

What to Do If You Think You're Being Bullied

Being bullied is one of the most distressing things that can happen to a person at work. It can happen in any organisation, and at any point in a person's career. If you are the victim of bullying, you may feel powerless, but there are, in fact, a number of steps you can take to regain control of the situation. Following the suggestions outlined below will help you to do this.

Addressing the issue

Don't ignore the problem

Although it can be difficult to face up to bullying, the effects of allowing it to continue unaddressed can be serious both for your personal wellbeing and your effectiveness at work. Many bullies behave the way they do because they believe they will not be discovered or reported and, unless action is taken, they will usually not stop of their own accord. If you feel as though someone is bullying you, it is vital that you recognise this and take the necessary steps to put a stop to it before the situation escalates.

Confide in someone

One of the worst things about being bullied is how isolated and powerless it can make you feel, and this is exactly what the bully wants. Talking about your concerns with a trusted colleague, a family member or friend is an important first step. If your organisation has an employee helpline or a nominated bullying/harassment adviser they can give you free and confidential advice and support. Independent external advice can also be sought from organisations such as the [ACAS helpline](#) or [the Samaritans](#).

Find out if others are affected

A bully will often pick on more than one person at once. Look around you: do others who come into contact with the bully look worried or stressed? The more people you can identify with the same concerns as you, the more powerful your complaint will be. If others are being bullied they may offer you support and even be willing to back you up when you take action against the bully.

Know your rights

Find out whether your organisation has a written policy that covers bullying and harassment. This information can often be found in your staff handbook, or may form part of your organisation's Dignity at Work policy if it has one. No matter where you work, there are some basic principles that all organisations must adhere to in order to protect its employees from bullying and harassment. [1] If you feel your organisation is not meeting these basic standards, you should contact your HR department (if you have one), trade union representative, or the [ACAS helpline](#).

Keep a diary

Log the dates, times, location and nature of bullying incidents (e.g. being humiliated in front of other members of staff or being given unrealistic or shifting work deadlines). Remember to note down the names of any witnesses to the incidents, irrespective of whether you think they would back you up or not. Keep a note of the actual words that were used, and stick to the facts; be careful not to allow your emotions to influence you when you record these incidents.

Keep copies of any written evidence

While it isn't necessary to have 'proof' of bullying in order to confront the bully or raise the problem with your manager, it is always helpful to have some supporting evidence, if it is available. To this end, it is important to save any relevant letters, emails or texts you receive from the bully. If the bullying relates to how you are being asked to perform your role, your job description or latest performance review document might also be relevant forms of evidence.

Taking action – the informal approach

In most cases, it is advisable to take an informal approach to challenging the bully about their behaviour in the first instance. Doing so will give the bully the opportunity to make amends, without you having to resort to making a formal complaint. There are two key ways of approaching a bully informally; these are outlined below.

Talk to the bully directly

Consider inviting the bully to a meeting and let them know that you find their behaviour towards you unacceptable. It may help to use phrases such as "You may not realise that when you do X, it makes me feel like Y". You should be prepared to give specific examples of when their behaviour has upset you; you may also wish to refer to any written evidence you might have of the bullying. It is important to be aware that a bully may become defensive or angry when challenged about their behaviour. If this happens and your conversation breaks down as a result, your next step should be to take action formally.

Ask someone else to talk to the bully for you

If you are wary of confronting the bully face to face, you might find it helpful to ask a third party to intervene and speak to the bully on your behalf. Depending on the situation, you may wish to ask your manager or another senior colleague to do this.

Taking action – the formal approach

If the situation doesn't improve once you have challenged the bully informally, or if the bullying is very serious, you should make a formal complaint using your organisation's grievance policy. The suggestions outlined below will help you to do this.

Raise a complaint with the appropriate individual

If the bully is another member of your team, you should raise your complaint with your supervisor or line manager. If it is your boss who is the bully, then make your complaint to the relevant senior manager (i.e. their boss) or your HR department. You may also want to talk to your trade union representative if you have one. When you raise your complaint, request confidentiality if you feel you need to.

Use your right to be accompanied

Once you have made a complaint, you will normally be asked to a meeting to discuss your grievance. You are entitled to take a colleague or trade union representative to such a meeting and it is advisable to do so.

Consider legal action

If, after having raised a grievance, nothing is done to improve your situation at work, you may wish to consider taking legal action. However, it is vital that you are fully aware of the potential implications of doing this, so make sure you seek professional advice (i.e. from an employment lawyer) before going down this route.

And finally...

Be as professional as you can. Being bullied can make you feel extremely angry and upset. But it's important to try to treat it as you would any other problem at work: as calmly and rationally as possible. A bully will look for any means they can to claim you are making a fuss about nothing. Keep your cool, and it will only help your case.

[1] These principles are outlined in the ACAS leaflet '[Bullying and Harassment at Work: Guidance for Employees](#)' (8 Feb 2010).