



Are You Being Bullied?

What do I need to know about bullying?

Bullying is the responsibility of the bully, not something wrong with you. It is a form of behavior in which the instigator intentionally and often repeatedly causes another person injury or discomfort. Bullying takes many forms including verbal, psychological, physical, cyber, prejudicial, relational, sexual, or more subtle actions, like coercive control.



You can control how you respond and the sooner you respond, the better. It is not always easy and sometimes takes time to build your confidence and become more comfortable with responding. Bullies are often motivated to continue their behavior and the longer it occurs, the harder it is to stop.

There are many reasons that people engage in bullying behavior. Bullies seek to gain a feeling of power, purpose and control over the target. Bullying can significantly impact you, should not be excused, and it is not your fault.

People's experiences and circumstances during the pandemic have heightened their anxiety. This may lead to an increase in bullying due to added fears, insecurity and stress in all areas of their lives, including work and home.

What can I do if I am being bullied?

1. Identify allies and support

- Try seeking out others at your workplace (e.g., a supervisor) whom you trust and with whom you feel comfortable.
- Try identifying a colleague who can provide consistent support and be there for you.
- Try communicating with other workers. Sharing your experiences can lead to:
 - Revealing the problem
 - Learning effective responses
 - Feeling empowered
 - Determining a course of action to address the behavior
- If bullying has affected your physical or mental health, consider seeking professional help. There are numerous resources ([link to mental health resources](#)) available, some at low or no cost. If you broke your leg, would you hesitate to have it treated?

2. Responding

- **If you don't feel safe enough to respond:**
 - If you feel any concern about your safety, remove yourself from the situation:
 - Be aware of your surroundings as you walk away.
 - It's ok to make an excuse to walk away such as "Excuse me I have some place to be right now," "For my personal safety I need to leave right now," or "If we're going to continue this conversation I need someone else in the room with us."
- **If you do feel safe enough to respond:**
 - Keep your cool
 - Check in with how you are feeling, both physically and emotionally. Freezing is a normal response.
 - Take a deep breath and a moment to collect your thoughts



2. Responding (continued)

- **If you do feel safe enough to respond (continued):**
 - Decide how you want to respond:
 - You can try to communicate directly with the bully.
 - Try to respond in a public space where others can support you.
 - Find someone to share your experience with and seek non-judgmental support. You don't have to be alone.
 - Reporting is always an option.
- **If you do decide to communicate directly with the perpetrator:**
 - **Options to de-escalate the situation**
 - Avoid humiliating the bully but be firm. That could light an emotional fuse that could further escalate the situation.
 - Treat them with professional courtesy - model the behavior you would like to see them exhibit.
 - Address the bully by name frequently "Jim, I know you are..."
 - Change the setting to change the atmosphere. "Can we take this somewhere else to talk about it?"
 - **Use body language to project courage**
 - Stand tall, don't fold your arms or hunch your shoulders.
 - Take up more space.
 - Raise your arms with flat palms facing the other party.
 - Look the bully in the eye, and keep your tone neutral and quiet.
 - **Make the bully aware of the impact**
 - Describe the specific words or action that made you uncomfortable.
 - Challenge the behavior, not the person: "Shouting/swearing at me it makes it harder for me to do my work well."
 - Be specific, avoid generalizing: "When you called me stupid for making a mistake tying that bridle..." rather than "You're always calling people stupid."
 - Be clear about what kind of behaviors are unacceptable to you.
 - Don't be afraid to repeat yourself – repetition builds resilience. "Stop acting this way." "Please stop acting this way." "Please don't do that anymore."
 - Let the bully know that their behavior is reportable without making it a threat.
- **Document, document, document:**
 - Keep a record of situations and incidents – this could be keeping a journal, recording an incident on your phone.
 - Try to include:
 - The date, time and what happened in as much detail as possible
 - The names of witnesses
 - The outcome of the event

3. Report your experience to a supervisor or other designated person

- Present your complaint as an issue that is disrupting the work environment, not a personal issue.
- Try to remain calm and keep your emotions in check when sharing details about the bullying.
- Describe or share evidence of specific details about the *behavior* (not the person).
- If the bully is your immediate supervisor find out if there is someone else who is also designated to receive complaints, or seek outside assistance.