Commission for Racial Equality www.cre.gov.uk
- Disability Rights Commission www.drc.org.uk
- Equal Opportunities Commission www.eoc.org.uk
- The Health and Safety Executive www.hse.gov.uk
- Royds Solicitors www.royds.com
- TUC www.tuc.org.uk
- UNISON www.unison.org.uk

*Further information, including the results of the research findings, can be found on the Institute's website www.managers.org.uk/bullying

This document is intended for guidance only. It cannot claim to be comprehensive and appropriate to each individual manager or circumstance. Expert opinion should always be obtained in cases of doubt.

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Bullying in the Workplace – Guidance for Managers

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Introduction

According to the latest research carried out by the Chartered Management Institute, bullying is increasing in the workplace.*

All managers have a duty of care to their employees. Bullying can not only damage the health, self-esteem and morale of the individual concerned, but can also have an extremely detrimental effect on the wider workforce and ultimately on the organisation's performance. Organisations must keep the issue on their agenda and be confident that they have the knowledge and policies in place to deal with individual cases.

The object should be to create a culture where bullying is simply not tolerated.

Although there is no legislation focusing solely on bullying, there are instances where employers have been taken to tribunal under the wide-ranging harassment or discrimination legislation. Breach of trust and confidence may also be claimed where complaints about bullying have not been acted upon by the employer. It is therefore essential for employers to be aware of the potential legal implications.

In the absence of any legal definition, bullying can be described in the following way:

Offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, or abuse or misuse of power, which violates the dignity of, or creates a hostile environment which undermines, humiliates, denigrates or injures, the recipient.

Employees are increasingly conscious of their workplace rights. It is therefore vital for managers to be prepared for possible bullying claims, and to be fully aware of their need to protect employee well-being. An organisation must have effective policies in place to deal with incidents of bullying and managers must know how to handle a situation as soon as it arises.

This leaflet offers practical advice to help managers:

- identify the signs of bullying
- put preventative measures in place
- deal with any cases which do occur
- implement policies.

Business impact

The cost of bullying for a business is not solely a human cost; it can also have serious financial implications. The problems may include:

- low employee morale
- reduced productivity
- increased staff turnover
- increased stress-related illness and absenteeism
- damage to the organisation's reputation
- management time and legal costs through compensation claims and tribunals.

Identifying bullying

Bullying can take many forms and is often subjective, but if someone feels they are being bullied, it needs to be dealt with. Bullying may manifest itself in the following ways:

- misuse of power/overbearing supervision
- undermining by overloading and constant criticism
- spreading malicious rumours or insults
- ridiculing, demeaning, excluding or victimising
- blocking promotion or training opportunities
- threats about job security
- unwelcome sexual advances
- intimidation or violence

Each organisation should think carefully about relevant examples to fit the nature of their work and their circumstances.

An employer can identify the tell-tale signs through:

- routine risk assessments
- employee satisfaction surveys
- talking with staff
- awareness training and briefings
- appraisals

Bullying is not always carried out by managers against staff. It can go both up and down the reporting line, as well as occurring between colleagues, or even by employees towards customers and clients or vice-versa.

Factors contributing to bullying

Lack of respect and poor management skills are often a central theme in environments where bullying is more predominant. Bullying may become an issue due to:

- authoritarian style of management
- prejudice and discrimination
- failure to address previous incidences of bullying
- personality of colleagues / managers
- unrealistic targets or deadlines
- inappropriate performance management systems

Organisations should tackle this by building a culture of mutual respect and support.

Developing a policy

To communicate a clear message that bullying is not acceptable, it is important to implement a policy. This need not be elaborate and can be included in other personnel policies.

Areas to address in a policy are:

- a statement of commitment from senior management
- examples of unacceptable behaviour
- a statement that bullying is a disciplinary offence
- details of who to approach if victims of bullying feel unable to speak to their manager or supervisor, for example, a trained contact officer
- responsibilities of managers and contact officers
- involvement of trade union and health and safety representatives
- confidentiality for any complainant and protection from victimisation
- an outline of the grievance procedures (formal and informal), including investigation procedures and timescales
- counselling and support availability
- availability of training for managers, health and safety representatives and staff
- a statement on how the policy is implemented, reviewed and monitored

The culture of the organisation, the type of business and the personality and management style of those in positions of authority are all factors which must be taken into consideration when developing a policy.

Setting a good example is as important as having a good policy. Instances of bullying are much less likely where there is a culture of respect and tolerance.