

**DON'T BE A SILENT WITNESS
TO WORKPLACE BULLYING**

Overview

- > what is workplace bullying?
- > what can I do about it?
- > Comcare's role

What is bullying?

“...Bullying is repeated unreasonable behavior that could reasonably be considered to be humiliating, intimidating, threatening or demeaning to a person, or group of persons, which creates a risk to health and safety.”¹

¹ Preventing and managing bullying at work - a guide for employers (OHS 65)

What is not bullying?

- > a single workplace incident
- > legitimate management action
- > reasonable management actions include legitimate:
 - performance management processes
 - action taken to transfer or retrench a worker
 - a decision not to provide a promotion in connection with the workers employment
 - disciplinary actions
 - allocated work in compliance with systems and policies
 - injury and illness processes
 - business processes, such as, workplace change or restructuring.

Overt bullying

- > abusive insulting or offensive language
- > behaviour or language that frightens, humiliates, belittles or degrades, including criticism that is delivered with yelling and screaming, tone of voice, sarcasm and insults, whether face-to-face or in emails
- > cyber bullying using social networking sites
- > inappropriate comments about a person's appearance, lifestyle, or their family.

Covert bullying

- > unreasonably overloading a person with work
- > setting timelines that are difficult to achieve or constantly changing deadlines
- > setting tasks that are beyond a person's skill level
- > ignoring or isolating a person.

What can we do?

- > prevention
- > early Intervention
- > management



We can...in the context of prevention

Promote a positive workplace culture through:

- > timely and constructive performance feedback
- > supportive leadership at all levels
- > engagement of employees through consultation and decision making
- > accountability of all managers for people management.

Officers demonstrate due diligence through:

- > clear statements that bullying will not be tolerated
- > modelling positive behaviours of respect and courtesy
- > consulting with staff at all levels
- > understanding the nature of operations and associated risks
- > ensuring support systems and resources are in place
- > responding to incidents in a timely manner.

We can...in the context of prevention

Develop a bullying prevention policy:

- > in consultation with workers
- > ensuring all staff are trained in appropriate behaviours
- > with clear reporting and procedures
- > applied consistently and reviewed regularly.

We can...in the context of early intervention

Recognise early warning signs, including:

Organisationally:

- > change/negative leadership styles
- > bullying reporting history
- > reasons for unscheduled absences.

We can...in the context of early intervention

Individually:

- > physical symptoms (tiredness, headaches etc)
- > increased unplanned absences
- > emotional responses
- > erratic behaviour
- > withdrawal behaviour
- > increased workplace conflict
- > low morale
- > deteriorating work performance.

We can...in the context of early intervention

Response to early warning signs, including:

Organisationally:

>open and frequent communication/supportive leadership.

We can...in the context of early intervention

Individually:

- >listen with empathy
- >offer support (alternate or flexible work arrangements, EAP, etc)
- >seek advice from specialist areas (HR, case management)
- >appoint a health case manager where appropriate.

We can...in the context of management:

- > respond in a timely manner to allegations of bullying
- > treat both complainant and respondent with empathy
- > apply the principle of natural justice to the parties involved
- > maintain confidentiality of the parties
- > arrange a discussion, case conference or mediation between the parties to clarify issues and solutions
- > continue to monitor the wellbeing of both parties and provide support throughout the process
- > apply flexible workplace arrangements (duties and responsibilities) where required to reduce risk
- > introduce reasonable adjustments to the workplace where required
- > report notifiable incidents of bullying to Comcare.

What can the worker do?

- > understand your responsibilities for appropriate behaviour at work
- > know how and when to report bullying
- > talk to someone early if feeling distressed or not coping
- > find out what support is available: Check with HR, speak to a contact officer or employee representative, call EAP
- > don't isolate yourself from work colleagues, friends or family
- > review your health status with your doctor.

What can HSRs do?

- > Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs) play an important role in hazard identification and risk management. Workplace bullying is a hazard that HSRs are well positioned to assist members of their Work Group (WG) identify and manage for.
- > HSRs are encouraged to take an active role and provide advice to supervisors and managers in all aspects of occupational health and safety relating to their WG.

What can PCBUs do now?

- > review workplace incident reporting data to identify organisational bullying 'hot spots'
- > use the bullying policy checklist and risk tools to implement measures to address risk
- > promote discussion of bullying prevention at team meeting level and use the 'two minute talk' to raise worker awareness
- > ensure discussion of bullying prevention and the audit program at management and WHS committee meetings
- > work with HSRs, contact officers and worker representatives to further local awareness and consolidate a standardised supportive framework across your organisation.

What is Comcare's role?

- > regulation and compliance
- > incident notification
- > WHS investigations



Comcare resources and contacts

Comcare website: www.comcare.gov.au/Bullying

Email: WHS.Help@comcare.gov.au

Comcare call centre: 1300 366 979

Comcare In-house training:

- A manager's WHS responsibilities
- Bullying and harassment—A WHS Issue
- Prevention and management of negative workplace behaviours

Contact: learning.development@comcare.gov.au