



Bullying: HR guide

Description

Introduction

Tackling **bullying** should be a high priority for any employer. Bullies can cause great harm to the people that they target, they can significantly reduce staff morale and they can lower productivity. On top of all that they can damage the reputation of the organisation.

What is bullying?

The Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service ([Acas](#)) defines **bullying** as “offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through means that undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient”. There is actually some overlap with harassment, which is unwanted physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct that has the purpose or effect of violating a person’s dignity or creating an offensive or degrading environment for them.



Bullying may be obvious – involving violent behaviour, physical threats or verbal abuse to more junior staff. But it could also be more subtle, and take the form of overbearing and intimidating levels of supervision, including sending aggressive emails when staff are working remotely. Bullying could include making inappropriate remarks about someone’s performance, ridiculing or demeaning

someone, spreading malicious rumours, or excluding them from team events.

Policy

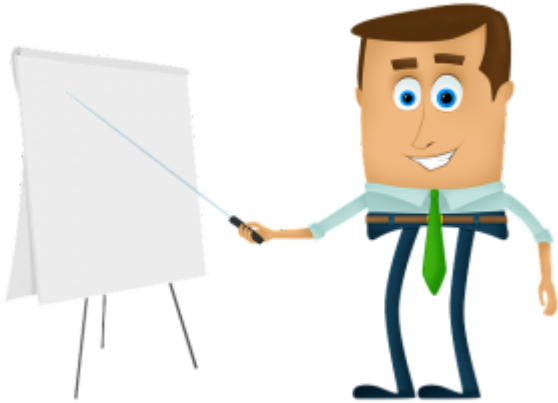
Employers should have an anti-harassment and **bullying** policy. It's important that the policy is properly communicated to the whole workforce. It is not sufficient just to provide the policy for new starters. Employees need to be regularly reminded about the policy and the employer's stance on **bullying**.



The policy should explain what **bullying** and harassment could be, clarify that such behaviour will not be tolerated and indicate the steps that employees can take if they believe that they are being bullied or harassed. This could include an informal route or raising the matter under the employer's [grievance](#) procedures. A policy will also confirm protection and support for those involved, and provide details of retaining information about complaints on employees' personnel files.

Training

Another important preventative measure is training. Managers and supervisors should be trained on **bullying** and harassment issues, and records ought to be kept.



Disciplinary action

When it looks like **bullying** or harassment is going on, it may well be necessary to deal with the matter under the employer's [disciplinary](#) procedure. If a case could involve serious misconduct, it might be appropriate to suspend the alleged bully pending an investigation. The suspension should be with pay. Sometimes a contract of employment provides for suspension without pay, although this would be rare as it would be a penalty in itself. Suspension is always a neutral act, and it's always important to make it clear that the suspension in no way suggests that someone is guilty.



Should the employer conclude that **bullying** or harassment did occur, the sanction could involve a written warning or possibly dismissal. If an employee is dismissed, they should have a right of appeal.

This guide is intended for guidance only and should not be relied upon for specific advice.

If you have any queries relating to **bullying** issues or need advice on other employment law matters please call [020 3797 1264](tel:02037971264).

Do check mattgingell.com regularly for updated information.