



# 10 TIPS FOR DEALING WITH WORKPLACE BULLYING

Sometimes the office is just an extended version of the school playground. There are the same personalities clashing all the time - the kind-hearted do-gooder, the popular group and, of course, the bully.

Unfortunately, bullying isn't limited to the playground. According to WorkSafe New Zealand, who released guidelines on preventing and responding to workplace bullying earlier this year, workplace bullying is a significant hazard in New Zealand.

Not only does it affect people physically and mentally, it can disrupt workplaces and reduce productivity, the guidelines say.

The Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) says bullies are often insecure people with low self-esteem (which they can hide well) and their targets are usually competent, honest and independent individuals who get along with colleagues; "...the very characteristics which the bullies feel they themselves lack," CAB says. This is how to recognise bullying, according to the CAB, bullying behaviours can include:

- Constant put-downs, especially when it's done in public
- Frequent nit-picking and fault-finding, always discounting what the other person says
- Using threatening language
- Refusal to acknowledge the target's contributions and achievements
- Refusing to allow an employee to take the breaks they are entitled to
- Frequent embarrassing comments about an individual's appearance
- Being singled out and treated differently (worse) from work colleagues
- Being overloaded with work, or having most of it taken away
- Making threats about job security

If you think you are being bullied at work, here are ten tips to help you deal with it.

## 1. keep your emotions in check

Sometimes a bully's intention is to get a rise out of you. Though this is difficult, it's a good idea to remain calm and rational.

## 2. don't be undermined

Continue to be productive. If you're being bullied by your boss, it may seem tempting to let your work slide. But this may justify the bully's behaviour.



### 3. get support

The CAB advises seeking moral support from co-worker, family or friends.

### 4. remember who's to blame

Bullies are very good at manipulating situations and their behaviour may even leave you wondering whether you are indeed incapable or incompetent. Try to keep confident, and remember the bully's actions are usually down to their own insecurities, and are not a true reflection of you or your work. Unfortunately, workplace bullying usually results in the target (rather than the bully) quitting their job.

### 5. gather information

WorkSafe NZ advises you document each instance by recording:

- date, time, place and who was present
- what was said (verbatim if possible)
- how you then felt
- how you responded
- what other people said and did

A detailed record kept in this format may give valuable legal evidence, reveal behaviour patterns, clarify the issues and their effect on your work, and help you decide what to do.

Listen to what others are saying about the situation, or discuss it to see if they're experiencing similar behaviour. Ask yourself (and others who might have experienced similar incidents) if the behaviour was (1) unreasonable, (2) repeated and (3) is a risk to health and safety. These points define behaviour as 'bullying'.

### 6. look after yourself

Don't let the situation you're in consume you. Try to maintain a healthy lifestyle by eating properly, sleeping well and exercising. This will help you cope with the extra stress you may be under. Feeling bullied raises many negative emotions. Depression and anxiety, combined with suicidal thoughts are not uncommon, WorkSafe NZ says. If you are experiencing any of these reactions, you need to seek help from your doctor immediately.

### 7. your response

Depending on the extent of the bullying, there are different options available if you decide to take action. You may decide to approach a manager in the first instance. At all times, it's a good idea to talk about behaviours, instead of making a bullying accusation. Find out what your company's procedures are around bullying, and try to stay in-line with these. This will help keep emotions out.



## 8. where to find help

There are organisations that can help you decide how to respond to workplace bullying:

- your lawyer or a community law centre
- your workplace health and safety representative, contact person or union delegate
- Raise – 0800 735 343
- MBIE's contact centre – 0800 20 90 20. Parties can use MBIE's mediation or choose independent mediators
- WorkSafe NZ's contact centre – 0800 030 040.

## 9. types of discrimination

If you believe you have been targeted because of your gender, age, religious beliefs, race or disability, you can lay a complaint to the Human Rights Commission.

## 10. focus on yourself, not the bully

Though you may feel the bully is in the wrong and their behaviour needs to change, it's not up to you to ensure they make these changes. The bully needs to accept that their behaviour is problematic before they can begin making changes.

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