

# BULLY FOR YOU

Bullying in the workplace can affect your work, health and social life.

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Bullying at work can destroy not only your career, but your self confidence, your health and your social life. And it's not always the overt bullying seen on television dramas and films that can be destructive, sometimes it's just a feeling of being hated, envied, distrusted or even feared.

Unfortunately, bullying is rife in today's workplace and, chances are, you've experienced some form of it. Have you noticed your superior taking note of the occasions when you come in 10 minutes late? Have they commented more than once that your appearance is shabby? That they dislike the way you dress? Have they, oh so jokingly, demeaned you in front of the entire office? But, ha ha, it was just a joke! Do you regularly get reprimanded in front of colleagues? Do you feel that, no matter how much you try, all you get is criticism?

Obviously, employees must abide by the rules, but this means ALL employees, including managers. If you

sometimes feel that there are one set of rules for you and a different set for everyone else, including those higher up on the ladder than you, you could be the target of psychological harassment and, more than likely, the harasser is fully aware of the situation and, before you know it, the constant bullying behaviour, the pithy comments, the demeaning jokes at your expense all come together to deliver their intended effect: to make you quit or get you fired.

The essence of workplace bullying is to twist political and social power to inflict psychological abuse. One in six workers experiences workplace bullying and most bullies, and their targets, are women, with 42% of the perpetrators being men. Companies should be concerned about bullying, if for no other reason than its potential to damage the bottom line and, in order to stop it in its tracks, they need to be vigilant. Employers need to be close enough to day-to-day activity to recognize and act upon any sort of intimidation. However, such

awareness won't necessarily end bullying and, unfortunately, employers are often more concerned with protecting themselves and avoiding any repercussions against the company than of protecting their most valuable assets.

## WHAT TO DO

■ *Try to deal with the situation straight away. Take the person aside and talk to them.*

■ *If the abuse persists, talk to your colleagues. They may have similar experiences to share with you and could offer advice.*

■ *Make sure your employer or HR department knows about the situation and about how it's affecting you.*

■ *If you think the situation warrants it, take advantage of any company grievance procedures are in place.*

■ *Keep a record of any incidents and of any witnesses. This will be invaluable if it comes down to a formal confrontation.*

The most obvious advice is to fight back and stand up to the bully or bullies, but this is easy to say. A lot of people who are targeted just don't have it in them to fight back, they don't know how. The situation is obviously exacerbated if the bully is your line-manager, the boss or the MD. And, usually with smaller businesses, the chief executive or one of the managers is also the bully-in-chief. In this kind of situation, it could be impossible to find someone within the organization who you feel you can talk to. The best thing to do should this situation arise, is to count your losses, take the positive experiences you have gained from the position, and get out. ■

## FOR MORE INFORMATION, SEE:

- [bullyonline.org](http://bullyonline.org)
- [workplacebullying.co.uk](http://workplacebullying.co.uk)

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