

Notes about workplace bullying

If you are experiencing bullying you are not alone. Bullying and poor management are very common.

The usual targets of bullying are high performers, competent and capable workers. They tend to be experienced. They may stand up to the bully and speak up for others.

Bullying behaviours are insidious and compounding. They can include petty criticism, undermining, splitting and mobbing behaviours. A bully will spend a lot of time looking for faults. When the target of the bullying is away, staff will not be allocated to cover the workload. Information and training may be withheld.

It is difficult to identify the motives of a bully. It may involve power and control, fear of competition or envy. Some personality types cause deliberate harm or are unable to see the harm they do to others.

A target of bullying often experiences a loss of confidence and doubts about themselves.

The target will over-work, be stressed and unhappy. This will impact on their family.

Monitor your own health, see your doctor, and engage with a counsellor. Work stress can lead to mental disorders, which will need to be addressed with the help of professionals and may involve workers compensation.

Arrange counselling support, either through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or privately. An independent counsellor needs to be available when you need them.

Contact a lawyer at an early stage for general advice. Look at the Fair Work sites.

Make contact with your union and ask about help.

Get your documentation together, for example, job/role description, employment contract, appraisals, correspondence, emails, diary.

Make sure that you have a backup of your documents away from the workplace. If you are shut out from the workplace and intranet you may not be able to access the evidence you need. Documents from work must be kept private and confidential.

Get copies of your workplace policies, for instance, performance appraisal/review policy, code of conduct, grievance/complaint policy, work health & safety policies, anti-bullying & harassment policy, whistle-blower policy.

Maintain a diary and journal to record recollections of relevant past events and events as they happen as contemporaneously as possible. Keep these with you and store them off-site when not at work.

If you want to make a complaint about something at work, check the policy for what steps you must follow and document what you do following those steps.

If someone has made a complaint about you, ask for details of the complaint in writing and what steps need to be followed according to the policy.

When attending meetings about a complaint, take a support person with you. Take notes during the meeting. Try to set agendas for meetings.

Bullying that goes on unchecked by management is indicative of a toxic workplace culture. Have you observed others being badly treated? What did management do?

If a bully is in a senior or management position, how do you think that has come about? What management values and you as a worker value may not align.

If management cannot address the problem the issues may end up in the Fair Work Commission in an application for a stop-bullying order, adverse action claim or unfair dismissal application. These applications/claims take a long time and are stressful.

The Fair Work Ombudsman may also investigate Award and other entitlements. SafeWork can also give directions for improvement in a workplace.

Despite orders being made against an employer, which could include the payment of compensation to the worker, the toxic workplace culture may still continue.

You need to think about whether the workplace is a healthy place for you to be working in. What is the likelihood of bringing about a change in the workplace?

A conscientious worker may want improvement in the workplace and the bully to be held responsible. Is this likely to happen in a toxic workplace culture?

If you suspect a toxic workplace culture or management that just does not care, do you really want to work there? Is it worth your effort and cost to try to change that?

For all of us, in workplaces and elsewhere, we should not be bystanders. Ideally, we should all call out inappropriate behaviour.

The problem is not the person who speaks up or challenges the bully, the problem is the individuals and managers that allow the inappropriate behaviours to continue.

A lot has been written about bullying and toxic workplaces. There are many resources available for managers and workers.

Despite this management often seems slow to realise the loss of productivity and costs associated with the failure to handle inappropriate behaviours.

Good resources include:-

Fair Work Commission (<https://www.fwc.gov.au>)

Fair Work Ombudsman (<https://www.fairwork.gov.au>)

SafeWork Australia (<https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au>)

Workplace Bullying by Catanzariti & Egan LexisNexis 2015

Workplace Conflict Guide by Harding Whelan & Farrar as an iBook