

Bullying & Harassment at Work

One might assume, rightly or wrongly, that bullying and harassment may take a back seat during the COVID-19 pandemic. With many people either locked down, isolating or working from home, the opportunities to mistreat each other with disrespectful and uncivil behaviours, whether face-to-face or at a distance, is severely diminished. Yet, in some sectors, such as health and social care, policing/blue-light services supermarkets etc, the pressures of work have been ramped up considerably.

Work intensification is a well-known driver of bullying behaviours as people strive to do more with less resources against targets that are intensified. Add in a heavy dose of change via new colleagues covering for those who are sick, new ways of working and daily changing rules and regulations, and the recipe for bullying brews nicely. If we then think about the lack of social support for those working at home, juggling childcare and home-schooling with a partner doing the same, we see the ingredients for the perfect storm forming.

Bullying in the Workplace can place an intolerable strain on the emotional and physical health and well-being of an employee who is subjected to bullying by an employer or colleague at work. This can cause loss of confidence, loss of self-esteem, tiredness, an inability to sleep, lack of appetite, panic attacks, depression and for some a dread of going to work.

Bullying in the Workplace can take many forms including:

- Constantly criticising an employee, often in front of other employees.
- Spreading nasty rumours and remarks about an employee.
- Using bad, obscene, aggressive, threatening language to an employee.
- Shouting at, intimidating and harassing an employee.
- Taking away responsibility from an employee unnecessarily.
- Asking the employee to do trivial and menial jobs which the employee is not responsible for.
- Withholding important information from an employee which the employee needs to have as part of their job.
- Isolating an employee by ignoring him/her and excluding an employee from conversations and communications which are relevant to his/her area of responsibility.
- An employer passing off an employee's ideas and work as his/her own.
- Expecting an employee to produce work in an unrealistic and/or impossible time-scale.
- Blaming an employee for the employer's mistakes.

What can you do if you are being bullied in the workplace?

- Talk to others within the workplace - colleagues, supervisor, personnel department, trade union representative. Take advice on the options open to you to deal with this e.g. by making a formal complaint through the grievance procedure.
- Find out whether your place of work has an Anti-Bullying Policy in operation.
- Keep a diary of all incidents with dates and times and copies of any notes, memos etc. from the bully which you feel constitute bullying, intimidation, harassment etc.
- Write to the bully clearly saying that you find their behaviour is unacceptable and amounts to bullying and set out the reasons why you believe this. Keep copies of any letters you send to the bully.
- If it is possible to record conversations where you are being bullied then do so.
- Try to look at ways of being assertive and standing up to the bully.
- If other colleagues witness any incidents where you are being bullied ask them whether they would be willing to write a statement relating to what they witnessed.
- If you have to take time off sick due to being bullied at work ask your GP to record this on your certificate.
- Sometimes the problem continues even after you've followed your employer's grievance procedure. If nothing is done to put things right, you can consider legal action, which may mean going to an employment tribunal. Get professional advice before taking this step.
- Find out more about the law covering workplace bullying from GOV.UK: workplace bullying and harassment

For managers, now is the time for more contact not less. But a cautionary note, checking in on well-being is not the same as checking in on performance. Those employees working from home will genuinely feel supported by a call asking how they are coping and whether they need any support, whereas telephone calls at odd hours of the day that come across as disingenuous can easily feel like staff are being checked up on. It is also important that managers take time to reiterate to their teams the importance of team cohesion. How we support each other during these most difficult of times has never been more important and none of us knows how each other might be reacting to long periods of lockdown, isolation or working from home.

If you feel you may need some support, you can also contact Care first. Care first is a leading provider of confidential, professional counselling, information and advice services. All employees are eligible to use Care first, our services include; telephone counselling, information services and online support. Call Care first on the Freephone number provided by your organisation and you can speak to a professional in confidence.

If you would like to view the Webinar on '**Bullying & Harassment at work**' this is being delivered live on **Tuesday 10th August at 12pm**, please use the below link to register for this session –

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/158414753408398352>

If you are unable to join the webinar live, a recording of the session can be accessed using the same link above after the webinar has taken place.