

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Bullying in the workplace

When you close your eyes and imagine a bully, chances are you'd picture an elementary school child in a playground faster than an image of an adult in the workplace. But the unfortunate reality is, bullying is also alive and well in the corporate world.

Workplace bullying is on the rise. While statistics vary, some studies reveal that nearly half of all working Americans have experienced repeated acts of bullying on the job. It's a real and prominent issue that can have crushing emotional and psychological consequences.

What is workplace bullying?
The Workplace Bullying Institute defines bullying as "repeated, health-harming mistreatment" that takes the form of verbal abuse or offensive conduct or behavior that is threatening, humiliating or intimidating. In the corporate world, bullying is usually psychological in nature rather than physical, and is often about personal control, power or striving for career progression.

How to recognize workplace bullying

It is often said that people don't leave jobs, they leave management – an overbearing boss is the number one reason cited for quitting a job. It is sometimes difficult, however, to determine if your supervisor's behavior is due to a strong management style, a difficult personality or a straight-up bully.

One good way to help determine if an action or statement could be classified as bullying is to use the reasonable person test. Ask yourself, would most people consider the action or statement unacceptable? If the answer is yes to that question, you might have a bully in the workplace. Further, consider how often the occurrences below happen in your workplace.

Trademarks of workplace bullying

- Overloading a person with work yet removing their authority to make decisions;
- Yelling and shouting at a person, rather than giving constructive feedback;
- Unfairly criticizing a person — often in front of others;
- Punishing a person without cause;
- Underutilizing a person to the point that they feel useless;
- Setting unattainable deadlines that could cause the person to fail;
- Withholding necessary information;
- Making offense jokes, remarks or spreading rumors;
- Invading a person's privacy;
- Declining requests for training and blocking deserved promotions;
- Physically abusing a person or threatening abuse.

Effects of workplace bullying

There are a range of effects experienced by people who are bullied, including:

- Feelings of anger, frustration or vulnerability;
- Loss of confidence;
- Inability to sleep and loss of appetite;
- Stomach pains and headaches;

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- Feelings of panic or anxiety, especially about going to work;
- Increased tension and stress, at work and at home;
- Decreased morale and productivity.

Workplace bullying trademarks and the effects can be seen in these real life experiences below:

“There were days that I would go home with stomach pains that felt like a huge knot in my stomach that wouldn’t go away."

"I couldn’t shake that stressful, anxious feeling created by my intimidating boss,” explained Kristen, a manager working in the public sector. "I'm a high performer, and this seemed to intimidate my former boss. He bullied me to meet unattainable deadlines, micro-managed me, removed my ability to make decisions and was overly critical of everything I did. It undermined my confidence, increased my anxiety, and made me dread going to work every day. If she hadn't have left, I would have," said Tim, a communications consultant working in healthcare.

What to do if you're being bullied at work

Many organizations have put a code of conduct or anti-bullying policy in place. If yours has one, ask for a copy and adhere to it.

If not, speak with your Human Resources department or reach out to your Employee Assistance Program for support or advice. Additionally, you may wish to:

- Professionally confront the bully to let them know that their behavior is unacceptable;
- Alert superiors to the behavior if it continues after speaking to the bully;
- Continue to do your job well and connect with coworkers;
- Record the incidences of bullying for future reference, if required;
- Avoid spending time alone with the bully.

Facts about workplace bullying

- Bullied employees spend about 30% of their time defending themselves and seeking support from colleagues;
- 35% of workers experienced bullying first hand, and 62% of the bullies were men, according to the the Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI)