

Keep Workplace Bullies at Bay

Kids aren't the only ones who experience bullies. People who aim to intimidate, harm, or prey on others whom they perceive as vulnerable are all around us, even at work. Whether you've seen it happen to a coworker, or you've been the target of such behavior yourself, workplace bullying takes a toll on the victim, witnesses, and the organization. It affects job performance and morale, creates physical and mental health risks, and can cost employers money, time, resources, and valued personnel. Keep reading to learn how to identify bullying behavior in the workplace, what you can do, and where to turn for help.

Bullying behavior

Take a moment to think about the kinds of conduct that you might consider to be bullying. While some behaviors are blatantly bullying, others aren't as obvious, especially in the moment as it's happening to you and even more so if it's coming from your boss. Additionally, some of these scenarios rise to the level of harassment. Here are some common examples of workplace bullying:

- Hostile yelling or shouting (in public or private)
- Deliberately excluding or isolating an individual from meetings or social gatherings
- Spreading rumors and gossiping about specific people or groups
- Ignoring, interrupting, or otherwise denying a person the chance to speak
- Using demeaning language about a specific person or group of people
- Consistently calling out, picking on, or otherwise humiliating a specific person or group
- Persistent criticism on irrelevant issues
- Taking credit for others' ideas or work
- Denying leave requests without cause
- Standing too close or peering over someone's shoulder
- Unwanted physical contact
- Displaying obscene or intimidating gestures
- Asking inappropriate questions about someone's personal life

Did any of the examples surprise you? Do any of them make you realize that bullying may occur in your office more than you thought, or that you are, or have been, a target?

Handling the hostility

Being the target of bullying behavior at work is stressful, draining, and can even be scary. If you are being bullied at work, here are some simple things you can do to start managing the situation.

Ask the person to stop. While confronting a bully isn't the easiest thing to do, it may very well do you the most good. Sometimes people continue certain behaviors because no one has ever asked them to stop. Schedule a private meeting to discuss the matter clearly and directly. Setting this boundary early on shows the person what you will and won't tolerate from them and, if the behavior continues, they can't say they didn't know it bothered you. If you don't feel safe in a closed-door meeting, make your wishes known in a more public setting, or take other measures.

Keep a record and document everything. Write down dates, times, and the details surrounding each incident or interaction. Be sure to also make a note of any witnesses that may have been present. This may seem tedious or excessive, but no detail is too small when it comes to providing evidence that shows a pattern of behavior.

Tell your supervisor. It's a good idea to let your supervisor know what's going on from the outset. That way, even if you're keeping your own good records, they can be another witness who can vouch for the timing and escalate things to the next level if a bully persists. They may also be able to intervene with the bully directly.

Bring it to your human resources team. If you can't tell your supervisor because, for example, *they* are the bully, get HR or other agency resources involved. They can advise you on the appropriate action to take in accordance with your agency's policies and guide you through next steps.

Call the EAP. Dealing with a workplace bully or navigating a hostile work environment can be tough, but you don't have to deal with it alone. Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to offer support and resources for stress management, coping skills, and more. Call any time, day or night, to speak with a counselor.

The EAP is a voluntary and confidential employee benefit available to federal employees at no cost.

24 HOURS A DAY

800-222-0364

TTY: 888-262-7848

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