

Am I Being Bullied?

You might think that the answer should be obvious, and it sometimes is, but some people are bullied for years without actually realising it. Many can see that they are being treated unfairly, but not all can put the nature of the unfairness into words. Some blame themselves for it. A common feature of psychological bullying is to make the target feel useless, guilty and to blame for their predicament, when they are not. How is someone to tell if they're being bullied, or the useless idiot they're made to feel like?

To work out if you're being bullied, its a good idea to collect together information about your experience, including notes about the way it made you feel. As soon as you think you might be being bullied, start documenting the experience, recording who said or did what to whom, why and when. If you have not been doing that up to now, it's time to write down everything you can remember, using emails, messages, calendar entries and what have you, to build a time frame and supporting evidence.

Get a definition of bullying you can understand. We say that **Bullying is conduct that cannot be objectively justified by a reasonable code of conduct, and whose likely or actual cumulative effect is to threaten, undermine, constrain, humiliate or harm another person or their property, reputation, self-esteem, self-confidence or ability to perform.**

Consider how your experience fits with the definition. If there are many incidents, what happened? Could it be justified by a reasonable code of conduct? In other words, if you were accused of misconduct, do you think that your accuser had genuine grounds to believe that you had done whatever it was? Was there clear evidence that you were innocent? Was the evidence overlooked? If there was more than one incident, where each was tolerable in isolation, were they collectively more serious? How did the conduct affect you? Was it threatening, explicitly or implicitly? How did you feel about it, and so on.

Accusing someone of bullying is a serious matter that should not be done without very good reason. If your experience seems aligned with the descriptions on this website, it makes sense to spend some time checking your account and considering other possible explanations of what has happened. This can be difficult: If you're being being psychologically manipulated and feeling guilty about things that are not your fault, or if you're worried about the futility or danger of taking action against a known abuser, then you might jump to some other conclusion. On the other hand, even if you're initially sure that you're being treated unfairly, it's important to take some time considering the possibility that you might be mistaken. If someone has treated you badly, have you made allowances for the way they behaved? Were they having an uncharacteristically bad day? Has this happened before? Is there a worrying pattern to their behaviour?

Many who are bullied at work eventually find themselves forced to take part in disciplinary or performance management procedures that are being used as a means to control, subjugate or humiliate them, or to terminate their employment. Having said that, disciplinary and performance management procedures are the legitimate means for employers to encourage improvements or, in some cases, to dismiss employees whose conduct or performance is below the required standard. If you're being "disciplined" or "performance managed", here are some signs to help you understand whether the procedure is being used legitimately or not:

People who work for properly run organisations who find themselves undergoing such procedures, typically:-

- Know from the beginning of the procedure that their performance or conduct is under investigation;
- Are aware of something they have done or failed to do or, if not, can readily understand why the employer might believe that they have done or failed to do something to warrant invoking the procedure;

- Are provided with copies of the relevant procedure at the outset, advised of their rights within the procedure, and given adequate opportunities to prepare and present their case;
- Are treated with civility throughout;
- Are listened to and questioned where the point of the questioning is to better understand their case;
- Are afforded their rights under the procedure, including the right to appeal to an independent person within the organisation;
- Are not given any reasons to think that the procedure is designed to “stitch them up”;
- Understand the logic of the employer’s decisions, even if the outcome is not in the employee’s favour.

Conversely, people who work for bully-tolerant organisations who find themselves undergoing such procedures, often:-

- Do not know that their performance or conduct is under investigation until they are told it has been, perhaps for some time;
- Are unaware of anything they have done or failed to do and cannot believe that the employer genuinely thinks they have done anything to warrant invoking the procedure. (The charges or allegations may be obviously contrived or trumped up, but with a grain of truth to create a hint of superficial plausibility.)
- Are suspended without a good business reason;
- Are not told about the relevant procedure at the outset, with minimal information given about rights and the importance of preparing their case;
- Are treated like an adversary from the outset, rather than an asset.
- Feel that they have been ignored when presenting their case, and subsequently discover that any evidence that contradicted the employer’s case was overlooked, without any reason being given.
- Are afforded their basic legal minimum rights under the procedure.
- The outcome is a decision which constrains, warns, demotes or dismisses them, leaving them feeling bewildered and stitched up, and sure that the procedure was a sham whose outcome must have been premeditated before the procedure began.

It's fair to say that isolated or one-off indiscretions that don't have a lasting effect are not "bullying", and neither are reasonable responses to actual or perceived misconduct. However, where someone's bad behaviour is focused on you, repeatedly or even persistently and is threatening, undermining, humiliating etc you, or where an employer is using

conduct or performance management procedures without good reason, then it may well be bullying.

People who are bullied find that they are:

- **Isolated**

- isolated and excluded from what's happening
- denied information or knowledge necessary for undertaking work and achieving objectives
- starved of resources, sometimes whilst others receive more than they need
- denied support by their manager and thus find themselves working in a management vacuum
- either overloaded with work (this keeps people busy [with no time to tackle bullying] and makes it harder to meet objectives) or have all their work taken away (which is sometimes replaced with inappropriate menial jobs, eg photocopying, filing, making coffee)
- have their responsibility increased but their authority removed
- overruled, ignored, sidelined, marginalised, ostracised
- given "the silent treatment": the bully refuses to communicate and avoids eye contact (always an indicator of an abusive relationship); often instructions are received only via email, memos, or a succession of yellow stickies or post-it notes

- **Controlled and Subjugated**

- do not have a clear job description, or have one that is exceedingly long;
- set unrealistic goals and deadlines which are unachievable or which are changed without notice or reason or whenever they get near achieving them;
- frequently or constantly criticised and subjected to unwarranted, destructive criticism;
- encouraged to feel guilty, and to believe they're always the one at fault;
 - when they defend themselves, their explanations and proof of achievements are ridiculed, overruled, dismissed or ignored;
- frequently subject to nit-picking and trivial fault-finding. The triviality reveals an absence of any serious concern;
- subject to excessive monitoring, supervision, micro-management, recording, snooping etc;
- undermined, especially in front of others and behind their back. Concerns are raised, or doubts expressed about a person's performance or standard of work, but the concerns lack substance and cannot be quantified, or are

simply false;



- threatened, shouted at and humiliated, especially in front of others;
- taunted and teased where the intention is to embarrass and humiliate;
- singled out and treated differently, e.g. being disciplined for arriving one minute late, when others stroll in late without penalty;
- belittled, degraded, demeaned, ridiculed, patronised, subject to disparaging remarks;
- regularly the target of offensive language, personal remarks, or inappropriate bad language;
- have their work plagiarised, stolen and copied - the bully then presents their target's work (eg to senior management) as their own;
- the subject of written complaints by other members of staff (who have been coerced into fabricating allegations - the complaints are trivial, often bizarre ["He looked at me in a funny way"] and often bear striking similarity to each other, suggesting a common origin);
- forced to work long hours, often without remuneration and under threat of dismissal;
- refused requests for leave, or unacceptable and unnecessary conditions are attached;
- denied annual leave, sickness leave, or especially compassionate leave;
- when on leave, are harassed by calls at home or on holiday, often at unsocial hours;
- receive unpleasant or threatening calls or are harassed with intimidating memos, notes or emails with no spoken communication, immediately prior to weekends and holidays (eg 4pm Friday or Christmas Eve - often these are hand-delivered);

- **Eliminated**

- are invited to "informal chats" or meetings which turn out to be disciplinary hearings;
- facing unjustified disciplinary action on trivial or specious or patently false charges;
- subjected to unwarranted and unjustified verbal or written warnings;
- are denied representation at meetings, often under threat of further disciplinary action; sometimes the bully abuses their position of power to exclude any representative who is competent to deal with bullying;
- dismissed on fabricated charges or flimsy excuses, often using a trivial incident from months or years previously;
- coerced into reluctant resignation, enforced redundancy, early or ill-health retirement;

- denied the right to earn their livelihood including being prevented from getting another job, usually with a bad or misleading reference.

If you're reading this because you think someone you know is being treated this way, send them a link to the page or print it and give it to them - it might be the best thing you ever do for them. If you're reading this because you're worried about the way you are being treated by someone, read more of this website to find out what courses of action are open to you.

 [Print \(/index.php/bullying/15-am-i-being-bullied?tmpl=component&print=1&layout=default\)](/index.php/bullying/15-am-i-being-bullied?tmpl=component&print=1&layout=default)  [Email \(/index.php/component/mailto/?tmpl=component&template=yoo_katana&link=e1a8ad5925abdca50b0e90d016f3a3f358d97693\)](/index.php/component/mailto/?tmpl=component&template=yoo_katana&link=e1a8ad5925abdca50b0e90d016f3a3f358d97693)

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