

# Bullying in the Workplace:

A handbook for the workplace



First Edition

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ISBN: 1-894878-71-X  
Product Number: RVIOE528  
First Edition: March 2009

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# Bullying in the Workplace:

## A Handbook for the Workplace

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### Preface

The Ontario Safety Association for Community and Healthcare (OSACH) supports the prevention and reduction of workplace injuries and occupational diseases in Ontario's health care sector by assisting organizations to adopt preventive best practices and approaches. The purpose of this booklet is to raise awareness of the prevalence and effects of bullying in the workplace, and to provide the employer, supervisor, co-workers and victims with suggestions to prevent and/or minimize any negative effects.

OSACH is a non-profit organization designated as the Safe Workplace Association for the health care sector under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997. Our vision is to lead Ontario's community and health care workplaces to be the healthiest and safest through innovative solutions.

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Development of this handbook made possible through funding provided by the  
Ministry of Health and Long Term Care.

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# Bullying in the Workplace: A Handbook for the Workplace

## Introduction

Violence in the workplace is a growing issue in the healthcare and community care sector. The literature recognizes four types of workplace violence:

- **Type I (Criminal Intent):** The perpetrator has no relationship to the worker or the workplace
- **Type II (Client or Customer):** The perpetrator is a client at the workplace who becomes violent toward a worker or another client
- **Type III (Worker-to-worker):** The perpetrator is an employee or past employee of the workplace
- **Type IV (Personal Relationship):** The perpetrator has a personal relationship with an employee or a client, e.g., domestic violence in the workplace

Although other types of violence receive more media attention, workplace bullying (type III, worker-to-worker violence) has increasingly been the focus of researchers, employers, unions and health and safety professionals. Healthcare and community care organizations need new tools to improve their violence-prevention strategies including methods to address workplace bullying.

Prevention of violence between staff members requires different management mechanisms, including anti-harassment policies, grievance and disciplinary procedures, education and training, and regular assessment and review of staff. It is important to clearly define the term “workplace violence”, or “occupational violence”, for several reasons:

- Staff, management and the public may not recognize certain non-physical acts (such as verbal abuse) as a type of violence
- This type of violence may precede physical violence
- A clear definition may encourage reporting
- Identifying bullying as an issue may encourage action to prevent violence

(Accreditation Canada 2008)

This booklet provides practical suggestions for the employer, supervisor and worker to participate in the reduction of bullying in the workplace. It outlines:

- The effects of bullying in the workplace on the organization and workers
- Recognizing the signs of bullying and why it happens
- Roles of the employer, supervisor and employees in recognizing and preventing bullying
- Tools to assist the victim, co-workers, supervisors and the employer to recognize, assess and control bullying in the workplace

## What is Bullying?

**Bullying may also be known as mobbing, abuse, workplace aggression, horizontal or lateral violence, victimization and social undermining.**

It is important to distinguish between normal worker conflict and workplace bullying. Bullying is defined as repeated, persistent, continuous behaviour as opposed to a single negative act and is generally associated with a power imbalance between the victim and perpetrator, where the victim feels inferior (Salin 2003). This could be nurse to student, senior nurse to junior nurse, supervisor to employee, etc.

**Under the Criminal Code of Canada, assault is a criminal offence. Employers and employees have the right to call the police to investigate and lay charges when an employee has been assaulted in the workplace.**

**An assault includes physical violence, attempts or threats to use force (including gestures that imply a serious threat), stalking or conduct that causes that other person to fear for their safety or the safety of anyone known to them.**

Bullying should not be confused with tough management styles. It is negative and persistent abuse. The following are examples of workplace bullying behaviours:

- Social isolation (silent treatment)
- Rumours
- Personal attack of a person's private life and/or personal attributes
- Excessive or unjustified criticism
- Over-monitoring of work
- Verbal aggression
- Withholding information

- Withholding job responsibility
- Trivial fault finding
- Replacing proper work with demeaning jobs
- Setting unrealistic goals or deadlines

(Salin 2003; Rowell 2005)

Bullying is usually seen as acts or verbal comments that could “mentally” hurt or isolate a person in the workplace. Sometimes, bullying can also involve negative physical contact (e.g., pushing, throwing objects).

## Prevalence

Bullying, which is increasing in the health and community care sector, happens four times more often than sexual harassment (Rowell 2005). In fact, bullying has been implicated as the most concerning form of violence experienced by nurses. As nurses account for about 77 per cent of the healthcare workforce, bullying may impact the current recruitment and retention crisis in the nursing workforce. Recent research in the area of nurse burnout suggests that our shrinking healthcare resources, restructuring and stressful work environments are contributing to the prevalence of workplace bullying. Nurses experiencing a higher rate of burnout are more likely to abuse other nurses and are seen as a major source of verbal aggression in the workplace, a position formerly held by physicians (Rowe & Sherlock 2005). There are few Canadian statistics on workplace bullying, however in the United States surveys suggest that 37 per cent of workers have been bullied at work, and 45 per cent of the targets reported stress levels that affected their health (U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey: September, 2007). In the healthcare sector, studies show as many as 17 per cent of staff reporting workplace bullying in the previous year, and fully 33 per cent of nurses experiencing it in their first year of practice (Sweet 2005).

**Anti-bullying legislation is now active in nine US states.**

## Recognizing Bullying

Bullying in the workplace is often associated with poor management styles and/or lack of presence of management in a department or unit. Managers need to be aware of the impact that bullying has on the staff, clients and organization. It is important to be aware of potential signs and symptoms associated with bullying in a workplace.

Signs and symptoms may include:

- Grievances by employees against their manager
- Declining work performance of dedicated and hard-working employees
- Increased stress and tensions between staff in a unit
- Poor morale
- Reported fear of a co-worker by other workers
- Individual symptoms of depression
- Increased absenteeism in a department/unit

(Hutchison et al. 2005; Rowell 2005)

Managers who tolerate bullying behaviour pay a high price related to the costs resulting from these signs and symptoms and staff turnover (Rowell 2005).

Managers may unwittingly encourage bullying by:

**Organizations perpetuate the problem by not taking action when verbal abuse occurs (Sofield & Salmond 2003).**

- Pitting workers against each other or emphasizing a competitive work style
- Having a lax management style (employees must determine what is acceptable and what is not)
- Making unreasonable demands and goals of employees and managers
- Failing to give supervisors the authority to reprimand problem workers
- Setting impossible deadlines or providing insufficient funding to accomplish a goal

(Workplace Bullying Institute 2007)

Managers can complete a culture assessment like the one following to assess the degree of bullying at the workplace.

**How does your commitment to building a culture of dignity in the workplace shape up?** Managers can complete the following self-assessment questionnaire to help identify the areas requiring further work in building your organization's culture of dignity and respect.

**Characteristic or behaviour** Please complete the questionnaire honestly.

<b>People focus</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>Always</b>
Do you give people personal responsibility?			
Do you actively seek out the views of others?			
Are you committed to team development?			
Do you instill confidence in others?			
Do you encourage open feedback and debate?			
<b>Personal integrity</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>Always</b>
Do you do what you say you'll do?			
Do you show respect to everyone?			
Can you say sorry when you've made a mistake?			
Are you open and honest about your mistakes and do you learn from them?			
Are you fair in all your dealings with others?			
<b>Visibility</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>Always</b>
Do you actively promote an open door approach?			
Do you champion a culture of respect and dignity?			
Are you available to listen to the views of others?			

*continued on next page*

<b>Visibility (Continued)</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>Always</b>
Are you prepared to talk to customers and clients about the need for respect and dignity at work?			
Have you put building a culture of dignity and respect on your main agenda?			
<b>Promoting standards</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>Always</b>
Do you establish individual and team goals?			
Do you give personal recognition to others?			
Do you use feedback and coaching constructively?			
Do you schedule regular time for improving interpersonal relationships?			
Are you constantly looking for opportunities for improvement?			
<b>Challenging the status quo</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>Always</b>
Do you openly challenge unacceptable behaviour?			
Do you seek out prejudiced attitudes?			
Do you critically examine policies and procedures to make sure they're fair to everyone?			
<b>How did you do?</b> Add up the ticks in each column			
<b>Now multiply each column total by the appropriate weighting factor</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>
Total score (Maximum total score possible 125)			

**If you scored:**

- 0–50** You don't yet understand what is needed to create a culture of dignity and respect
- 51–75** You have some awareness of requirements but significant effort is still needed
- 76–100** You have reasonable skills in creating a culture of dignity and respect
- 101–125** You have excellent skills in creating a culture of dignity and respect

Now ask your team to complete the questionnaire anonymously and see how they rate you.

Adapted from: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development Website, [www.cipd.co.uk](http://www.cipd.co.uk)

## Profile of the Bully

Characteristics of those who bully include low-self esteem, poor communication skills, unresolved work issues from earlier in their career and the belief they have the right to inflict controlling and abusive behaviours onto others. They often are viewed as charmers and may be well liked by their supervisors.

They often bully to cover up their own insecurities and weaknesses. According to Rowell (2005), 81 per cent of bullies are managers, 4 per cent are peers, and five per cent are lower-ranking staff.

Those who bully have psychological issues that have accumulated over time and are carried throughout their life. Bullying occurs over and over again by these individuals because the organization either ignores their behaviour or does not know how to deal with the issues and enforce organizational policies and procedures related to acceptable behaviours.

Sometimes it's difficult to know if you are being bullied. Complete the self-test to find out.

## Self-test: Are You Being Bullied?

Consider each of the questions in the self-test below, then circle the appropriate number to indicate how often the described behaviour happens.

Does the person you're having trouble with:	Never	Not Often	Often	Almost Always /Always
1 Ignore you, not say hello when you greet them, not return phone calls or emails?	0	0	1	2
2 Dismiss what you're saying or "put you down" while alone or in the presence of others?	0	1	2	3
3 Sabotage you or make you look foolish, such as by "forgetting" to tell you about a meeting or, if the person is your boss, set you up to fail by placing impossible demands on you?	0	2	3	4
4 Spread rumours, lies and half-truths about you?	0	2	3	4
5 Frequently act impatient with you, treating you like you're incompetent?	0	1	2	3
6 Blame and criticize you?	0	1	2	3
7 Try to intimidate you by interrupting, contradicting and glaring at you and giving you the silent treatment?	0	1	2	3
8 Tease, ridicule, insult or play tricks on you, especially in front of others?	0	2	3	4
9 Always insist on getting their own way and never apologize?	0	1	2	3
10 Yell, point their finger, swear, insult or threaten you or call you names?	0	2	3	4
<b>Total score =</b>				

Add up the numbers to get your total score. There is a possible total score of 33.

If your score is 5 or below, it doesn't look like you're being bullied. If your score is between 6 and 19, there are indications of bullying behaviour. Naturally, the higher the score, the more pronounced the behaviour. If your score is 20 or above, you are definitely being bullied. As scores increase beyond 20, the severity of the bullying is escalating.

<http://www.bullyfreetwork.com>

**If you completed the self-test but are still not sure if you are being bullied, consider the body language of the potential bully.**

A bully in the workplace also uses body language to express his/herself. Body language is a powerful tool you can watch to determine whether you have a bully in the workplace. It often communicates a person's attitude more forcefully than words.

If you're uncertain about whether or not you're being bullied, look for these body language signals:

- **Eyes:** narrowed or very wide. Some people report they can see "coldness" in the eyes of a hostile person.
- **Eye contact:** little or none. You may notice that the bully maintains eye contact with others but not with you. That is a sign that you're not important to them or that they want to make sure you know you're not important/worthy of notice.
- **Mouth:** a sneer or a cocky smile. A person who values others shows sincerity in their smile.
- **Arms:** crossed over chest. This gesture says, "I'm closed to anything you have to say."
- **Body:** turned away from you. A person who is giving you their full attention turns their body toward you.
- **Gestures:** aggressive. Is the bully stabbing the air to make a point, turning away from you before you finish, pointing at you or pounding the desk? These gestures are dead giveaways that a bully is on the loose.

<http://www.bullyfreetwork.com>

## Profile of the Victim

**Women are targeted by bullies more frequently than men, especially by other women (Workplace Bullying Institute 2007).**

Often the victim is a hard-working employee, dedicated to his/her work and liked by others. These individuals are perceived to be threats to the bully. They are competent, popular and vulnerable (need the job, minority, undergoing personal stress, suffering an illness, etc.).

## Effect on Workers and the Organization

There is growing evidence that exposure to bullying in the workplace has serious negative outcomes, not only for the victim but also for the organization, workplace colleagues and the victim's family members.

The **victim** may experience:

**One-third of those reporting a distressing incident considered leaving nursing as a result (Sweet 2005).**

- Lower levels of job satisfaction
- Psychosomatic symptoms and physical illness (stress, anxiety, sleeplessness, fatigue, frequent colds, coughs, back pain, chest

pains and angina, high blood pressure, headaches and migraines, sweating, palpitations, etc.)

- Post-traumatic stress
- Mental illness – depression
- Permanent disability

(Hutchison et al. 2005; Sofield & Salmond 2003)

### **What are the effects of bullying on my health?**

Bullying causes injury to health and makes you ill. How many of these symptoms do you have?

- Constant high levels of stress and anxiety
- Frequent illness such as viral infections, especially flu and glandular fever, colds, coughs, chest, ear, nose and throat infections (stress plays havoc with your immune system)
- Aches and pains in the joints and muscles with no obvious cause; chronic back pain with no obvious cause that won't respond to treatment
- Headaches and migraines
- Tiredness, exhaustion, constant fatigue
- Sleeplessness, nightmares, waking early, waking up more tired than when you went to bed
- Flashbacks and replays, obsessiveness, can't get the bullying out of your mind
- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Skin problems such as eczema, psoriasis, athlete's foot, ulcers, shingles, rashes
- Poor concentration, inability to concentrate on anything for long
- Bad or intermittently functioning memory, forgetfulness, especially with trivial day-to-day things
- Sweating, trembling, shaking, palpitations, panic attacks
- Tearfulness, bursting into tears regularly and over trivial things
- Uncharacteristic irritability and angry outbursts
- Hypervigilance (feels like but is not paranoia), being constantly on edge
- Hypersensitivity, fragility, isolation, withdrawal
- Reactive depression, a feeling of sorrow, lethargy, hopelessness, anger, futility and more
- Shattered self-confidence, low self-worth, low self-esteem, loss of self-love, etc.

(UK National Workplace Bullying Advice,

<http://www.bullyonline.org/workbully/amibeing.htm>)

The **organizational** effects might include:

**Nearly half of respondents in a survey of healthcare staff in the US experienced intimidation that affected the way they handled medication orders (Rowell, 2005).**

- High turnover and intent to leave the organization; high recruitment costs
- High absenteeism rates
- Reduced efficiency and productivity due to poor staff morale
- High rates of injuries and illness
- Increased short- and long-term disability costs
- Increased employee assistance program (EAP) costs
- Increased WSIB costs
- Decreased commitment to the organization
- Decreased productivity
- Higher levels of client dissatisfaction
- Decreased organization image
- Legal action

(Hutchison et al. 2005; Rowell 2005)

## Explaining the Occurrence of Workplace Bullying

There are multiple causes of workplace bullying. The main causes described in the literature are the personality traits of the perpetrators and victims, and the organizational environment and culture. It often occurs when there is organizational change (Hutchinson et al. 2005). It has been suggested that bullying is more prevalent in the healthcare sector because nurses are an oppressed group who will continue to feel powerless to bring about change until this cycle is broken (Stanley et al. 2007).

The Registered Nurses Association of Ontario lists the following as potential causes of bullying related to physicians and nurses:

Physicians:

- Power differentials between physicians and nurses
- Lower status associated with the female-dominated nursing profession as compared to the historically male medical profession
- A higher value that society has granted to the medical profession compared to the nursing profession

Nurses:

- Nurses, like other oppressed groups, often feel a lack of control; attempts to gain control may take the form of intimidation or abuse of nurses by nurses
- Racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination among nurses are expressed through verbal abuse and put-downs from nursing colleagues
- Stress caused by higher patient acuity, nursing shortages and organizational and staffing changes leads to burnout and creates a climate for nurses to abuse other nurses

It is clear from the literature that for workplace bullying to occur, certain conditions must exist. Bullying does not happen unless it is possible, beneficial and triggered. It is the interaction between these conditions that can potentially result in workplace bullying. Salin (2003) describes these conditions as “structures”. They are:

### 1. Enabling Structures

- Factors that set the foundation for bullying:
  - i. Perceived power imbalance between the victim and perpetrator.
  - ii. Low perceived costs for the perpetrator – no or little risk of being reprimanded. Two factors associated with this are leadership style and organizational culture. Some organizations, even though they have policies for discrimination/harassment, fail to enforce them due to lack of either education in how to do that or time to monitor the behaviours of their staff.
  - iii. Frustration and dissatisfaction with the work environment. This can include perceived lack of control over one’s job; role conflict; and environmental conditions such as noise, over-crowding and high level of stress on the job.

## 2. Motivational Structures

- These are the conditions that encourage persons to harass others. Examples include reward systems within the organization (e.g., an individual who is promoted despite having bullied another), sabotaging the work of others for financial gain, performance evaluations based on quantitative measures where one may bully another in order to meet their own performance requirements.

## 3. Precipitating Structures

- These are organizational triggers that can precipitate bullying. Examples include downsizing, organizational change and changes in the management or composition of the work group.

## Tips for Preventing Workplace Bullying and Creating a Respectful Work Environment

The Occupational Health and Safety Act encourages all workplace parties to assist in the prevention of work-related injuries and illnesses. Below are some tips outlining how each of these parties can participate in the prevention of bullying in the workplace.

**Bill 29, an act to amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act to protect workers from harassment and violence in the workplace, is under consideration in the Ontario legislature. Among other measures, this private member's bill would expand the definitions of "workplace-related harassment or violence" to include health-impairing mistreatment.**

## Employees

### What to do if you are bullied at work

1. Learn more about bullying – information is power. Check out some of the information in the resources list at the end of this booklet.

2. Don't ignore the behaviour. Remember, the statistics show that you are not alone.
3. Get help/support. Tell others you trust. Do you have friends, relatives, a union, co-workers or another group who are truly understanding and supportive? Do you have an EAP, counsellor or physician you can speak to?
4. Document every incident. Start a diary/journal and enter events after they occur or each night. Include the date (and time if relevant), who was present, what happened and how you felt.
5. Address the situation with the bully if you feel comfortable and safe. Let them know that their behaviour is unacceptable. Stay calm; be polite and direct.
6. Be willing to examine your own behaviour/feelings.
7. Report the incident to your manager or human resources.

(Sofield & Salmond 2003; Massachusetts Nurses Association 2008; RCN 2005; [www.nobullyforme.ca](http://www.nobullyforme.ca))

## If you are confronted – know some bully-proof responses

Train yourself to listen critically to a bully. When you hear words of attack (criticism, blame or self-justification), fall back on the following responses. Very simply, excuse yourself with one of these bully-proof responses and walk away.

- Excuse me, I have a meeting to go to.
- I have something I have to attend to. I'll get back with you later.
- Pardon me, I was just heading out. Can we talk tomorrow?
- Let's talk later (this afternoon). I have something that can't wait.
- (Non-defensively) Do you think so? Maybe you're right.
- I don't agree, but I'm sure we can talk about this another time.

## Providing defence skills – 10 steps you can take to prevent bullying

1. Deflect the bully if you can (see “If you are confronted, above”). Remain calm, stand firm, and try to keep up a confident appearance. Keep a detailed record of every incident; you will need it as proof if you decide to make a complaint.
2. Check your job description. If you suddenly find yourself being set menial tasks, or are given an increased workload with shorter deadlines, you can do something about it if those conditions contravene your contract.
3. Try to get witnesses to bullying incidents, and avoid situations where you are alone with the bully.
4. Get advice from your trade union or from personnel and health and safety officers at work. Does your employer have a policy on harassment or against unacceptable behaviour?
5. Take a stress management course and/or assertiveness training. They are good for your general health, and may help you in the future.
6. If you go ahead with a complaint, state the facts clearly.
7. Get emotional support from your family and friends, talk to them about how you are feeling. Ask your physician about counselling.
8. If you decide to leave your job because of the bullying, let your company know exactly why you are resigning. It may help others in the future.
9. If you wish to pursue a legal claim against your employer, start by taking advice from your union.
10. Know there are many forms of legal action that may be possible, including industrial tribunals, civil claims for personal injury and sometimes even criminal action.

(Adapted from: UK National Workplace Bullying Advice,  
<http://www.bullyonline.org>)

## What Co-workers Can and Should Do

*“He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it” – Martin Luther King*

1. Stand by a bullied co-worker immediately after an attack. Go up to her or him immediately after a closed-door session that leaves your co-worker obviously beaten.
2. Refuse to betray your co-worker when the bully boss tells you to. This is the “divide and conquer” game. Siding with the bully brings short-term immunity but at what ethical cost? How can you have integrity if you stand by and watch a co-worker being mistreated?
3. Sit in on meetings with the bullying manager as a witness, a representative. Witnesses can temper the most outrageous bullies because they are careful to not show their tactics in public for fear of exposure.
4. Provide testimony at hearings, arbitrations and mediation sessions. This can be as simple as a written statement or in-person testimony. (Of course, this carries the risk of retaliation by the bully. But if the workplace is that fear-laden, the outcome you fear most is no worse than your current reality.)
5. Gather the group when a co-worker is being bullied (even if behind closed doors) and invoke what operating room nurses call Code Pink. Circle the bully as a unified group. Tell her or him to stop; make it clear that the outrageous tactics are unacceptable and unprofessional. Threaten to stop all productive work if the bully does not stop attacking that targeted person or attempts to attack anyone else in the group

(Adapted from: <http://bullyinginstitute.org/education/bbstudies/coworkers.html>)

## Supervisors

**The employer and supervisor have a general duty to protect workers from hazards (OHS s. 25 & 27). This duty can apply to sources of potential harm to both physical and mental health.**

- Enforce anti-discrimination/harassment policies
- Attend education/training sessions on how to effectively deal with bullying
  - Consult with your human resources professionals as required
  - Provide staff with regular education/training in harassment/discrimination policies
  - Provide education sessions on workplace bullying to raise awareness and understanding
- Encourage staff to report bullying
- Take all complaints seriously and ensure a thorough investigation is completed
- Investigate all complaints promptly
- Monitor staff behaviours and deal with inappropriate behaviours promptly
- Ensure staff who have bullied others receive counselling
- Provide support to staff and make appropriate referrals as required
- Employ fair, equitable and transparent management practices
- Design creative strategies to improve staff morale
- Involve all staff in decision-making where possible

## Employer

- Ensure the commitment of senior leadership
- Create a culture with standards and values against bullying
- Develop and implement anti-discrimination/harassment policies in collaboration with the JHSC, unions and front-line staff. The policy should clearly outline acceptable and non-acceptable behaviours. There should be a zero-tolerance approach to all forms of bullying (see *Workplace Bullying Policy*)

- Conduct a needs assessment through a workplace survey to understand organizational attitudes and practices
- Develop and implement reporting and investigation processes. The employer must also ensure that there is a reporting procedure in place for employees to report their supervisors. This is often accomplished by appointing a delegate in the human resource department
- Develop a conflict resolution process
- Train supervisors and managers in how to enforce the policy and deal with complaints and situations
- Provide a support system for staff
- Ensure that education in bullying and in discrimination/harassment policies are included in orientation of new staff (*see What to Include in Educational Programs*)

**The Ontario *Human Rights Code* states that it is public policy in Ontario to recognize the dignity and worth of every person and to provide equal rights and opportunities without discrimination.**

## Recognizing and Removing the Risks of Workplace Bullying

Workplace bullying should be managed like any other occupational health and safety hazard. Once workplace bullying is identified, the degree of risk should be assessed and the risk controlled and reviewed to ensure that it does not become, or continue to be, a problem within the workplace.

An assessment of the risks within a workplace should also consider those to the employer if workplace bullying is not appropriately dealt with. By using a four-step process, employers should be able to minimize the direct and indirect costs associated with bullying in their workplace and ensure that the health, safety and welfare of staff and associated people are not compromised.

## Step 1 – Identifying the Hazard

The first step in the process is establishing whether workplace bullying actually exists, or whether there is a potential for bullying to occur in the workplace at some point in the future.

The onus is upon the employer to actively take reasonable steps to help identify whether workplace bullying exists, or has the potential to exist. It is recommended that employers:

- Consider the work required and work procedures to determine if there are factors in the workplace that make it more likely that bullying can occur
- Focus on the systems of work rather than on the individuals
- Conduct a survey of employees on the issues of workplace bullying
- Monitor patterns of absenteeism, sick leave, staff turnover, grievances, injury reports and other such records to establish any regular patterns or sudden unexplained changes
- Monitor deterioration in workplace relationships between employees, clients or managers
- Monitor feedback from exit interviews or feedback given directly from managers/supervisors or any other internal or external party

This identification checklist has been developed to assist employers, health and safety representatives and joint health and safety committees to assess whether or not there is a potential for bullying behaviour occurring in the workplace.

	YES	NO
Do you have workplace procedures and reporting procedures in place relating to workplace bullying?		
Have you established and promoted expectations for appropriate behaviour?		
Are employees made aware of workplace bullying procedures, their specific roles and responsibilities and appropriate behaviours concerning workplace bullying?		

<i>(continued)</i>	YES	NO
Is there a clear process or procedure for dealing with and resolving conflict and aggression within the workplace?		
Are your employees aware of the Human Rights Code, in particular its provisions that acts of discrimination or harassment are unlawful and will not be condoned in the workplace?		

If you have answered 'No' to any of the above questions, you may need to conduct a risk assessment of your workplace and develop the appropriate policies and procedures.

	YES	NO
Have grievances or complaints previously been raised by employees concerning workplace bullying?		
Do absenteeism or sickness rates or patterns suggest that workplace bullying may be an issue in the workplace?		
Are blatant incidents or acts of workplace bullying that a reasonable person would consider inappropriate – such as the initiation of new employees, offensive literature, pictures or behaviour, etc. – condoned or accepted in the workplace?		
Are there unusual levels of staff turnover or requests for transfer that may be attributed to incidents or acts of workplace bullying?		

If you have answered 'Yes' to any of the above questions, you may need to conduct a risk assessment of your workplace.

(Adapted from:

<http://www.stopbullyingsa.com.au/documents/checklist.pdf>)

## Step 2 – Assessing the Risk Factors

The second step involves determining, in consultation with those affected, the specific behaviours and circumstances that may result in incidents of workplace bullying, and assessing the likelihood of these behaviours affecting the health, safety and welfare of employees.

Employers should check whether the following situations are occurring, or have been identified through the process undertaken in Step 1:

- Repeated and unjustified criticism that is targeted at an individual or individuals, rather than at work performance
- Threats of punishment for no justifiable reason
- Overloading a particular person with too much work or an unreasonable share of unpleasant jobs
- Unwarranted or unjustified constant checking of an employee's work quality, output or whereabouts
- Humiliating a person through criticism, sarcasm and/or insults, especially in front of other staff, customers or clients
- Denying opportunities for training, promotion, interesting jobs or assignments
- Deliberately withholding information necessary for a person to be able to perform work to the required standard
- Sabotaging a particular person's work
- Excluding a particular person from workplace social events
- Spreading gossip or false rumor about a particular person
- Dangerous practical jokes or forms of ritual humiliation, including initiations

## Step 3 – Controlling the Risk Factors

The third step involves developing and implementing strategies and plans to minimize and control the risks relating to workplace bullying. It is recommended that these include:

- Developing a Workplace Bullying Policy
- Developing an outline of acceptable and non-acceptable behaviours including a zero-tolerance approach to all forms of bullying

- Defining bullying as psychological abuse that is destructive and totally unacceptable
- Establishing consequences for failing to comply with expectations of appropriate behaviour
- Establishing a reporting procedure, or naming a delegate in the human resource department, to allow employees to report their supervisors
- Developing a complaint handling and investigation procedure for all reported incidents
- Providing training, education, information and awareness for all employees on workplace bullying
- Establishing guidelines for managing disruptive physician behaviour (Accreditation Canada 2008)
- Ensuring that managers (and persons of responsibility) are aware of the responsibilities they have to assist the employer in complying with their obligations
- Communicating what support services are available to staff – both the victim and the perpetrator (the organization’s EAP, medical attention as required, etc.)
- Providing clear job descriptions that include an outline of the specific roles and responsibilities for each position within the workplace
- Keeping statistical records and information relating to productivity, absenteeism, grievances, work-related injuries, customer complaints, disciplinary actions, etc.

## Workplace Bullying Policy

Some organizations choose to include workplace bullying within the violence prevention policy, while others may develop a separate policy. The choice depends on the organization, but a zero-tolerance stance should be adopted for any type of violent behaviour, including bullying.

## Sample Workplace Bullying Policy

Adapted from the Commission of Occupational Safety and Health,  
Government of Western Australia,  
[http://www.worksafe.wa.gov.au/newsite/worksafe/media/  
Guide\\_bullying\\_emplo.pdf](http://www.worksafe.wa.gov.au/newsite/worksafe/media/Guide_bullying_emplo.pdf)

*Company X* considers workplace bullying unacceptable and will not tolerate it in any circumstances.

Workplace bullying is behaviour that harms, intimidates, offends, degrades or humiliates an employee, possibly in front of other employees, clients or customers. Workplace bullying may cause the loss of trained and talented employees, reduce productivity and morale and create legal risks.

*Company X* believes all employees should be able to work in an environment free of bullying. Managers and supervisors must ensure employees are not bullied.

*Company X* has grievance and investigation procedures to deal with workplace bullying. Any reports of workplace bullying will be treated seriously and investigated promptly, confidentially and impartially.

*Company X* encourages all employees to report workplace bullying. Managers and supervisors must ensure employees who make complaints, or witnesses, are not victimized.

Disciplinary action will be taken against anyone who bullies a co-employee. Discipline may involve a warning, transfer, counselling, demotion or dismissal, depending on the circumstances.

The contact person for bullying at this workplace is:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

## Developing a Complete Complaint Resolution Process

A complaint resolution process is designed to remove the risks of bullying behaviour at work by implementing a planned and systematic approach to the management of this workplace hazard. It is important that all employees are made aware that a procedure exists in the event that they experience bullying behaviour at work. It is useful to provide a number of resolution options to employees that range from taking action personally to lodging either an informal or formal complaint.

### Personal Options

An employee may choose to speak to the perpetrator on their own. They should be advised to keep a record of that conversation. Information and advice should be available from the following people:

- H&S representative
- Human resource manager
- Union representative
- Manager
- Professional counselor

### Informal Resolution Process

An informal resolution process aims to ensure that the bullying incident is resolved as quickly as possible. This can usually achieve a more timely and satisfactory resolution for both parties. No investigation or disciplinary action should be taken as a result of an informal complaint. Rather, a no-blame, conciliatory approach should be used to assist the individuals in reaching an outcome that will ensure appropriate conduct in the future. The main focus is to return the individuals to productive work without further interruption.

A manager or another person in the workplace may conciliate the matter if they have the skills and it is appropriate for them to do so, or you may arrange for professional intervention. It is important that the employee can trust and respect the conciliator.

**Managers and supervisors can use this tool to** determine whether the “suspect” in the workplace would qualify as a “bully”.

Check if Yes	Observed behaviour
<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Blames others for “errors”
<input type="checkbox"/>	2. Yells and screams
<input type="checkbox"/>	3. Makes unreasonable job demands
<input type="checkbox"/>	4. Frequently lies to others
<input type="checkbox"/>	5. Insults and puts down others
<input type="checkbox"/>	6. Criticizes others’ abilities
<input type="checkbox"/>	7. Discounts and/or denies others’ accomplishments
<input type="checkbox"/>	8. Steals credit from others
<input type="checkbox"/>	9. Threatens others’ jobs
<input type="checkbox"/>	10. Starts rumours to harm others

**One or two check marks:**

Not a huge worry. Some of the symptoms listed above are typical indicators of a stressful work environment.

**More than two check marks:**

Several of these behaviours observed in an individual, as well as in a consistent trend, are cause to look more closely.

(From: <http://bullyfreework.com>)

## Formal Investigation Procedure

It is important that employees clearly understand what to expect from making a formal complaint. For example, you may wish to inform employees that:

- The investigation procedures will adhere to natural justice principles and ensure fairness for all concerned
- An investigation will occur as soon as possible after the complaint is received
- It will be conducted by an impartial person who can carry it out without hindrance

A formal process usually has the following steps:

- Lodging the Complaint – The complaint should be in writing with specific allegations including dates, times and names of any witnesses.
- Initial Response – Arrange for an appropriate senior manager to meet separately with both parties as soon as possible and explain the formal process and their rights and responsibilities.
- Appointment of an Investigator – Arrange for an independent or impartial investigator to look into the complaint.
- The Investigation – The investigator should contact the alleged bully in writing and notify them about the details of the complaint. The investigator should then interview the alleged bully. If the accused person admits to the behaviour, the matter can be referred back to the employer for appropriate action. This may include disciplinary procedures or referral to support services – for example, anger management counselling. If the alleged bully disputes the allegation, further investigation should be carried out in an attempt to determine the facts. This will include meeting with the complainant and available witnesses.
- Findings – The investigator should provide the employer with a written report on the findings of the investigation. The employer should then meet with both parties individually to explain to them the findings of the investigation as well as notifying them in writing. If the allegation cannot be substantiated, this does not necessarily mean the bullying did not occur. Employers need to identify what can be done to assist the individuals to return to a working relationship.
- Appeal – Provide mechanisms to enable the parties to appeal against the decision if they consider this warranted.
- Access to Counselling and/or Rehabilitation – This should be provided for:
  - The complainant, to assist him or her to find coping strategies to deal with the alleged bully while the matter is being resolved

**Less than 30 per cent of nurses who have experienced bullying and harassment were satisfied with their employer's handling of the situation (Sweet 2005).**

- The alleged bully, to enable him or her to recognize and change their behaviour
- Any affected work team member
- Review – Ensure the resolutions and the continuing well-being and behaviour of all parties are reviewed with the complainant and alleged bully for a period of time following resolution to ensure your actions to stop the bullying have been effective.

(Adapted from: <http://www.stopbullyingsa.com.au/develop.asp>)

## What to Include in Educational Programs

**Health Care and Residential Facilities Regulation (s. 8 & 9) requires that employers establish written measures and procedures for the health and safety of workers, revise them at least annually in consultation with the joint health and safety committee, and provide training and educational programs in health and safety measures relevant to the employees work.**

- Organizational policies and procedures
- Training for supervisors and managers on how to enforce the policy, investigate reports and deal with complaints and situations. Ensure that they do not confuse the person with their conduct and instead know to instruct the perpetrator that the behaviour itself must stop
- How to confront unacceptable behaviour
- Conflict resolution, communication skills or assertiveness training
- Information on bullying, including definitions, legislation, effects on the workplace and workers, profile of bullies and victims
- Signs of bullying in an organization, department and individual
- How to report bullying
- How and where to obtain support
- The importance of documenting the episode

Bullying poses a great risk to the mental and physical health of nurses, which can lead to deterioration of patient care. Only when employers, staff and clients take incidents of bullying seriously by will these risks be removed from the health sector workplace (International Council of Nurses 2007).

### **Understanding why co-workers may not stand up for themselves**

The reasons people don't assert their right not to be bullied are complex, as the following list of potential scenarios shows:

- The target of bullying has been disempowered through isolation and exclusion
- The bully is constantly threatening and intimidating the target and co-workers
- They are frightened to assert their rights
- The target now has artificially high levels of shame, embarrassment, fear and guilt – all stimulated by the bully
- The target feels bewildered, often cannot believe what is happening and feels responsible in some way, as evidenced by the nagging thoughts, "Why me?" and, "Why did I let it happen to me?"
- The target fears for loss of their job
- The target fears they will be unable to obtain a reference
- There is no law against bullying, and the laws that do exist are difficult to apply to bullying
- The target may be suffering a severe psychiatric injury, is traumatized and unable to articulate their circumstances – while the bully remains glib and plausible
- The target has no knowledge of serial bullies, sociopaths, etc., and no experience of dealing with these characters
- There's a lack of knowledge about bullying
- The target fears that no one will believe them
- Bullies are encouraged and rewarded, often by promotion
- In many cases unions are unhelpful and may be part of the problem
- The target doesn't want to have 'stress' noted on their health record
- The target doesn't want to get others into trouble and is reluctant to initiate a grievance against a fellow human being
- If another manager handles the grievance, he or she may be connected with the bully in some way

(Adapted from: UK National Workplace Bullying Advice, <http://www.bullyonline.org/workbully/amibeing.htm> and Stop Bullying in South Australia, <http://www.stopbullyingsa.com.au/recognise.asp>)

## Step 4 – Evaluation and Review

The fourth step involves the ongoing review and evaluation of the specific strategies and plans implemented in a workplace to prevent and control workplace bullying. The evaluation and review process should ensure that those strategies are effective.

If you have a health and safety representative or joint health and safety committee, consultation with them should be part of the processes used to develop anti-bullying strategies and the ongoing monitoring and review of the effectiveness of the strategies.

## Putting the Knowledge to Work

The following case study provides an example of how the employer, supervisor and fellow workers might respond to this potential bullying situation.

John is a middle-aged worker struggling to keep abreast of rapid changes at his workplace. His supervisor continuously criticizes him for his work, persistently picks on him in front of others, excludes him from meetings he should attend and often shouts at him for trivial reasons. John is concerned.

The list below outlines possible actions the employer, supervisor or co-workers can take.

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### Employer Response:

- Develop and enforce a zero-tolerance policy
- Offer an employee assistance program for all workers
- Offer training programs for all staff related to workplace bullying
- Educate managers in effective management strategies
- Conduct a culture assessment
- Develop fact sheets and a reporting process for employees
- Be prepared to discipline, retrain, suspend or terminate the perpetrator

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**Supervisor Response: (In this instance this would be the person with authority over John's supervisor)**

- Conduct an assessment of the area if you suspect bullying
- Encourage reporting of all incidents
- Investigate the report of bullying and interview both parties
- Provide support and inform John of resources available to him inside and outside the organization
- Review the availability of the employee assistance program with all workers
- Monitor the behaviour (including management practices) in your department for signs of bullying
- Instruct the perpetrator that the behaviour itself must stop

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**Co-worker Response:**

- Spend time with John and offer a listening ear; remind him that bullies are often intimidated by their targets
- Stand by John immediately after an attack to offer support
- Encourage John to document and report the episode and confront the behaviour
- Circle the offending supervisor as a unified group; tell him or her to stop the unacceptable behaviour
- Offer to be in attendance if John must meet with his supervisor
- Offer to be a witness when John is reporting the episodes
- Stand up to the bully and stop gossip about the target

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**Verbal responses John could use if he felt comfortable confronting his supervisor.**

- I don't like shouting. Please lower your voice.
- I don't like it when you put me down in front of my peers.
- It's demeaning when I am told that I am...
- I don't like it when you point your finger at me
- I want to have a good working relationship with you.

## Conclusion

Knowing the prevalence of bullying in the workplace and the costs to the victim, co-workers and the organization, it is necessary to include bullying in a workplace violence prevention plan and immediately address any reports of workplace bullying. The suggestions outlined in this booklet should assist the organization in establishing prevention procedures and developing an education program to raise awareness of bullying in the workplace. While every organization is different, being prepared and having an idea of what your organization can do will minimize the impact of bullying in the workplace.

## Glossary

EAP – employee assistance program

Harassment – “engaging in a course of vexatious comment or conduct that is known or ought reasonably to be known as unwelcome” (Human Rights Code)

Horizontal or lateral violence – violence or aggression among co-workers

OHSA – Occupational Health and Safety Act

RCN – Royal College of Nursing

Verbal abuse – swearing, insults or condescending language

Verbal aggression – aggressive acts that are made verbally (e.g., teasing and name-calling) (Public Health Agency of Canada)

Victimization – occurs when “...a person suffers direct or threatened physical, emotional, and/or financial harm”; can include physical violence, sexual violence, psychological or emotional abuse and neglect (US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

## Resources: Workplace Bullying

A Guide to the Canadian Human Rights Act

[http://www.chrc-ccdp.ca/legislation\\_policies/chra\\_guide\\_lcdp-en.asp](http://www.chrc-ccdp.ca/legislation_policies/chra_guide_lcdp-en.asp)

Anger Management Resource (for bullies)

<http://www.angermanagementresource.com/>

BullyFreeWork

<http://bullyfreework.com>

Bully Free at Work

<http://www.bullyfreeatwork.com>

Bully Online Support Group

<http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/bullyonline/>

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety – general information

<http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/bullying.html>

Canadian Injured Workers Alliance

<http://www.ciwa.ca/>

Canadian Legal Information Institute (CanLII)

<http://www.canlii.org/>

Canada Safety Council – Bullying in the Workplace

<http://www.safety-council.org/info/OSH/bullies.html>

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development

[www.cipd.co.uk](http://www.cipd.co.uk)

Doors of Hope (support information for victims of child and adult abuse, domestic violence, sudden death, school violence, bullying, etc.)

<http://www.doorsofhope.com>

Monster.ca: Workplace Bullying Forum

<http://monster.prospero.com/n/pfx/forum.aspx?webtag=mstworkbully>

Nineveh Support Group (Christian ministry to support victims of bullying)

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Nineveh/>

No Bully For Me

<http://www.nobullyforme.org/>

Ontario Human Rights Code – Policies

<http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/resources/Policies>

Psychological Harassment Information Association

<http://www.psychologicalharassment.com/>

Public Health Agency of Canada:

[http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/dca-dea/pubs/ffc-ief/pdf/ffc\\_aggression.pdf](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/dca-dea/pubs/ffc-ief/pdf/ffc_aggression.pdf)

Stop Bullying in South Australia

<http://www.stopbullyingsa.com.au>

The Commission of Occupational Safety and Health, Government  
of Western Australia

<http://www.worksafe.wa.gov.au>

The Law Society of Canada

<http://www.lsuc.on.ca/>

The Workplace Bullying and Trauma Institute – materials and references

<http://bullyinginstitute.org/>

UK National Workplace Bullying Advice

<http://www.bullyonline.org/workbully/amibeing.htm>

Workplace Bullying – Bullying in the News

<http://workplacebullying.org/press.html>

Workplace Bullying Institute

<http://www.workdoctor.com/>

Workplace Mobbing in Canada

<http://members.shaw.ca/mobbing/mobbingCA/index.htm>

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Ontario Safety Association  
for Community & Healthcare

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ISBN: 1-894878-71-X

Product Number: RVIOE528

First Edition: March 2009

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