

# The **SILENT** Epidemic

## Understanding Bullying in the Workplace

Many people experience workplace bullying. A person is bullied when exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more people, and the person has difficulty defending himself or herself. The bullying can be verbal, psychological, physical, or cyber. Fear of retaliation or job loss prevent people from reporting abusive behavior at work. Even when reported, employers often fail to respond or mishandle the situation by accepting the behavior as a leadership style.

Bullying behavior may include:

- False accusations of errors or spreading rumors.
- Harsh criticism or derogatory comments.
- Social exclusion or isolation.
- Racial or sexual harassment.
- Forced to do work not included in the job description.
- Withholding information needed to perform the work.
- Deliberately changing work location to cause an inconvenience.
- Different standards that favor other employees.
- Blacklisting from promotions or employment opportunities.

These high stress behaviors can have toxic effects on a person's physical or mental health. More than half of those experiencing bullying lose work time worrying and avoiding the offender and report declines in their performance.

Approximately two out of every five people have been bullied at work. Bullying can occur between co-workers or an employee and a supervisor.



### The **EMPLOYEE'S** Actions

Whether you are a target or an observer of bullying, here are steps you can take to address it.

- Acknowledge there is a problem—Calling bullying what it is can be a validating experience.
- Document the behavior—Keep a record of the behavior with specific examples to support your claims.
- Strategize—Take time to research workplace policies, state and federal laws, and consulting with internal or external resources.
- Take action—Calmly, yet firmly, tell the individual you do not want to be bullied and ask that the behavior stop.
- Focus on healing and support—Seek assistance from your employee assistance, medical, mental-health, or legal professionals.



### The **EMPLOYER'S** Actions

If you know your workplace environment is unhealthy, here are steps you can take to make it better.

- Review data and current policies—Examine employee satisfaction, turnover rates, core organizational values, and policies on bullying.
- Open a dialogue with employees—Create a safe, open atmosphere where employees can discuss their concerns and wants through anonymous surveys or discussions.
- Take action—Determine what needs to be changed, whether it's improved policies or enforcement of a zero tolerance on any toxic behavior.
- Adjust and be flexible—Be open to continued feedback from employees on policies and practices addressing bullying.



Office of Employee and Organization Development

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