



DEALING WITH WORKPLACE BULLYING

WHAT IS WORKPLACE BULLYING?

Bullying is behaviour that intimidates, degrades or humiliates a member of the campus community. It may be one-on-one or in front of other staff, students or visitors.

It includes the repeated less favourable treatment of a person by another or others in the work/study environment, which is considered unreasonable and inappropriate practice.

Bullying can take place between:

- Managers
- A manager or supervisor and an employee
- Employees

Bullying is NOT about occasional differences of opinion, conflicts and problems in work relationships - these are part of working life and every conflict certainly does not constitute bullying. When the behaviour is unreasonable, degrading or contrary to Company policies and procedures, then it should be addressed.

It is NOT workplace bullying for a manager or supervisor, within the framework of Company policies and procedures, to:

- Note poor performance, suggest ways to improving performance, follow through on poor work practices, deal with complaints from others, institute proceedings for unsatisfactory performance, misconduct or dismissal; or
- Point out professional difficulties they have with other members of staff, provided that it is done in an appropriate manner.

KINDS OF BULLYING BEHAVIOUR

Bullying may include:

- Yelling, screaming, abusive or offensive language, insults, inappropriate comments about a person's appearance, personal life or lifestyle, defamation of individuals or their family or associates;
- Constant belittling opinions or unreasonable criticism of others;
- Isolating individuals from normal work/study interaction without justification;
- Impossible demands within the framework of existing work unit standards;
- Minimisation or non-acknowledgment of contribution to team activities;

- Deliberately withholding work/study related information or resources, or supplying incorrect information to an individual;
- Teasing or regularly being made the brunt of pranks/practical jokes, particularly after an objection has been made known;
- Displaying written or pictorial material which degrades or offends an individual;
- Unreasonable and punitive "administrative sanctions" e.g. Deliberate delay in processing an individual's applications for training, leave or payment of wages;
- Creating unexplained job changes, setting meaningless tasks or tasks well beyond a persons job description;
- Handling the personal effects or work equipment of other staff without reasonable justification; or,
- Abusive e-mails.

ELECTRONIC BULLYING

The use of electronic technology as a vehicle for bullying is relatively new. Additional explanation is needed as the accepted use of colloquial language and speed of communication make it easy for electronic technology to be used to harass or bully.

E-mail is provided primarily for Company business use. It is written communication and is sent in the name of the Company using Company facilities. E-mail may be subject to legal proceedings. Nothing should be E-mailed that would not be written in other work communications.

E-mail messages should not include:

- Any communication which fits the bullying behaviour described above;
- Comments or images that would offend a person on the basis of his or her gender, age, sexual orientation, religion or political beliefs; or
- Exhibition, copying or transmission of obscene or sexually explicit images or actions on Company equipment or networks.

Forgery or attempted forgery of E-mails; attempts to read, delete, copy or modify E-mails of other users; obscene and/or threatening E-mails of other users; attempts at sending harassing, obscene and/or threatening E-mail and any accessing, viewing or passing on of child pornography is strictly prohibited. Offenders may be subject to Company disciplinary procedures and/or civil or criminal sanctions.

WHY PREVENT WORKPLACE BULLYING?

Workplace bullying can have harmful effects on employees and the Company.

The effects of workplace bullying may include:

- High stress levels, anxiety, sleep disturbances;
- Ill health, severe tiredness, panic attacks, impaired ability to make decisions; and

- Incapacity to work, loss of self-confidence and self-esteem, feelings of social isolation, reduced output and performance.

Impact for the Company may include:

- Reduced efficiency, productivity and profitability;
- Increase in student non completion levels;
- Adverse publicity, poor public image, ie becoming 'known' as a difficult environment;
- Unsafe work environment;
- Increased absenteeism, sick leave, staff turnover;
- Poor morale, erosion of loyalty and commitment;
- Increased costs associated with counselling, employee assistance, mediation, recruitment and training of new staff, management time; and
- Costs resulting from legal action.

The Company is committed to ensuring an environment conducive to good work outcomes and practices, which value people. To this end the Company considers bullying unacceptable.

All employees have the right to work in an environment free of bullying. They have a responsibility to ensure they do not bully others.

All managers and supervisors have the additional responsibility to take action to stop bullying when it is brought to their attention.

WHAT ACTIONS CAN BE TAKEN TO STOP BULLYING ?

Approaching the Alleged Bully

It is recommended that whenever possible, the alleged bully is spoken to directly, told precisely of the behaviour that is objected to, and asked to stop. This may solve the problem. If the person being bullied is too intimidated to approach the bully in person, other options to deal with the matter are suggested below.

If speaking is ineffective, the alleged bully may be written to and a statement - including date, time and action claimed to be bullying, request to stop and an indication that the matter will be raised with the relevant supervisor if the behaviour does not stop - should be provided.

Seek Assistance

If the above approach is unsuccessful or inappropriate, employees being bullied may consider the following.

If they think there will be no unfavourable consequences for themselves, they may:

- Inform their immediate supervisor and together attempt to resolve the problem;

- If this does not work or if the immediate supervisor is part of the problem, the next person in the chain of command should be approached;
- An appropriate person (supervisor, personnel or union representative) may be approached for advice, support and assistance;
- Approach the Company EEO officer - particularly if the bullying involves acts such as sexual or racial harassment or other discrimination based on the grounds covered by anti-discrimination legislation; or
- Seek mediation that may be arranged through the Company EEO officer.

Keep a Diary

Bullying can sometimes be difficult to define and to prove. It is therefore important for a diary to be kept in as much detail as possible of alleged:

- Incidents,
- Witnesses names; and
- The names and addresses of people willing to support claims.

This diary may be used at a later date, if there is no resolution or problems escalate. If a diary is kept, emotional language or unsupportable claims should be avoided. Remember - this record is a one-sided view of the interaction with the alleged bully.

Formal Complaint Procedures

Formal complaints may be lodged with a written complaint using the Company Grievance Resolution Procedures particularly if:

- Other approaches are unsuccessful, or
- The allegations are so serious that other approaches are inappropriate and
- The matter is not excluded from the Grievance Resolution Procedures because they are of a criminal nature.

Possible outcomes of formal complaint procedures include:

- Dismissal of the complaint where it is not upheld;
- A finding that bullying occurred; and disciplinary action for the bully.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Under relevant Occupational Health and Safety legislation:

- The Company has an obligation to ensure the health and safety of staff and students. Bullying has the potential to impact on the health and safety of the campus community, therefore the University's obligations extend to taking reasonable steps to ensure that bullying on campus is prevented or stopped; and
- Management and employees also have an obligation to take reasonable care in the work environment both for themselves and others. This includes following Company policies, especially health and safety, bullying and particularly prompt reporting of incidents.

Where bullying involves acts such as sexual harassment or discrimination, claims may be lodged under Commonwealth or State anti-discrimination legislation on the grounds of race, sex, sexual harassment, marital status, physical or intellectual impairment, age, homosexuality, homosexual vilification, HIV/AIDS, and transgender discrimination and vilification.

Where bullying involves assault, threat of assault or other criminal actions, it may become a police matter.

COUNSELLING

Management and employees experiencing bullying may wish to undertake counselling by contacting the Company HR Manager.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Employees may also wish to undertake personal development courses to enable them to cope with the bullying while the problem is being addressed.

These courses may cover:

- Improving communication skills
- Conflict resolution
- Stress management
- Self-confidence and self-esteem

Details of available courses can be provided by the Company HR Manager.