



About Workplace Bullying

Bullying is deliberate, harmful, involves a power imbalance and has an element of repetition.

What is bullying?

It isn't uncommon to hear someone say something insensitive or mean to someone else. In fact, probably all of us have said or done something that wasn't very nice to someone else in a moment of anger or frustration. And although such comments or actions are not okay, bullying has some specific features that make it much more serious and harmful.

- Bullying is deliberate – harming another colleague intentionally
- Bullying involves a misuse of power in a relationship
- Bullying is usually not a one-off – it is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated over time
- Bullying involves behaviour that can cause harm ([Bullying-Free NZ Week website](#), 2017).

Is bullying harmful?

- Bullying can lead to increased stress levels, decreased emotional wellbeing, reduced coping strategies, lower work performance and disruptive workplaces ([WorkSafe New Zealand](#)).
- Bullying can negatively impact the entire workforce and result in a hostile work environment ([WorkSafe New Zealand](#)).
- Bullying harms the person being bullied, the person doing the bullying and can also harm those who witness it (bystanders) ([WorkSafe New Zealand](#)).

Why do some people get bullied?

There is never a good reason for bullying. But, we know people are more likely to be bullied if they seem different from their peers in some way. This might include being clever or popular, differences in race, sexuality, gender identity, religion, disabilities and abilities, weight, height. That's why it's so important to celebrate diversity and embrace our differences – we aren't all the same and that's a great thing! ([Bullying-Free NZ Week website](#), 2017).

Why do some people bully others?

Just as there are many reasons someone might experience bullying, there are also many reasons why someone might bully someone else:

- They feel unhappy
- They have been the target of bullying themselves
- They want to feel important or powerful
- They don't realise how their behaviour harms others
- They believe being different is a bad thing.

Labelling someone who bullies as a "bad person" isn't right or helpful. While the bullying behaviour isn't okay, someone who bullies others often needs our help and support too.

“Workplace bullying affects between 15 and 20 per cent of the workforce” (New Zealand Work Research Institute Director, Professor Tim Bentley, 2014).

FACT SHEET #1

Examples of bullying behaviour include:



Personal attacks (direct): eg, belittling remarks, undermining integrity, lies being told, sense of judgement questioned, opinions marginalised, attacking a person's beliefs, attitude, lifestyle or appearance, gender references, verbal abuse or physical attacks.



Task-related attacks (indirect): eg, giving unachievable tasks, impossible deadlines, unmanageable workloads, constant criticism of work, unreasonable or inappropriate monitoring or denial of opportunity.

Bullying can negatively impact the entire workforce and result in:



- Decreased worker health and wellbeing
- Decreased worker motivation
- Decreased worker performance
- Decreased worker commitment



- Increased sick leave
- Increased worker turnover

Workplace bullying can be carried out in a variety of ways, including:



Through email, text messaging, internet chat rooms or other social media channels.



In some cases workplace bullying may occur outside normal working hours.



It can be directed at a single worker or group of workers.



It can be carried out by one or more workers.



It can also be directed at other people such as clients, patients, students, customers and members of the public.



The initiator of the bullying can be other people such as clients, patients, students, customers and members of the public.