

Workplace Bullying

While public awareness of bullying has increased in recent years, we usually hear about it with respect to children. The reality is, however, that bullying can happen anywhere, to anyone – even in the workplace. Your **Employee Assistance Program (EAP)** can help you identify the signs of bullying at work and offer tips on what to do if you or a coworker becomes the target of a bully.

Signs of workplace bullying

As adults in an environment where hierarchy is normal and division of power is inherent, identifying bullying at work can be difficult. **Bullying is generally defined by a pattern of behavior**, not a one-time occurrence. Bullying can be both obvious and subtle; below are some examples of behavior that may indicate that bullying is taking place in your office or agency.

- Perpetuating rumors or gossip
- Excluding or isolating a person
- Undermining someone’s work
- Constantly changing work guidelines
- Establishing impossible deadlines
- Intimidating a person
- Assigning unreasonable duties or workload
- Shouting or using profanity
- Constantly criticizing
- Withholding or purposefully giving the wrong information
- Violating a person’s privacy
- Deliberately embarrassing or humiliating someone
- Belittling others’ opinions
- Imparting unwarranted or undeserved punishment or retaliation
- Tampering with personal property or work equipment

Handling hostility

A hostile work environment should never be tolerated. Not only can workplace bullying negatively impact your morale, it can also increase stress and anxiety levels, and affect your mental and emotional state. If you see or experience bullying in your workplace, take action. Here are some tips on what to do if you or a coworker experiences bullying:

Speak up – remain calm and firmly let the person know that you feel harassed by their behavior

Set clear boundaries – tell the person (in no uncertain terms) that you will not tolerate their behavior

Keep a record – document every instance of bullying behavior, including the date, time, and a description of what occurred; be sure to include the names of witnesses and ask them to document any harassment they see or experience

Report the behavior – disclose the incident(s) to the person’s supervisor and/or inform Human Resources (HR), contact the agency’s ombudsperson, and/or file a formal complaint if needed

While bullying is not illegal, many workplaces have instituted zero-tolerance policies around bullying and hostile work environments. Consult with your HR department to learn about how your organization defines workplace bullying, what anti-bullying policies are in place, and what reporting protocols require.

We are also aware that reporting bullying can be a delicate situation in and of itself, especially if it’s your supervisor or someone in your chain of command who is demonstrating bullying behavior.

If after abiding by your organization’s official guidelines you feel as though the response isn’t enough or if the behavior continues without adequate intervention, call your EAP for guidance and/or help coping with the effects of harassment.

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

24 HOURS A DAY

800-222-0364

TTY: 888-262-7848
foh4you.com