



Let's Talk . . . Bullying, Abusive Conduct, & Their Consequences Leader's Guide

Overview:

Bullying and abusive conduct, inappropriate behavior covered in *Bullying, Abusive Conduct, & Their Consequences*, are particularly egregious forms of workplace harassment problematic for both individuals and organizations. They negatively impact the workplace in terms of productivity and effectiveness, and they negatively impact our well-being at work in terms of job satisfaction, performance, and physical and emotional health.

The *Bullying, Abusive Conduct, & Their Consequences* training program is a stand-alone program, which works well in conjunction with the other programs in the Let's Talk series. It can also be used to fine-tune other, more general, Harassment and Respectful Workplace programs.

Prepare for the Session:

- Preview the *Bullying, Abusive Conduct, & Their Consequences* program, and consider how the topic relates to harassment in general.
- Read through the Leader's Guide.
- Make sure you have a Discussion Question handout for each participant.
- Remember to use a matter-of-fact, nonjudgmental tone of voice when discussing sensitive concepts.
- Greet participants in a friendly manner.

Open the Session:

- Introduce yourself and welcome the participants to the training session.
- Introduce the *Bullying, Abusive Conduct, & Their Consequences* program, explaining that its topic is applicable to individuals at all levels of the organization.
- Ask participants as they watch the program to think about the topic in terms of their personal experience and observation.
- Let participants know that there will be a short discussion portion of the program, with an opportunity to comment and/or ask questions.

Present the Material:

- Show the *Bullying, Abusive Conduct, & Their Consequences* program (running time: 10 minutes).
- Review definitions and learning points for key concepts as follows:

What is bullying and how does it manifest itself?

Definition: Bullying is a pattern of abusive conduct and a form of harassment, which is inappropriate in any organization.

Learning Points:

❖ **Bullying is aggressive.**

It is a pointedly abusive form of harassing behavior.

❖ **Bullying is intimidating.**

Bullies intimidate others in order to feel in control.

❖ **Bullying is humiliating to its targets.**

Bullying demeans the person it's aimed at.

❖ **Bullying is threatening.**

Bullying can take social, psychological, emotional, or physical forms.

❖ **Bullying is undermining.**

Bullying undermines the target's confidence and self-esteem.

Examples of bullying and abusive conduct are:

- ❖ Insults, name-calling, and sarcasm
- ❖ Inappropriate physical contact, from shoving to hugging
- ❖ Blocking someone's way
- ❖ Gossiping and spreading rumors
- ❖ Making verbal, written, or electronic threats, or gesturing threateningly
- ❖ Cyber-bullying on social networking sites
- ❖ Yelling or laughing at someone
- ❖ Direct or veiled threats of demotion or dismissal
- ❖ Taking credit for someone else's work
- ❖ Social exclusion or ostracism
- ❖ Micromanaging
- ❖ Abusive hazing or initiations

How Does Bullying Affect Individuals and Organizations?

Learning Points:

❖ **Bullying causes absenteeism.**

It's difficult to show up for work when you're afraid you'll be mistreated.

❖ **Bullying adversely affects productivity.**

It's hard to focus on the task at hand if you're stressed about something bad about to happen.

❖ **Bullying can lead to depression, headaches, and digestive problems.**

The impact of bullying and abusive conduct has been likened to that of post-traumatic stress disorder.

❖ **Bullying cause self-doubt and low self-esteem.**

It's hard to respect and have confidence in yourself when you're treated disrespectfully.

Bullying and the Law

Legal definition: Bullying is a form of harassment, and harassment that violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act and other acts that amend or extend it, including the Age Discrimination in Employment Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act, is illegal.

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, or EEOC, defines harassment as “unwelcome conduct that is based on race, color, religion, sex (including gender-identity and pregnancy), national origin, age (for those over 40), disability, or genetic information.”

Learning Points—Legal:

- ❖ **Bullying and abusive behavior are forms of harassment, and, as such, may be illegal when the behavior is severe and pervasive.**

Legal action may be taken in response to patterns of egregious abusive behavior. Accidental, isolated, or occasional occurrences of bad behavior, while not necessarily illegal, may violate organization policy, and thus may be subject to disciplinary action.

- ❖ **Bullied individuals who fall under the EEOC categories are protected by law.**

Under even broader local legislation, however, others may be protected as well

- ❖ **The “Reasonable Person Standard” is used to determine whether inappropriate behavior in the workplace is detrimental enough to be illegal.**

Would a “reasonable person” consider the behavior egregious enough to meet the legal definition of harassment?

- ❖ **Even a non-employee may be guilty of bullying and abusive conduct.**

Non-employees include customers, vendors, patients, and contractors.

- ❖ **It is illegal for an organization or supervisor to retaliate against an employee seeking to address harassment.**

How can we deal with bullying?

- ❖ **Acknowledge that bullying can happen in any organization.**

- ❖ If you observe—or are the target of—bullying, and if you feel safe in doing so, let the bully know in a matter-of-fact manner that the behavior is unacceptable and must stop.
- ❖ If the behavior continues, or you're uncomfortable talking to the bully directly, bring the matter to the attention of Human Resources or a trusted supervisor. There are processes and procedures to address grievances and correct inappropriate, and perhaps even unlawful, conduct.

Start Discussion:

- Distribute the Discussion Questions handout.
- Read the 4 questions on the Discussion Questions handout to participants, and explain that they will have 5–8 minutes for discussion based on the questions.
- Ask participants to take the handout Quiz.
- Remind participants of the importance of using respectful language and tone of voice when discussing such sensitive issues.
- Have participants form small groups of 3–5 people for the discussion portion of the training.

Discussion Questions:

Can you identify a bullying or abusive behavior you or a coworker witnessed or participated in?

Sample answers:

- 1. A colleague hung a racist cartoon in the break room.*
- 2. A friend and I posted unflattering gossip about our coworker online.*
- 3. My supervisor yells at me.*

What might be a practical consequence of this action for the target?

Sample answers:

- 1. It might have made some of my coworkers feel unwanted at work and unsafe.*
- 2. We may have invaded our coworker's privacy and embarrassed her.*
- 3. When I'm yelled at I feel angry, embarrassed, and powerless.*

What might be a practical consequence of this action for the organization?

Sample answers:

- 1. The targets of the joke might be less able to work effectively, or quit.*
- 2. Our coworker could become depressed and less able to function well at work.*
- 3. I don't want to be at work after I'm yelled at. When I am there, I don't do my best for my abusive boss.*

What might be an appropriate response to the behavior?

Sample answers:

- 1. Take down the cartoon and bring it to the attention of HR.*
- 2. Calmly let the perpetrators know that their actions were inappropriate and hurtful and ask them to stop.*
- 3. Matter-of-factly let your supervisor know that you want to be treated in a professional and courteous manner and that yelling is unacceptable.*

Quiz Answer Key

1. Bullying and abusive conduct is a rare phenomenon.

TRUE/FALSE

2. Bullying is never illegal.

TRUE/FALSE

3. It can sometimes be helpful to talk to a bully directly about his or her behavior.

TRUE/FALSE

4. It is illegal for an organization to retaliate against someone who reports bullying.

TRUE/FALSE

5. Bullying is a form of harassment.

TRUE/FALSE

6. Bullying can do physical and psychological harm.

TRUE/FALSE

7. A non-employee, such as a customer or salesperson, cannot be guilty of bullying.

TRUE/FALSE

8. Bullying and abusive conduct has no effect on productivity in the workplace.

TRUE/FALSE

9. Bullying by a group of people is called “mobbing.”

TRUE/FALSE

10. A respectful workplace discourages bullying.

TRUE/FALSE

Conclude the Session:

1. Reassemble the group.
2. Recap the following key concepts from *Bullying, Abusive Conduct, & Their Consequences*:
 - **Bullying and abusive conduct** are forms of harassment and are never acceptable.
 - **Bullying and abusive conduct** negatively impact the workplace in terms of productivity and effectiveness, and they negatively impact our well-being at work in terms of job satisfaction, performance, and physical and emotional health.
 - **Bullying and abusive conduct** can occur in any organization.
 - **Bullying and abusive conduct** can be remedied with civility, respect, and professionalism.
3. Take questions.
4. Thank everyone for participating, and express your hope that participants will take what they've learned at the session and work to improve their organization.

Bullying, Abusive Conduct, & Their Consequences

Handout

Discussion Questions

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Quiz

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TRUE/FALSE

Let's Talk . . . Bullying, Abusive Conduct, & Their Consequences Transcript

You probably don't worry about a colleague stealing your lunch money, or not letting you have a turn on the swings—

But adults get bullied too. In fact, it's been estimated that almost half of all employees have encountered some form of bullying at work.

Have *you* observed—or even been the target of—bullying in your organization?

What exactly *is* bullying or abusive conduct? How does it affect individuals and organizations? What are its legal ramifications? And how can we deal with it?

Let's explore these questions regarding one of the most insidious problems facing individuals and organizations today.

What is bullying?

What do we mean when we use the term *bullying*?

Bullying within an organization is a pattern of inappropriate, abusive conduct that is:

- *aggressive:*

It's a form of harassment that is particularly emotionally abusive and detrimental to the self-esteem and well-being of the target;

- *intimidating:*

Bullies feel the need to be in control, at the expense of their targets, and they can often encourage the same negative behaviors in others. When a group of people engage in bullying behavior together, it's called "mobbing";

- *humiliating:*

Bullying is behavior that demeans another person;

- *threatening:*

Historically, workplace bullying and intimidation tends to be more psychological and less physical than it once was, but it still occurs in *all* its forms, especially during times of global or national economic uncertainty;

- *undermining:*

Being bullied undermines a person's confidence and ability to do his or her job.

Bullying is often a hostile expression of discomfort with some characteristic—for example, gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation—that differs from the bully's.

It can occur between colleagues at the same organizational level; or individuals may be bullied by their manager or supervisor.

Sometimes bullying behavior, such as hazing, or embarrassing initiations of new hires, is justified by the bully as a rite of passage necessary for younger coworkers to “prove themselves”—

or bullying may be used as a way to encourage older workers to “step aside” to make way for younger ones.

Examples of bullying in an organization are:

- Verbally undermining a person's self-esteem through direct put-downs, sarcasm, or implying that he or she is incompetent, immature, or a detriment to the organization.
- Adversely affecting productivity by assigning busy-work and pointless tasks.

- Taking credit for or plagiarizing someone else's work or ideas.
- Intimidating someone by blocking his or her path or access to a workspace or needed equipment
- Shoving, inappropriately touching, or otherwise physically assaulting
- Cyber-bullying by posting inappropriate messages or pictures on social networking sites
- Gossiping or spreading rumors
- Yelling or laughing at someone
- Name-calling or other verbal abuse
- Making overt or veiled threats of demotion, dismissal, or even physical harm
- Isolating someone by ostracizing or excluding him or her socially, or putting the person in socially awkward situations
- Withholding information needed to work effectively or fit in socially
- Placing someone in physically dangerous situations
- Gesturing threateningly
- Ridiculing, mocking, or otherwise intentionally humiliating someone
- Unnecessarily nitpicking and micromanaging another's work
- Abusive hazing or initiations
- Trying to embarrass someone by revealing his or her personal information

How does bullying affect individuals and organizations?

How does bullying affect individuals and organizations?

People who are bullied experience a great deal of stress, the effects of which can be devastating; and bullying creates an unsafe, less productive, less satisfying work environment for everyone.

Bullying can cause:

- absenteeism,
- an inability to focus,
- lack of productivity,
- depression,
- chronic headaches and digestive problems. and
- self-doubt and low self-esteem

The impact of bullying and abusive conduct has been likened to that of post-traumatic stress disorder. It can even spill over to affect the target's home life, adversely affecting the relationship with his or her spouse, or children.

Even if one is not the target of bullying, seeing *others* treated so disrespectfully can also cause distress, and can leave people feeling guilty and distracted.

The well-being of an organization is reflected in the well-being of its members. When individuals feel unsafe and unhappy, they can't perform as well—and everyone suffers.

Is bullying illegal?

Bullying and abusive conduct can also have legal ramifications for employers and organizations.

Bullying is a form of harassment, and harassment that violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act and other acts that amend or extend it, including the Age Discrimination in Employment Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act, is *illegal*.

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, or EEOC, defines harassment as “unwelcome conduct that is based on race, color, religion, sex (including gender-identity and pregnancy), national origin, age (for those over 40), disability, or genetic information.”

According to the EEOC, harassment becomes unlawful when enduring the offensive conduct becomes a condition of continued employment, or when the conduct is severe or pervasive enough to create a work environment that a “reasonable person” would consider intimidating, hostile, or abusive.

Individuals must realize that bullying will not be tolerated and can even cost them their job, and organizations must realize that to turn a blind eye to bullying can lead not only to a problematic work environment but to lawsuits as well.

How can we deal with bullying?

So, how can we effectively deal with bullying in an organization?

- First, we should talk about it, like we’re doing now, and acknowledge that bullying can happen in any organization.
- If you observe—or are the target of—bullying, and if you feel safe in doing so, let the bully know in a matter-of-fact manner that the behavior is unacceptable and must stop. Sometimes a person doesn’t realize the effect of his or her behavior and will change it when made aware.
- If the behavior continues, or you’re uncomfortable talking to the bully directly, bring the matter to the attention of Human Resources or a trusted supervisor. There are processes and procedures to address grievances and correct inappropriate, and perhaps even unlawful, conduct.

Retaliation is illegal.

Employers are liable for harassment from supervisors, non-supervisory coworkers, and even non-employees, such as customers, contractors, vendors, and patients.

Know that it is *illegal* for an organization or supervisor to retaliate against an employee seeking to address harassment.

We have seen that the patterns of aggressive and demeaning harassment known as workplace bullying and abusive conduct are more common than we might have thought.

Bullying takes a heavy toll on the well-being of both individuals and organizations. And when it's based on one of the government's categories of discrimination—and in some local jurisdictions that have additional legislation in place, even if it's *not* based on one of those categories—bullying is not just unpleasant but also illegal.

With policies and procedures in place to prevent and prohibit bullying, and the courage of individuals to speak up for a respectful environment, together we can move forward.

Let's all take a stand against bullying, and work to make ours a safe, productive, and happy organization for everyone.

PREVIEW ONLY