



Causes of Workplace Bullying

People engage in bullying behavior for a variety of reasons. Awareness of these factors can help recognize bullying behavior in ourselves, others, and the environments and cultures where we live and work.



Bullying has a negative impact on others and should never be excused. Understanding the motivation, however, can help you understand the situation and determine how to respond.

Bullying is almost always a coping mechanism for insecurity or need for power or control. It can also be a reaction to shame from adverse experiences (e.g., being bullied, childhood trauma, or emotional/physical abuse).

- Insecurity doesn't necessarily make an individual shy and reserved. They may engage in bullying to bring others down to their self-perceived level.
- Feelings of powerlessness may trigger bullies. They feel more powerful and important when intimidating others.
- The need for control may result from issues such as anxiety, earlier traumas, or a lack of control in their own lives.
- Shame is rooted in different sources such as childhood trauma, being bullied, or a sense of incompetence. One response to shame is to hurt others.

Bullies can have common personality characteristics. The bully who is arrogant or narcissistic and craves attention generally displays a lack of empathy, and may be unaware of their impact on others. Bullying is often reinforced behavior.

Bullying feels personal but is rarely about you or the person being targeted.

Common traits of bullies:

- Limited social skills and difficulty in social situations
- Impulsivity or difficulty restraining behavior
- Impaired sense of personal responsibility with need to cast blame on others
- Attention-seeking, whether positive or negative
- Low self-esteem
- Inadequate skills to process their own anger and frustration
- Inability to face their own insecurities and feelings of powerlessness
- Failure to recognize their behavior as a problem
- Sense of entitlement and superiority
- Need to dominate others to improve their social status
- Self-centered with lack of empathy
- A victim of bullying themselves



Other Influences:

Bullying does not exist in a vacuum. The work environment impacts bullying, and bullying impacts the work environment.

Cultural: The environment in which we work matters. Accepted norms and behaviors shape the culture in the workplace.

Personal: Our experiences and relationships shape how we relate to each other in the workplace and influence our behavior towards others.

Systemic and Structural: The communities in which we live determine the way each of us sees the world. Realities such as access to education and resources, socio-economic status, and experiences of diversity and inclusion shape our perspective and approach.

It's time to change our culture and stand up against bullying. Bullying should not be tolerated and together we can make bullying a thing of the past. This is how change happens.