

A WORKPLACE MENACE

Nicola Davies offers advice on breaking the bullying spiral, and explains what constitutes harassment and why it should not be tolerated

Loneliness, loss of confidence, anxiety, reduced motivation and, at worst, suicidal thoughts are symptoms of bullying. Some might believe that bullying is confined to the playground, but unfortunately it is all too common in the workplace.

Bullying affects an estimated 50 per cent of the UK workforce at some time in their lives. Surveys by Unison and the RCN suggest that 33 per cent of nursing and healthcare workers are affected.

Examples of bullying behaviour include the following:

- ▶ Unreasonable deadlines.
- ▶ Verbal threats or insults.
- ▶ Being targeted by gossip.
- ▶ Public humiliation.
- ▶ Exclusion from meetings.
- ▶ Persistent, unwarranted criticism.
- ▶ Being prevented from accessing information that affects your performance.

Bullying can have a terrible effect on a person's physical and mental health, resulting in poor performance and increased sickness. It can sometimes be so severe that a staff member feels forced to leave their job. This may sound dramatic, but many bullying symptoms can prevent

RESOURCE FILE

- ▶ **RCN resources on bullying**
www.rcn.org.uk/search?q=bullying
- ▶ **RCN counselling service**
www.rcn.org.uk/support/services
or telephone 0845 769 7064
- ▶ **RCN 24-hour information and advice**
www.rcn.org.uk/support/rcn_direct_online_advice
or telephone 0845 772 6100
- ▶ **ACAS advice**
<http://tiny.cc/bullyACAS>

people reaching out for help. For example, diminished self-esteem can make a person fear they will not be believed, or that the situation will be made worse if they repeat the harassment.

Written evidence

If you are being bullied, or suspect that a colleague might be, keep a written record of events, even if you feel reluctant to make a complaint. This will provide useful evidence if you later decide to take action.

There are three main approaches for dealing with bullying. These are often staged to resolve issues at a local level before making the complaint legal (see table). Whichever approach is taken, talking issues

over with an RCN or union representative will help to take the complaint forward in a clear and objective way.

There are a number of reasons why workplace bullying occurs, but often an organisation's culture maintains it. Employers have a duty of care to provide a safe and healthy working environment, in which staff are able to raise concerns about bullying if they arise.

It is important for managers to take claims of bullying seriously and ensure relevant policies are implemented effectively. Ideally, taking a proactive approach to any signs of conflict should be part of management training.

Managers need to lead by example, demonstrating that bullying is unacceptable and will not be tolerated **NS**

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Taking action

Approaches

Direct: reasoned confrontation

Informal: conciliation

Formal: written complaint

Description

Talking to the person in a calm and reasoned way can put an instant stop to behaviour that a person did not realise was causing distress.

Ask your manager to talk to those you feel are bullying you.

If the bullying continues, you might want to make a formal written complaint.



JOHN BEHETS