

# Workplace Bullying, Harassment and Violence

Not in the playground.  
Not in the workplace.

## Our vision:

Creating an inclusive work environment that is free from all forms of unlawful discrimination and harassment, and where people are valued for their diverse experiences, knowledge and abilities.

Education Queensland actively encourages and supports workforce diversity and equity

## Workplace Bullying, Harassment and Violence

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### Did you know?

International research suggests that up to 50 per cent of employees will experience harassment, bullying or violence at some stage in their working life.

Up to 20 per cent of employees have been bullied in the past 12 months.

*It can happen to anyone*

## Introduction

Education Queensland is committed to working with its employees to create and maintain a work environment that is free from harassment, bullying and violence.

All Education Queensland employees have the right to work in a respectful and safe environment. Bullying, harassment and violence are unacceptable — in the playground and in the workplace.

## What is workplace harassment?

Workplace harassment is defined by Education Queensland as unwelcome behaviour directed towards another person that may be based on one or more attributes as defined in the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991*. These attributes are sex, marital status, pregnancy, parental status, breastfeeding, age, race, impairment, religion, political belief or activity, trade union activity, lawful sexual activity and association with, or relation to, a person identified on the basis of the preceding attributes.

Workplace harassment is behaviour intended to offend, humiliate or intimidate, or where a reasonable person would anticipate the possibility of offence, humiliation or intimidation.

### Case study

*Ashid, an Indian Muslim, was employed as a finance officer. Two months prior to the start of the religious period, Ramadan, he received permission from his manager to leave work early on a few occasions to attend prayer activities. The manager advised other staff of this arrangement. However, when Ashid started to participate in Ramadan activities, a number of work colleagues began making disparaging comments saying he was a fanatic and making jokes about him being a Middle-Eastern extremist and a terrorist. Ashid found these comments offensive and embarrassing and asked his colleagues to stop. When they told him he was being overly sensitive, he reported the harassment to his manager who organised a meeting to mediate the issue. During this meeting, Ashid explained clearly why he was offended and the manager supported him, advising the staff that the comments were unacceptable workplace behaviour. All the staff involved apologised to Ashid who decided to pursue no further action.*

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<http://education.qld.gov.au/workforce/diversity/equity>

*It's unacceptable*

### Did you know?

In 2001, 18 per cent of complaints received by the Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland were sexual harassment related.



*It's against the law*

*This behaviour may be harassment because it is:*

- *offensive or humiliating*
- *based on race and religious attributes*
- *a reasonable person would have anticipated offence.*

## What is sexual harassment?

Sexual harassment is unlawful under the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991*. Sexual harassment is defined as unwelcome behaviour of a sexual nature intended to offend, humiliate or intimidate the person, or where a reasonable person would anticipate the possibility of offence, humiliation or intimidation. Examples of sexual harassment include, but are not limited to:

- unsolicited sexual acts
- unsolicited demands or requests for sexual favours
- making remarks with sexual connotations relating to another person
- engaging in unwelcome sexual conduct in relation to another person.

Some behaviour can be considered as sexual assault or abuse and could be considered a criminal offence.

### Case study

*Linda worked as an administration officer in a district office. After three years a new co-worker was appointed. The co-worker began to subject Linda to unwelcome offensive and degrading comments about Linda's sex life and her body. Linda raised the matter with her supervisor but the supervisor did not take any action to stop the behaviour. The co-worker continued this harassing behaviour and sexual comments. Linda complained a second time; this time lodging a stage two grievance and the matter was formally investigated. Linda found the outcome to be unsatisfactory and lodged a complaint under the Anti-Discrimination Act 1991.*

*This behaviour may be sexual harassment because it is:*

- *of a sexual nature*
- *offensive or humiliating*
- *unsolicited or unwelcome*
- *a reasonable person would have anticipated offence.*

## What is workplace bullying?

Workplace bullying is defined by Education Queensland as the repeated less favourable treatment of a person by another or others in the workplace, which may be considered unreasonable and inappropriate workplace practice.

Workplace bullying is behaviour that intimidates, offends, degrades or humiliates. This can range from loud aggressive behaviour to subtle intimidation. It is not just a difference of opinion or general conflict in working relations.

Bullying is not limited to the playground. It is apparent in most workplaces and exists in various forms. Bullying can occur at all levels of employment, regardless of age or gender.

It may take time before you realise that you are being bullied, as bullying can be composed of many small incidents that build up over time.

It is important to remember that constructive performance feedback or formal counselling on work performance or work-related behaviour is not considered workplace bullying.

### Case study

*Sue worked as a teacher in a large school. Over eight months, a number of teachers requested transfers due to the behaviour of a deputy principal. Her behaviour included unreasonable timetables, excessive demands for extracurricular duties and abusive and belittling language during staff meetings. Sue became increasingly stressed, eventually taking sick leave.*

*This behaviour may be bullying because it is:*

- *repeated behaviour*
- *unreasonable*
- *offensive or intimidating.*

*Not just in the playground*

*Bullying is not an acceptable management tool*

*Let's cut the problem down to size*

## How do I identify workplace harassment and bullying?

Workplace harassment and bullying can be subtle and difficult to detect. It can be cloaked cleverly in another guise — ‘I was only mucking around’, ‘just trying to make you work harder’ or ‘can’t you take a joke’. Workplace harassment and bullying is not a joke.

### *It's not funny*

Some examples of workplace harassment, sexual harassment and bullying include, but are not limited to:

- verbal abuse — including yelling, screaming, offensive language and threats
- demeaning comments or putdowns, including inappropriate comments regarding appearance, lifestyle, sexual activity, race or religion
- displaying written or pictorial material that offends or degrades
- belittling comments, constant criticism or undermining someone’s work
- isolation from normal work interaction, training and development or career opportunities
- overwork, unnecessary pressure or impossible deadlines
- under-work or meaningless tasks
- deliberately withholding work-related information or supplying incorrect information
- offensive emails, especially those of a sexual nature
- initiation ceremonies.

If you’re unsure whether you have been the target of workplace harassment or bullying ask yourself — does this person’s behaviour, whether verbal or nonverbal:

- offend, frustrate, demean, isolate or intimidate me
- interfere with my ability to perform my duties
- reduce my status or ability to participate in decision making
- make me feel powerless
- threaten my job security or promotional opportunities
- reflect the way I’d like to be treated?

## What is workplace violence?

Workplace violence includes physical violence, which arises out of disputes or adverse interpersonal relations between employees, clients and visitors in and around their place of employment.

Violence can occur in any occupation and in a variety of situations. In its many forms, workplace violence is believed to occur at least once during the working life of the average person.

Under the Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995 employers and employees have a responsibility to prevent and report violence in the workplace.

### *Case study*

*At an inter-school sporting carnival, a melee broke out between children from opposing teams. The coaches from each of the teams became involved and an altercation occurred with one of the coaches receiving a dislocated arm. The incident was reported to the principal and an investigation ensued.*

*This behaviour may be workplace violence because it is:*

- *physical violence arising from a dispute at a place of employment.*

## What is the cost?

The cost of workplace bullying, harassment and violence is severe for both the employee and the organisation.

As people experience workplace bullying, harassment and violence differently, the effects can differ dramatically. Some commonly reported effects include, but are not limited to:

- stress
- feelings of social isolation
- anxiety and panic attacks
- loss of confidence and self-esteem
- loss or deterioration of personal relationships

### Did you know?

Physical or psychological symptoms were reported by 75 per cent of victims, according to Australian research.

- physical symptoms of stress such as headaches, backaches and stomach cramps
- depression
- reduced work performance
- incapacity to work.

Over half of victims said their relationship with their partner or family had worsened because of workplace harassment, bullying or violence.

Apart from the physical and emotional stress on employees, workplace harassment, bullying and violence also have a significant impact on an organisation. Workplace bullying, harassment and violence cost Australian businesses billions of dollars a year. Some of the potential costs to an organisation include:

- sick leave
- absenteeism
- staff turnover
- low productivity
- negative cultural climate
- legal action
- workcover claims
- negative publicity.

*Bullies stay — their victims leave*

### Did you know?

*Latest research shows workforce harassment, bullying and violence affects one in every four workers and costs Australian industry an estimated \$13 billion a year.*

*For a company of 50 employees, it is estimated that the annual commercial costs of workplace bullying are \$234 695 — imagine what the cost would be to an organisation with 50 000 employees.*

*Harassment, bullying and violence in the workplace can reduce the productivity of victims by more than half.*

*Almost 25 per cent of victims retire or resign.*

## Who is responsible?

It's everybody's responsibility!

It's the responsibility of Education Queensland to:

- take reasonable steps to prevent workplace bullying, harassment and violence from occurring in workplaces — reasonable steps may include developing policies and information booklets — such as this one — and conducting training programs
- respect employees' rights and the needs of individuals
- provide employees with formal avenues of complaint and support such as having a grievance process in place and having trained counsellors and contact officers.

It's the responsibility of all employees to:

- treat others with respect and dignity
- refrain from behaviour that may constitute workplace bullying, harassment or violence
- comply with departmental policy and the relevant legislation.

In addition to their responsibilities as employees, it is the responsibility of all managers to:

- model appropriate workplace behaviour
- monitor the workplace for inappropriate behaviour and take appropriate action
- deal with all grievances and complaints seriously and confidentially and in accordance with relevant directives and guidelines.

Employees found to be in breach of the Department of Education's Workplace Bullying, Harassment and Violence Policy may be subject to disciplinary action.

## What can I do?

If you feel you are a victim of workplace harassment, bullying or violence it is important not to blame yourself. Research shows it is generally the most competent, loyal and productive workers who are targets for this behaviour.

However, it is important to take action to prevent further incidents.

### *Bully-proof yourself*

If you feel comfortable, consider talking to the person who is bullying or harassing you. Focus on the inappropriate behaviours and not on the individual. Ask the person to stop the bullying or harassing behaviour.

If you don't feel comfortable talking to the person who is bullying you, talk to another work colleague or your supervisor.

Avoid one-on-one confrontation with the person who is harassing or bullying you. Look for witnesses when talking to the person. When instructions are unclear, ask for written clarification. Consider recording the conversation in front of the person.

Keep a diary — it is important to take comprehensive notes of all incidents. This includes times, dates, what happened and who was there. Harassment, bullying and violence are difficult to prove, therefore keeping a diary recording all incidents in detail is important in identifying how, when and where the offending behaviour occurs.

The Department of Education is committed to resolving workplace harassment and bullying at a local level. Employees are encouraged to resolve workplace issues in an informal manner so talk to the person about their behaviour if possible. Remember, you can have someone there for support.

### *You're not alone*

Tell your family and friends what's happening or approach a supportive colleague. Seek support from your relevant union or talk to your local employee advisor.

The Employee Assistance Service (EAS) is a specialised service providing confidential counselling. The service is available free of charge to any Education Queensland employee with work-related or personal problems. The service is available in different district locations throughout the state. More information on EAS can be found in the human resources section of the Education Queensland intranet: [http://www.qed.qld.gov.au/workdept/hr/chw/html/eas\\_ser.html](http://www.qed.qld.gov.au/workdept/hr/chw/html/eas_ser.html)

Where it is not possible to resolve issues informally, employees can lodge a grievance. This grievance can be made either verbally or in writing and can be lodged with their immediate supervisor. If this is not appropriate, the grievance can be lodged with the supervisor's reporting officer.

Due to the sensitive nature of grievances relating to sexual harassment, such grievances can be lodged directly with the Director-General.

Education Queensland encourages managers and employees to report incidences of workplace violence to the Queensland Police. Reports of this nature should also be discussed with the Crime and Misconduct Liaison Officer in the Executive and Legal Services Unit.

If you are injured through an incident of workplace violence you should complete an accident report form, available from your manager or supervisor, and, if possible, obtain a photographic record of the injury and note the details of any witnesses.

## Workplace harassment, bullying and violence

### *What?*



Workplace harassment is defined by Education Queensland as unwelcome behaviour directed towards another person on the basis of one or more attributes as defined in the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991*.

Sexual harassment is unlawful and is defined as unwelcome behaviour of a sexual nature directed towards another person.

Workplace bullying is the repeated less favourable treatment of a person by another or others in the workplace, which may be considered unreasonable and inappropriate workplace behaviour.

Workplace violence includes physical violence, which arises out of disputes or adverse interpersonal relations between employees, clients and visitors in and around their place of employment.

### *Who?*



Both men and women can perpetrate workplace harassment, bullying and violence. It can take place between:

- an employee and supervisor/manager
- between employees
- between an employee and a person outside the organisation.

### Where?



Harassment and bullying in the workplace can take place anywhere and through all forms of communication — face to face, over the telephone, through email or by the exclusion of others.

### How?



Harassment and bullying behaviour intimidates, offends, degrades or humiliates a person, possibly in front of co-workers or clients. Violent behaviour intimidates physically resulting in bodily harm.

### Not!



Workplace harassment and bullying is NOT constructive feedback, counselling on work performance or work-related behaviour that may include critical comments indicating performance deficiencies.

## Where can I find more information?

Workforce Diversity & Equity, Education Queensland:  
[www.education.qld.gov.au/workforce/diversity/equity/](http://www.education.qld.gov.au/workforce/diversity/equity/)

Education Queensland's Employee Assistance Service:  
[http://www.qed.qld.gov.au/workdept/hr/chw/html/eas\\_ser.html](http://www.qed.qld.gov.au/workdept/hr/chw/html/eas_ser.html)

Education Queensland Grievance Resolution process:  
<http://www.qed.qld.gov.au/workdept/hr/er/grieve1.htm>

Violence at Work, DETIR:  
<http://www.whs.qld.gov.au/guide/gdeo2v1.pdf>

Workplace Bullying: An Employer's Guide, DETIR,  
Workplace Bullying: A Worker's Guide, DETIR:  
<http://www.whs.qld.gov.au/guide/gde31.pdf>

Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland:  
<http://www.adcq.qld.gov.au/>

Useful and informative websites devoted to workplace harassment, bullying and violence.

## Australian

Bullies Down Under: <http://www.bulliesdownunder.com/>

Beyond Bullying: <http://cwpp.slq.qld.gov.au/bba/>

Stop the Violence: <http://stop-the-violence.netfirms.com/>

## International

Bully Online: <http://www.successunlimited.co.uk/>

Campaign Against Workplace Bullying:  
<http://www.bullybusters.org/>

Workplace Bullying: <http://www.workplacebullying.com/>

Workplace Bullying site: <http://www.workplacebullying.co.uk/>