



CRA BULLETIN

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BULLYING – A THREAT TO BUSINESS THAT IS FLYING UNDER THE RADAR

The provision and ensuring of a safe and secure workplace is one of the most important legal requirements facing today's employer. To ensure that they meet this requirement most employers focus a lot of effort and capital to meet all physical and operational health and safety requirements. Quite often, the non-physical and psychological aspects of health and safety in the work place are not considered by employers. These non-physical health and safety threats and risks can confront an employer as an unjustified disadvantage claim or personal grievances in the form of bullying, harassment (including sexual), work related stress and other psychological conditions or circumstances. Employers must also take note of the indirect cost and effects that bullying and harassment have on their businesses. To mention a few of these:

- Low staff morale
- High staff turnover
- High frequency of sick leave and staff absenteeism
- Poor customer service
- Poor performance and low productivity levels.

Workplace bullying can be defined as offensive, intimidating, malicious, or insulting behaviour, an abuse of power that undermines, humiliates or injures an employee or a group of employees. The following points are used as yard sticks in determining if certain behaviour amounts to bullying in the workplace:

- Repeated behaviour that is persistent and can take different forms over a period of time.
- The effect of bullying must have a detrimental effect on the victim.
- Bullying behaviour means actions that a reasonable person in similar circumstances would consider as unreasonable and degrading.
- Workplace bullying can vary from direct communication and interaction between employees to indirect gestures, non-verbal communications and innuendoes. Internet, texting and other forms of social media are also utilised in bullying behaviour. Workplace bullying is also not limited to the workplace and hours of work.
- Workplace bullying can also occur by being unreasonable and unsupportive in work and task instructions and delegation.

Sexual harassment and discrimination are related to bullying but there are other legal recourse and procedures available in addressing that type of behaviour.

Bullying in the workplace can be perpetrated in various ways and means or in combination of those. As indicated below, the list of bullying behaviour is quite extended and can vary from very inconspicuous, subtle actions or comments to a full frontal and direct verbal attack on an employee.

Personal attacks	Task related attacks
Belittling remarks – undermining integrity – lies being told – sense of judgement questioned – opinions marginalised	Giving unachievable tasks – impossible deadlines – unmanageable workloads – overloading – ‘setting up to fail’
Ignoring – excluding – silent treatment – isolating	Meaningless tasks – unpleasant jobs – belittling a person’s ability – undermining
Attacking a person’s beliefs, attitude, lifestyle or appearance – gender references – accusations of being mentally disturbed	Withholding or concealing information – information goes missing – failing to return calls or pass on messages
Ridiculing – insulting – teasing – jokes – ‘funny surprises’ – sarcasm	Undervaluing contribution – no credit where it’s due – taking credit for work that’s not their own
Shouted or yelled at	Constant criticism of work
Threats of violence	Underwork – working below competence – removing responsibility – demotion
Insulting comments about private life	Unreasonable or inappropriate monitoring
Physical attacks	Offensive sanctions – eg. denying leave
Public humiliation	Excluding – isolating – ignoring views
Persistent and/or public criticism	Changing goalposts or targets
Using obscene or offensive language, gestures, material	Not giving enough training or resources
Ganging up – colleagues/clients encouraged to criticise you or spy on you – witch hunt – dirty tricks campaign – singled out	Reducing opportunities for expression – interrupting when speaking
Intimidation – acting in a condescending manner	Sabotage or ambushing
Intruding on privacy, eg. spying, stalking, harassed by calls when on leave or at weekends	Supplying incorrect or unclear information
Verbal abuse	Making hints or threats about job security
Inaccurate accusation	No support from manager
Suggestive glances, gestures, or dirty looks	Scapegoating
Tampering with personal effects – theft – destruction of property	Denial of opportunity
Encouraged to feel guilty	Judging wrongly
	Forced or unjustified disciplinary hearings
	Lack of role clarity
	Not trusting

Reasonable and task orientated corrective actions by managers are considered not as bullying as long as these actions and interventions are applied and executed in a fair and reasonable way. We will discuss this and other aspects of work place bullying in a future Bulletin.

As mentioned in the heading – Bullying flies under the radar and when you become aware of it the damage has been done.