

Bullying Prevention Resource Guide

FOR SCHOOLS, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Tips and Topics For Bullying Prevention Success

ADULT BULLIES IN THE WORKPLACE

As we teach youth to address bullying and to stand-up to bullying behaviors, we as adults find that many childhood bullies have grown up to become bullies in the workplace. This is a particular challenge when the workplace bully is your boss and when students at your school or program witness this dynamic between adults. Ultimately, individuals and organizations working in this climate cannot be productive, and adults in this situation are unable to teach youth to intervene in bullying situations effectively when this dynamic is occurring.

Facts according to adult bullying research:

- In the U.S., 1 in 5 American workers has experienced destructive bullying in the past year.
- Over 80% of bullies are bosses, some are co-workers and a minority bully higher-ups.
- Woman-to-woman bullying is more common than man-to-woman bullying. Man-to-man bullying and woman-to-man bullying occur less frequently.
- Bullied employees waste between 10% and 52% of their work day. Their time is spent defending themselves, networking for support, and thinking about the situation. They have less motivation, increased stressed levels, and often take more sick leave due to stress-related illnesses.
- Employers pay for lost efficiency, absenteeism, high staff turnover, severance packages and lawsuits. In extreme cases, a violent incident may be the tragic outcome.
- In the United States, workplace bullying is not yet recognized by the legal system, even though workplace bullying is more common than sexual harassment. A few states have initiated bills.
- Both Canada and the United Kingdom have specific workplace bullying laws.
- Victims suffer stress effects such as severe anxiety (76%), disrupted sleep (71%), and post-traumatic stress disorder (39%).
- In 70% of cases, the bullying only stopped when the victim quit or was fired. In an additional 17% of the cases, the victim was transferred. The bully will likely find a new target once the original target is gone.
- The bully suffered consequences in only 13% of cases.
- In at least a quarter of bullying cases, discrimination played a role.
- When targeted, an individual has a 7 in 10 chance of losing their job involuntarily or for health related reasons.

THE BULLY — views competent colleagues as a threat to their professional position, social standing, and/or authority, even though the typical adult bully holds a higher status than the target.

THE TARGET — many adult bullies target colleagues who are stronger, more popular, more efficient, and more professional.

THE BYSTANDERS — often avoid involvement because, much like kids, they are afraid of becoming the next target.

WHAT DO ADULT BULLYING BEHAVIORS LOOK LIKE?

Obvious Bullying Behaviors

- Repeatedly shouting or swearing in public
- Public humiliation
- Persistent criticism
- Constantly undervaluing effort
- Personal insults and name calling
- Persecution through threat or fear
- Dispensing unfair punishment out of the blue
- Increasing responsibility while decreasing authority
- Overruling, ignoring, marginalizing, or excluding

Less Obvious Bullying Behaviors

- Setting individuals up to fail
- Setting tasks far outside of individuals job description
- Setting unrealistic deadlines for an increased workload
- Removing areas of responsibility and imposing menial tasks
- Deliberately sabotaging or impeding work performance
- Constantly changing guidelines
- Withholding work related information

IMMEDIATE STRATEGIES FOR TARGETS

- Name it — bullying, psychological harassment, psychological violence, emotional abuse -- There is tremendous healing power in naming the behavior.
- Use assertive but non-threatening body language by standing at an angle to the bully and not squarely in front of him or her. This is non-verbal avoidance of a possible confrontation.
- Do not let the bully see you upset.
- Tell the bully directly to stop. Do not meet alone with the bully. Bring a colleague to meetings or meet only where there are others around. Avoid “meetings” at the water cooler or copier.
- Use positive self-talk to get through situations. Positive images help you refocus and stay on track.
- Stick to the subject of the original discussion with the bully. For example, if the bully begins to rant and rave, direct the conversation back to the specific issue.
- Use humor to diffuse a confrontation.
- Speak up only if you feel safe to do so, but recognize that incidents could escalate. Bullies don't like to have their authority questioned or their control challenged.
- Eat a balanced diet and exercise to stay healthy in spite of stress.
- Practice relaxation techniques.
- Maintain trusted friendships outside of work. You will need an empathetic and honest listener.
- Give yourself treats.
- Keep your sense of humor and keep situations in perspective.

LONG-TERM STRATEGIES FOR TARGETS

1) Protect Yourself

- Document each incident, time, date, place, situation, who said what, and witnesses present. You may need to demonstrate patterns to prove what you are experiencing is bullying behavior.

2) Bully Proof Yourself, Seek Respite, Take Time Off

- Check your mental and physical health. Stress-related diseases rarely carry warning signals (e.g., hypertension).
- Research state and federal legal options. Talk to an attorney. Look for internal policies (harassment, violence, respect) for violations to report (and fully expect retaliation from the bully).
- Gather data about the economic impact the bully has had on the employer. Discover turnover rates. Calculate the costs of replacement (recruitment, demoralization from understaffing, interviewing, lost time while new hire learns job), absenteeism, and lost productivity from interference by the bully.
- Start job search for next position.

3) Expose the Bully

- Make the business case that the bully is “too expensive to keep.” Present the data gathered to the highest level person you can reach, so they know about the bully’s impact on the organization. Stick to the bottom line. If you drift into tales about the emotional impact of the bully’s harassment, you will be discredited.
- Give the employer one chance. If they side with the bully or rationalize the mistreatment, you will have to leave the job for your health’s sake. However, some employers are looking for reasons to purge their very difficult bully.
- Tell everyone about the bullying **for your health’s sake**. You have nothing to be ashamed about. Exposing the bully could help others speak out about similar injustices.

CONCLUSION

Everyone deserves to do the work they love in a safe environment free from bullies. Every company, whether a private corporation, non-profit organization or school, has the responsibility to keep their staff safe and ensure conditions that will make their work and their collective efforts successful. However, if there is a bully in your midst, individual and corporate productivity will suffer. It is in the best interest of all managers to provide support for each of their employees to do their very best work at all times. This may mean writing, implementing, and enforcing workplace bullying policies, addressing difficult issues between staff members, taking the time to teach good communication skills, and developing a workplace culture that is caring, supportive, and ultimately, productive. While the ripple effects of bullying are wide reaching; positive, strength-based caring approaches to workplace relationships can have an even more profound effect on the workplace and on individuals and their families.

Resources:

The Bully At Work by Gary and Ruth Namie (Sourcebooks, 2003)

The Andrea Adams Trust Bullying in the Workplace Factsheet

When Bullies Grow Up by Stacie Dilts-Harryman, ASCA School Counselor November-December, 2004

www.bullyonline.org, UK National Workplace Bullying Advice Line

Bullying Prevention Initiative Common Elements:

- Partnerships
- Positive Youth Development
- Interventions for Students (bully, bullied, and bystander)
- Cultural Competency
- Sustained Climate Change

This online guide was produced by the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children and the Colorado Springs Assets for Youth as part of their services to support The Colorado Trust’s Bullying Prevention initiative.



THE COLORADO TRUST
A GRANTMAKING FOUNDATION

© The Colorado Trust 2008. All Rights Reserved.