

WORKPLACE BULLYING

What Is Workplace Bullying?

The Australian Workers' Union (AWU) does not believe that bullying and harassment in the workplace is ever permissible.

Bullying is repeated and unreasonable behaviour such as verbal, physical, social or psychological abuse that is directed towards a worker or a group of workers and creates a risk to health and safety.

Employers have an obligation to create a safe environment. Bullying and harassment are widely acknowledged as significant health risks. As a common cause of workplace stress, bullying and harassment can lead to adverse psychological and physical reactions. If you or somebody you know are being bullied at work, it's a good idea to seek support from the AWU and take steps to address the situation.

How to Recognise Bullying and Harassment

Bullying and harassment are broad terms for various behaviours that are intended to ridicule, humiliate, intimidate or degrade. Bullying does not include reasonable steps taken to performance manage an individual.

However, taking steps to single out an individual and unfairly target them during performance management processes may be bullying. Therefore, it may be best for an employee to speak to their AWU organiser to discuss their specific circumstances and determine if what they are experiencing is inappropriate. Some examples of repeated inappropriate behaviour include:

- Unfair behaviour where others are given preferential treatment;
- Unwelcome sexual advances, including lewd and suggestive comments and jokes;
- Rumours and verbal insults such as name calling;
- Making threats about job security without foundation;
- Overbearing supervision or misuse of power;
- Discrimination due to association with a union;
- Systematic targeting;
- Unreasonable workload and unattainable deadlines;
- Pushing and other forms of violence and inappropriate contact; and
- Discrediting professional ability.

Course of Action

If a worker believes that they are being bullied or harassed the following steps may help stop the inappropriate behaviour:

1. Keep a diary and log of any instances of bullying, whether verbal or written. If an employee believes they are being bullied and harassed, it is best if they have some evidence of this. Workplace diaries document incidents that may constitute bullying. It is important that diary entries are detailed. Entries should also be dated, set out what was said in speech marks, as best as the employee can remember, and list any witnesses who may have overheard the conversation or witnessed the behaviour.

2. Approach the bully. If the employee feels confident to do so, and does not think it will have an adverse effect on their mental health, then they can approach the person who is engaging in the bullying conduct directly. Sometimes, hearing how their behaviour is being perceived may lead some people to stop acting in an unreasonable manner. If the employee will take this approach, they should make sure there are witnesses around when they discuss this and clearly articulate what behaviours they have an issue with. They should also make thorough notes of this discussion in their workplace diary.

3. Escalate your complaint to the appropriate HR Manager or supervisor. If the behaviour continues, an employee can request a formal meeting with their appropriate HR Manager or supervisor. The employee can take a support person to the meeting (this can be their AWU organiser) and request that an investigation be conducted to examine the offending behaviour.

If the above steps do not stop the bullying, there are legal steps that can be taken, such as applying to the Fair Work Commission for a "stop bullying order" or pursuing the matter through the workplace health and safety jurisdiction.

Workers have the right to a comfortable, safe and happy working experience and employers have a duty of care to ensure they have this.

If you feel that a colleague, group of colleagues, manager or employer are targeting you then there are rights and protections you are entitled to and the AWU can help you exercise them.

Contact your AWU HSR/Delegate or Organiser, if you need more information, advice or support at your workplace, or contact your branch:

Branch Contact Details

QUEENSLAND BRANCH

Toll-free 1800 298 753

NEW SOUTH WALES BRANCH

Toll-free: 1300 763 223

VICTORIA BRANCH

Toll-free: 1300 362 298

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN BRANCH

Phone: (08) 8360 1900

WEST AUSTRALIAN BRANCH

Toll-free: 1800 810 723

TASMANIA BRANCH

Toll-free: 1300 795 677

