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HEADLINES

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Work Shouldn't Hurt: The Impact of Workplace Bullying

When you think of bullying, what comes to mind? Many of us imagine an awkward high school scene where a group of kids relegate a new student to sitting alone during lunch. But bullying isn't a behavior you age out of, and it's not confined to the halls of high school. Harassment in the workplace is often more subtle, making it difficult to detect and prove. It's not as obvious as a coworker berating you or storming out during a meeting. It can be more covert, such as a team member withholding important information needed to complete a project. So what constitutes bullying? Bullying is formally defined as threatening, humiliating, or intimidating behavior and may include actions that prevent work from being done. Workplace harassment degrades bullied employees' dignity and erodes self-confidence. Bullying undermines psychological safety, which is the shared belief that members on a team will not embarrass, reject, or punish each other for speaking up or sharing ideas. Lack of psychological safety leads to isolation, further damaging a bullied employee's well-being. While workplace bullying is common, it does not make it normal or acceptable behavior. It can harm individuals' health and mental well-being, lead to relationship breakdowns, and cause a toxic work culture that damages productivity and hurts an organization's reputation. Workplace harassment is a serious issue with a high price to organizations, teams, and individuals.

Sticks & Stones

You've probably heard the saying, "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me," and research shows this childhood phrase doesn't hold weight. Victims of bullying experience higher levels of stress and fear, which can lead to a host of health problems like hypertension, migraines, hormone disturbances, ulcers, anxiety, panic attacks, and insomnia. Many of these health concerns are associated with an increased risk of chronic health conditions.



Performance at work suffers when team members are preoccupied with harassment. It can lead to an inability to focus or concentrate, loss of self-esteem, problems with decision-making skills, and lowered productivity. Bullied employees may turn to unhealthy coping mechanisms like increasing alcohol consumption, further increasing their risk of physical and mental health problems. These repercussions can affect career trajectory, but the consequences of workplace bullying aren't confined to the office. Psychological and physical problems carry into the home, impacting personal relationships and quality of life.

Addressing Bullying in the Workplace

If you are experiencing workplace bullying, you can take steps to address the behavior.

Call Out Inappropriate Behavior: Call attention to the bully's actions directly, calmly, and professionally. Describe the behavior you see the bully exhibiting without offering opinions or side commentary. For example, "you regularly enter my cubicle, lean over my shoulder, and read my personal correspondence on my computer screen." Tell them exactly how the behavior is affecting your work. Then set boundaries and inform them what behavior you will not put up with in the future. For example, "In the future, you are not to enter my cubicle unless I invite you to come in. This is my private workspace, and your actions are unwelcome."

Listen to Emotion Well: Let's Talk About Boundaries

Write It Down: If the behavior persists, carefully document it. This means saving emails and other correspondence, taking screenshots, and writing down who, when, and where the abuse occurs. Note if another employee witnessed the incident. Save the documentation as a hard copy and in a file on your computer. If you choose to file a report with HR, this documentation provides the information they need to work on your behalf.

Do Your Homework: Find out if your company has a policy against harassment or abuse. Being able to cite specific rules of conduct about bullying in your employee handbook strengthens your case. If you decide to file a complaint, look to your employee handbook. Most outline the HR investigation process that filing a complaint sets into motion.

If outside assistance is needed, get in contact with your EAP or check out the below websites and helplines:

- Workplace Bullying Institute: www.workplacebullying.org. Provides information on tutorials and actions you can take if you're a bullying target or witness.
- STOP BULLYING NOW HOTLINE (USA): Supported by the US Department of Health and Human Services, the helpline is available 24/7: **800-273-8255**.

Prevalence of Bullying in the Workplace

A 2021 national survey by the Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI) found over 79 million people are affected by workplace bullying in the US. **30%** of workers are subject to workplace harassment, and **49%** are affected by it. Over **40%** of bullied targets experience adverse health effects.



Sources: [WBI](#), [SHRM](#)

Remote Work & Online Harassment

The transition to hybrid or remote work has made it easier for workplace

bullying to invade the home. Video calls can invite disparaging comments on appearance or physical surroundings, and it becomes much more challenging to keep aspects of personal life private. Details such as a religious decoration on a wall or a same-sex partner walking into the room can spur unwelcome comments. Virtual communication is also harder to navigate because it has an air of informality. Traditional rules of conduct seem to go out the door when communication occurs outside a company-sponsored platform. Tone and intent are difficult to discern over a few words of text on a screen, making inappropriate behavior not as easily identifiable. The lack of supervision can also embolden bullies. In an office, a coworker may overhear a barrage of belittlement and step in, but remote work allows privacy in interactions.

With the advent of the Internet, online harassment is inevitable. But just because it's common doesn't mean it's normal. If you or someone you know is experiencing workplace bullying, reach out! Your EAP can help you navigate the next steps to addressing harassment.



Put Your EAP to Work

As your Employee Assistance Program providers, our job at EFR is to help and guide you and your family members through difficult life phases. If you, your child, or other family member are experiencing difficulties in life, please give us a call at **800-327-4692**. To learn more about your EAP, visit efr.org.

A speech bubble-shaped logo with a light green border and a background of vertical grey lines. The text 'connect' is written in a large, dark green, sans-serif font. Below it, 'WITH US' is written in white capital letters on a dark green rectangular background.

It takes a healthy mind, body, and spirit to stay active. Download our Monthly Motivator and track your progress!

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Emotion Well is EFR's podcast. This month we are speaking with Dr. Warren Phillips, a clinical psychologist who sheds light



on Emotional Intelligence (EQ). Learn how unlike someone's IQ, their EQ can increase over time to help improve communication and relationships in the workplace and at home.

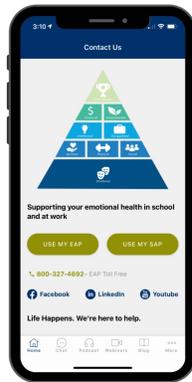
[Click Here](#) to listen. Or find us on your favorite Podcasting App.

Looking for further readings on a variety of health and wellness topics?

Check out our monthly blog posts! During times of distancing or separation, the Internet keeps us connected. But with this connection comes opportunities for bullies to gain new access to our time and emotional energy, and the damage they can inflict is often more substantial, further-reaching, and less obvious.



[Click Here](#) to read the blog.



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