



Bullying in the Workplace and What You Can Do If You Are Being Bullied

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Bullying exists in the adult world. Bullying does not only happen to children, in fact, chronic bullies seem to maintain their behaviors into adulthood taking them into the community and the workplace. As young adults with disabilities and special needs enter the workplace, they may encounter bullying. Adults with disabilities may be at a higher risk of experiencing these types of bullying from people who target their different styles of communicating, accomplishing tasks, or lack of social appropriateness.

Workplace bullying is the tendency of individuals or groups to use persistent aggressive or unreasonable behavior against a co-worker. Workplace bullying can be verbal, nonverbal, physical, psychological, or humiliation, often in front of others. It can take a wide variety of forms, from being rude or belligerent, screaming, cursing, spreading rumors, gossiping, destruction of property, social isolation, and even physical assault. Unlike childhood bullying however, it is far more common for a combination of tactics to be used.

Examples of bullying behaviors that might be experienced in the workplace are:

- Unwarranted or invalid criticism.
- Blame without factual justification.
- Being treated differently than the rest of the work group.
- Being cursed at.
- Exclusion or social isolation.
- Being shouted at or being humiliated.
- Being the target of practical jokes.
- Excessive monitoring.

Statistics from the Waitt Institute for Violence Prevention show that one in three employees personally experiences bullying at some point in their working lives. At any given time, 1 out of every 10 employees is a target of workplace bullying. Nearly half of all American workers (49%) have been affected by workplace bullying, either being a target themselves or having witnessed abusive behavior against a co-worker.

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Bullying jeopardizes worker safety as well as professional careers and ruins work-family balance for those targeted. Co-workers who witness workplace bullying can also experience negative effects, such as fear, stress, and emotional exhaustion. Those who witness repetitive workplace abuse often choose to leave the place of employment where the abuse took place. Workplace bullying can also hinder the organizational dynamics such as group cohesion, peer communication, and overall performance.

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

Here are some tips, but if you are being physically threatened don't waste a minute before you report it to both your employer and, if appropriate, the police.

- Seek the advice of a trusted mentor.
- If you can, confront the bully in a professional manner, but only if your physical safety isn't threatened. Don't sink to his or her level. Stay as calm as possible. Don't yell or threaten. Often bullies are looking for this type of confrontation and it will encourage them to come back for more. Don't cry or show weakness either. That's usually what the bully is after in the first place.
- Don't try to win over other people to your side, allow them to make their own judgments.
- Don't allow the bully to intimidate you or make you feel bad about yourself. You know your true worth. Don't forget what that is.
- Do your job and do it well. The workplace bully wants you to fail and when you don't he or she will be defeated.
- Make sure your superiors are aware of your work. Workplace bullies often try to spread the word that you are not doing your job well and will even go as far as to report the smallest infractions to your boss. Your actions will carry more weight than his or her words.
- Don't allow the bully to isolate you from your colleagues. Keep up your workplace friendships.

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