

# Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Services

## Bullying



Coventry City Council

[www.coventry.gov.uk/ohsw](http://www.coventry.gov.uk/ohsw)

## Introduction

Society today is fast-moving. This is reflected in the workplace. The competitiveness of modern commercial practice can increase stress levels for everyone.

The diversity of employees with their individual personalities, belief systems and emotional make-up means it is inevitable that there is the potential for conflict. At times this conflict can manifest itself in bullying behaviour.

## What is 'bullying' and how does it show itself?

**“Workplace bullying constitutes offensive treatment through vindictive, cruel, malicious or humiliating attempts to undermine an individual or individuals.”** ('Bullying at Work')

These persistently negative attacks on an individual's personal and professional performance can be unpredictable, irrational and often unseen.

This abuse of power or position can cause such chronic stress and anxiety, that the employee gradually loses belief in themselves, suffering physical ill-health and mental distress as a result.

Bullying shows itself in a number of diverse and sometimes subtle ways:

- Being treated differently
- Constant criticism – often unjustified
- Being undermined – not feeling valued respected or treated with dignity
- Trivial fault finding
- Being ignored, marginalised or ostracised
- Being excluded
- Being belittled, intimidated and humiliated
- Being shouted at, threatened
- Being set unrealistic goals and deadlines

## Who are the victims of bullying?

Bullying can arise at different levels in an organisation as indicated below:

- Manager bullying employee
- Employee bullying manager
- Colleague bullying colleague
- Group of employees bullying manager
- Service users bullying employee
- Elected members bullying employee

## Impact of bullying on the individual?

Individuals are not usually affected immediately. It can take months or even several years for the impact to take hold. It is this persistent behaviour over a sustained period and the erosion of a person's self-confidence, which eventually affects people.

Individuals usually find themselves affected in a variety of ways.

### **Physically**

tearfulness, anxiety, tension, headaches, nausea, stomach upsets, tiredness, extreme fatigue etc.

### **Emotionally**

numbness, anger, frustration, fearfulness, confusion, self-doubt, self-blame, loss of confidence, panic-attacks, depression.

### **Behaviourally**

irritability, sleeping difficulties, worrying, low mood, poor decision-making, impaired judgement, poor concentration.

## **Effect of Bullying on the Organisation?**

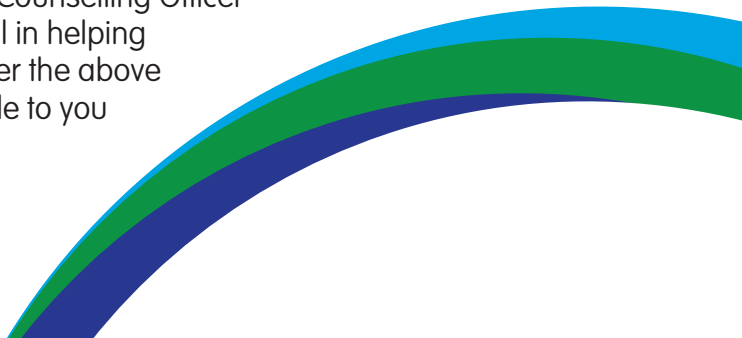
There are great costs to the organisation, not only financially, but also in terms of peoples morale. This can be through staff time being spent on following procedures, the effect on an individuals work performance, the amount of sick leave taken.

Other costs may be the impact on other staff, causing distrust, insecurity and high turnover as well as including the costs involved in the recruitment and training of new personnel. There is also the potential for costly legal proceedings.

All of the above requires considerable time and effort to resolve issues. Whilst so much time is spent on 'bullying issues', this takes the individuals away from the organisations work.

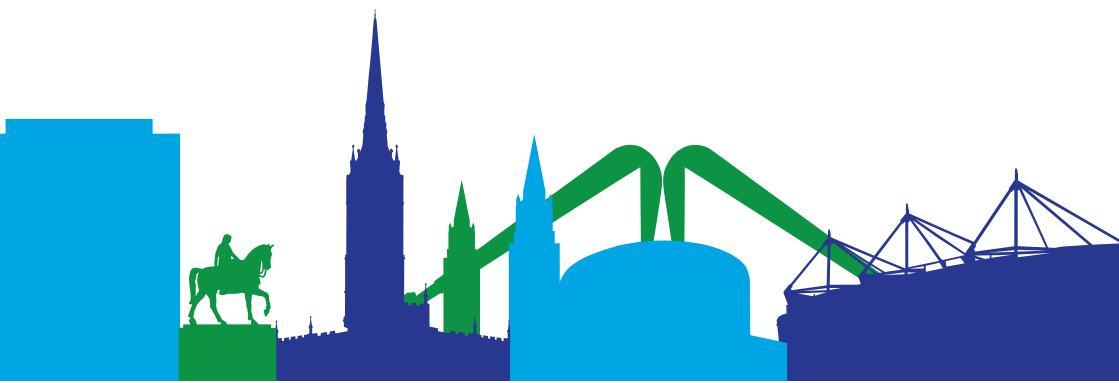
## **How to deal with bullying?**

- 'Step back' and assess what is happening  
A session with a Counselling Officer may be beneficial in helping you clarify whether the above may be applicable to you



- Elicit the views of work colleagues with whom you have some trust so that you can obtain another viewpoint
- Try and resolve issues on an informal basis because the other person may not be fully aware of their actions yet
- Observe how others interact with the individual who you think is bullying and see if you can learn alternative ways of communicating or interacting with them
- Keep a diary of incidents
- Refer to relevant policies and legislation e.g. Managing Stress Policy, Anti-bullying and Dignity at Work Policy, Health & Safety Act 1974
- Consider discussing the issues with your line-manager, Human Resources, another manager you trust or the Counselling Service
- Referral to the Counselling Service to support you practically and emotionally. Whatever, you discuss with a counsellor will be treated in the strictest of confidence

*If you would like an appointment to see a counsellor please ask your manager/HR to make a referral.*



**Further information:**

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