

Bradford National Union of  
Teachers  
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# Workplace Bullying

## Why is it a problem?

Workplace bullying is hard to recognize because it creeps up on you over time and it can be months before you realize what it is that is making you feel ill. Bullying is a gradual wearing down process that makes you feel demeaned and inadequate. Victims lose all their self confidence, they feel that they can never get anything right, and they feel useless, not only within their work environment, but also in their domestic life.

If any of the following symptoms strike a chord with you, you could be the victim of bullying.

PHYSICAL	EMOTIONAL
• Sleeplessness	• Acute anxiety
• Nausea	• Feeling isolated
• Migraine/severe headaches	• Loss of confidence/self esteem
• Palpitations	• Depression
• Skin complaints	• Panic attacks
• Sweating/shaking	• Anger
• Stomach problems	• Mood swings
• Backache	• Lack of motivation
• Loss of appetite	• Suicidal thoughts
• Lethargy	

## Bullying is Abuse

Bullying is psychological abuse. A bully is usually a person in authority who mistakenly thinks that they have to take a 'strong line' with employees. There is, however, a fine line between strong management and bullying. That line is crossed when the target of bullying is persistently demeaned with the result that they begin to show signs of being distressed, becoming either physically, mentally or psychologically hurt.

With bullying, it is not the intention of the perpetrator, but the deed itself and its impact on the recipient that constitutes workplace bullying



Bullying thrives where certain behaviours are common across the management hierarchy and in some workplaces bullying is, quite wrongly, the accepted method of motivating staff. Employees may feel that they have to put up with bullying behaviour as part of the job, and may not wish to complain for fear of further victimisation or of being labelled a troublemaker. Yet, what sort of workplace can really condone a form of behaviour which engenders fear in their employees? People cannot contribute their best when under fear of harassment, bullying or abuse.

### OBVIOUS BULLYING BEHAVIOUR

- Repeatedly shouting or swearing in public or private
- Public humiliation
- Persistent criticism
- Constantly undervaluing effort
- Personal insults and name calling
- Persecution through fear or threats
- Dispensing unfair punishment out of the blue
- Increasing responsibility whilst decreasing authority
- Being overruled, ignored, marginalised or excluded

### LESS OBVIOUS BULLYING BEHAVIOUR

- Setting individuals up to fail
- Setting uncontracted tasks
- Setting unrealistic deadlines for an increased workload
- Removing areas of responsibility and imposing menial tasks
- Deliberately sabotaging or impeding work performance
- Constantly changing guidelines
- Withholding work related information



The following is a list of **personal** behaviours which have been deemed by the HSE to be unacceptable. Tick the box next to the statement that indicates how frequently this behaviour is observed in your workplace.

BULLYING BEHAVIOUR (PERSONAL)	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
Ignoring/excluding/silent treatment/isolating			
Malicious rumours or gossip			
Belittling remarks/undermining integrity/ lies told about you/ sense of judgement questioned/ opinions marginalized			
Public humiliation / eg making someone look stupid			
Ridiculing/insulting/teasing/jokes/ 'funny surprises'/sarcasm			
Shouted or yelled at / 'Bawling out'			
Threats of violence (or threats in general)			
Insulting comments made about your private life			
Physical attacks			
Attacking person's beliefs, attitudes, lifestyle/appearance / devaluing with ref to gender / accusations of being mentally disturbed			
Persistent criticism (often in front of others)			
Using obscene/offensive language/gestures/material			
Ganging up Colleagues/clients encouraged to criticise you or spy on you / Witch hunt/dirty tricks campaign / Singled out			
Intimidation / acting in a condescending or superior manner			
Intruding on privacy e.g., spying, stalking, harassed by calls etc when on leave/weekends			
Sexual approaches/offers (unwanted) or unwanted physical contact			
Verbal abuse			
Inaccurate accusation			
Insinuating glances/gestures/dirty looks			
Tampering with personal effects / Theft/destruction of property			
Encouraged to feel guilty			

The following is a list of **work-related** behaviours which have been deemed by the HSE to be unacceptable. Tick the box next to the statement that indicates how frequently this behaviour is observed in your workplace.



BULLYING BEHAVIOUR (WORK-RELATED)	OFTEN	SOMETIMES	NEVER
Giving unachievable tasks/impossible deadlines/overloading/ demands/'setting up to fail' / unmanageable workloads			
Meaningless tasks / unpleasant jobs / Belittling person's ability / Undermined Withholding information deliberately / info goes missing / concealing information/ failing to return calls / failing to pass on messages			
Undervaluing contribution / No credit where due / Taking credit for work that is not their own			
Constant criticism			
Under work / working below competence / removing responsibility / Demotion			
Unreasonable/inappropriate monitoring			
Offensive administrative penal sanctions e.g., denying leave			
Exclude/isolate/views ignored			
Changing goalposts/targets			
Not providing enough training/resources			
Reducing opportunities for expression / interrupting when speaking			
Negative attacks on person for no reason/sabotage			
Supplying incorrect / unclear information			
Making threats/hints about job security			
No support from manager			
Abuse/threats			
Denial of opportunity			
Judging wrongly			
Forced/unjustified disciplinary hearings			
Lack of clarity re. Role			
Not trusting			
Scapegoating			

As these behaviours are all unacceptable, your answers should all be "NEVER". If any of these behaviours are prevalent in your workplace, you need to take action. Even if you have not been on the receiving end of such behaviours and it has been other people who have been the victims, you will still be affected by the prospect that you may be turned on next. The perpetrators of these behaviours are contravening the HSE's Stress Management Standards and they do not have the necessary management skills to create a safe and healthy workplace.

The School's management has a legal duty to conduct a Stress Risk Assessment, which is the process whereby the causes of stress in the workplace, including bullying, are identified. The Stress Risk Assessment process is supposed to involve all staff having the opportunity to report on the issues. Contact the union if you have not been invited to contribute to the process in your school, or if you are not aware that a Risk Assessment for stress has indeed been done.

The following steps are the recommended course of action for anyone who is experiencing workplace bullying.



## GETTING RID OF BULLYING

1. Get hold of a copy of the school's policy and procedures on harassment.
2. Get hold of a copy of the school's stress risk assessment.
3. Stand calm and firm and do not allow yourself to be a target.
4. Do not become isolated. Seek immediate support and advice from the NUT Office (Tel 01274 414664; email [contact@bradfordnut.org](mailto:contact@bradfordnut.org)).
5. If objectives or instructions are unclear, ask for written clarification. Explain that this will provide an aide-memoire to help you achieve the aims within the given time.
6. Keep a record of all incidents which cause you distress or are undermining - log dates and write down your feelings after each such occurrence together with your own response.
7. Try to get witnesses to bullying incidents by avoiding situations where you are alone with the bully.
8. Do not take action alone. Make an appointment with your union Rep and seek their guidance and support.
9. Talk to colleagues and see if they are experiencing the same treatment as you.
10. Follow the school grievance procedures with the help and support of your Union officers.
11. Keep your complaint as objective as possible so that you can't be accused of filing the complaint out of malice or ambition.
12. Make an appointment with your doctor and tell them what is happening to you at work. Follow medical instructions and get signed off if necessary.
13. If counselling is available at work make an early appointment to talk through your experience.
14. Talk to friends and family for emotional support.