

Facing Bullying at Work

Bullying – *When one worker physically or psychologically intimidates another for purposes of getting his or her way; is a form of abuse. If it happens to you, you should know what to do about it.*



Who are the bullies, and why do they do it?

While we think of bullies as physically intimidating, that may not be the case at work. Someone with power – supervisory responsibility, team leadership, tenure, or an aggressive personality – who exerts that power in an abusive manner to influence your behavior is bullying. Bullying can be peer to peer for no reason other than the need for attention, or as a response to jealousy, deep-seated resentment or a person's emotional issues. Bullying can be associated with sexual, racial, age, or other forms of discrimination. Bullying occurs when you are personally confronted in an uncomfortable way, and you

fear the consequences if you don't act as the bully wants. The threat can be expressed or implied, but in either case you are being bullied if someone "gets in your face" in a personal, insulting, or intimidating manner.

What bullying looks like

Bullying comes in all forms – name-calling, unwelcome kidding, physical intimidation, threats, harassment, and any other type of abuse. When it comes from a supervisor, a line must be drawn between that person's authority and your personal rights, and you need to be clear on where that line is. The acid test is simple – if the way someone speaks to you or treats you

causes you to feel uncomfortable or threatened, if it's personal and unwelcome, then it's bullying, even from a supervisor.

What to do if you are being bullied by a coworker

The first step is to tell the bully to stop the behavior. Tell the person you will file a report if the behavior doesn't stop. This may end it, but if not, you need to follow through and get help from your organization. If this brings further threats of harm or even harsher bullying, don't back off. Bullying is not just your problem. Your employer has an equal stake in correcting the behavior. Request help from management in writing. Cite your fear of repercussions or even your fear for your safety. As with sexual harassment, go to the next level of management if needed.

What to do if you are being bullied by a supervisor

If the bully is a supervisor, the response is very much the same, except that now you must document the abuse in writing, making sure you clearly differentiate between instructions that fall within the scope of the supervisor's job and your rights to personal dignity and safety. If coworkers have witnessed the bullying, enlist their support. Talk to the supervisor about your concerns, but don't threaten. If the behavior doesn't stop, tell the person that you intend to bring this to the attention of a higher authority and that you've documented your observations and the affect on you. This may make things uncomfortable, but it should lead to a resolution. If it doesn't, you may need an attorney to continue the discussion for you.

Get help, avoid victimization

Top management does not want you to be bullied. Your morale is crucial to productivity, and bullying can lead to unwanted employment complaints and legal challenges. Everyone benefits when you are proactive, act early, and do not allow yourself to adapt to the victim role. Find support inside or outside your organization so you can take the right steps to end bullying fast.