



Level: Intermediate+
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Bullying in the Workplace



Photo by William Iven on Unsplash

1) *Look at this definition of workplace bullying with a partner. Do you agree with this definition? Do you think anything can be added to this definition? What, in your opinion, is not workplace bullying?*

Workplace bullying is harmful, targeted behaviour that happens at work. It might be **spiteful**, offensive, mocking, or intimidating.

(Source: healthline.com)

2) *Discuss these questions with a partner.*

- What are the effects of workplace bullying on people's health?
- What are the effects of workplace bullying on an organisation/company?

3) *You are going to read an article about bullying in the workplace.*

First, match the words on the left with their definitions on the right

1. chances are	a) conversation that is funny and not serious
2. constitutes	b) a complaint
3. intimidating	c) admit that they were wrong
4. humiliate	d) a request to a court to enforce a legal right
5. back down	e) it is likely
6. appeasing	f) a special type of court in the UK that decides legal problems between employees and employers
7. paper trail	g) is considered as
8. a grievance	h) hidden
9. a legal claim	i) embarrass
10. an employment tribunal	j) making someone you are arguing with feel better by agreeing with what they are saying (even if this isn't your opinion)
11. disguised	k) making you feel frightened or nervous
12. banter	l) a series of documents that show a record of someone's activities

4) *Read the article. Are these statements **true** or **false**?*

- a) Laura Milne knows a lot about bullying in a work environment.
- b) Laura Milne thinks workplace bullying is key to career success.
- c) ACAS provides rules that staff and their managers should follow.
- d) Most bullies do not respond well when the person who they are bullying confronts them.
- e) It is sometimes helpful to ignore the actions of a bully, and not to look up from your work when they make comments.
- f) When documenting bullying, you should include key information such as which other members of staff were around when it happened.

- g) The diary of events that you keep should include brief but detailed information.
- h) Over half of the people from the Slater and Gordon study said an example of workplace bullying is inviting someone out for drinks with colleagues and then leaving them on their own.

5) *Read the article again. Find a word or phrase that means...*

- a) inner peace
- b) it becomes too much for you to handle
- c) take advantage of their higher position in the company
- d) it seems like an easy thing to do but it's actually quite difficult
- e) if all the other plans don't work out

Five powerful ways to tackle bullying in the workplace

(Adapted from [Stylist](#), 2020)

With over 16 years of experience working for some of the UK's top employment law firms, HR expert Laura Milne is an expert when it comes to workplace bullying.

"We've all been there – chances are if you've ever had a job then you've experienced someone along the way who has treated unfairly. Someone who has tried to intimidate, harass or bully you," Laura says.

"Sadly it's key to career success and, of course, general peace of mind, to learn the skills of how to manage such an experience in a way that's healthy and productive."

Here she speaks to [Stylist](#) about the most effective ways of tackling office bullying – before it gets the better of you:

1. Find out if the treatment you're receiving constitutes bullying

"First things first – establish what IS bullying? Sometimes the way someone behaves towards us might seem harmful. But we might be unsure if a particular comment or behaviour constitutes harassment or bullying.

In essence, however, the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration service (ACAS*), provides the guidelines by which all UK employees and employers should follow. ACAS tells us that we all have the right to be treated fairly and with dignity and respect. If someone you work with treats you in a way that is **offensive**, **intimidating**, **insulting**, or, they **abuse their position of power** over you or **humiliate** you then these are all examples of bullying."

2. Have an informal chat to begin with

"It's easier said than done perhaps, but if someone treats you in a way that damages your self-esteem then it's useful to have an informal, non-confrontational discussion in a neutral location. Try saying something like this:

'When you say [blah] / do [blah] it makes me feel uncomfortable, I feel like I am being attacked.'

Afterwards, it's important to document the discussion by email and keep a copy somewhere safe and confidential.

This might be a difficult thing to do but it's true that most bullies back down when confronted in a calm and confident way."

3. Avoid appeasing the bully

"Let the bully know by your behaviour that you will not accept their treatment of you. That doesn't necessarily mean getting aggressive or confrontational. Be calm and self-assured.

I once had a boss who would make inappropriate comments about my physical appearance. Every time he made such a comment I would reply simply and calmly (sometimes not even looking up from my work); ‘Not appropriate Paul, not appropriate.’”

4. Paper trail

“This one is key! Document – document – document...”

Every inappropriate or aggressive email should be kept.

Every inappropriate conversation should be written up in a notebook, with witnesses and names, and the date and time of the conversation included.

The same goes for the work you do well – keep that positive review from your last client. Keep copies and details of accounts and sales targets met. You never know when you may need to refer to them to protect yourself.”

5. The legal route

“The first stop on a legal route is to raise a written grievance. Check your Staff Handbook or the ACAS* website for further guidance but write a clear and concise diary of events of what happened and when.

Take the grievance to your HR department – an employer should investigate and provide a written decision within 28 days.

If all else fails, then a legal claim should be brought to an employment tribunal within three months of the date of the first act.”

In a study by employment law specialists Slater and Gordon, more than a quarter of people asked witnessed colleagues being deliberately humiliated by a bully while one in ten had heard racist insults. One in six saw a co-worker make inappropriate sexual remarks towards another.

The bullying was disguised as ‘workplace banter’ in 56% of cases while 68% said the behaviour was ‘subtle’, such as leaving a colleague out of work drinks, lunches and meetings.

“A bully’s behaviour is never truly about you,” says Laura, “Never be a victim and never let another’s opinion of you define who you are. Only you can define who you are.”

Adapted from the Stylist article: <https://www.stylist.co.uk/life/careers/workplace-bullying-being-bullied-at-work-what-to-do/61249>

*ACAS = The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service is an organisation in the UK, which tried to prevent or solve problems between employers and workers.

Answers:

1. *Suggestions for teachers:*

- Workplace bullying forms a pattern. It is usually directed at one specific person. It usually involves an unequal power relationship (where one person is higher up in the company hierarchically). Criticism, feedback or monitoring isn't (always) bullying. Workplace bullying is usually verbal or psychological in nature.

2. *Suggestions for teachers:*

- Workplace bullying can cause burnout, sleep issues, headaches, decreased appetite, anxiety, stress, depression and low self-esteem.

- Workplace bullying can cause decreased productivity and morale, increased employee absences, high turnover rates, reduced trust from employees and financial loss due to legal costs.

3. 1. e), 2. g), 3. k), 4. i), 5. c), 6. j), 7. l), 8. b), 9. d), 10. f), 11. h), 12. a)

4. a) True, b) False, she thinks learning how to manage it is key, c) True, d) False. According to the article, most bullies back down when confronted in a calm way, e) False, you should reply in a calm and self-assured way and let them know that you will not accept this treatment, f) True, g) True, h) False, it is not inviting a colleague out for drinks at all.

5. a) peace of mind, b) it gets the better of you, c) abuse their position of power, d) it's easier said than done, e) if all else fails