

Responding to bullying and harassment

Bullying and harassment can undermine trust, confidence, and wellbeing if not addressed. A respectful workplace starts with recognizing the boundaries of acceptable behaviour, understanding the harm these actions can cause, and responding with courage and accountability. By learning to identify harmful patterns, understanding their impact, and actively taking steps to intervene, we can foster a culture of safety, respect, and dignity where everyone can thrive.

Recognizing inappropriate behaviours

Bullying can take many forms, including verbal abuse, repeated criticism, exclusion, humiliation, or misuse of power.

Harassment often involves unwanted conduct linked to a protected characteristic, such as gender, race, age, disability, religion, or sexual orientation, that violates dignity or creates a hostile environment.

Learning to recognize these patterns gives us the clarity to set boundaries and take meaningful action.

Understanding the psychological impact

Bullying and harassment erode a person's confidence, focus, and sense of belonging. Bullying can lead to stress, anxiety, burnout, and withdrawal from colleagues, while harassment can create feelings of humiliation, fear, and isolation, particularly when linked to someone's identity or protected characteristic.

Over time, both behaviours can harm mental health, damage career progression, and weaken team trust.

The power of the bystander

Every workplace story of harm includes not just the people involved, but those who witnessed it. Silence can unintentionally validate harmful behaviour, while speaking up can change its course.

Recognizing the power of bystanders reminds us that responsibility is shared, and small acts of courage create big cultural shifts.

Building organizational solutions

Respect doesn't happen by accident. It grows from systems, culture, and leadership. Clear policies, transparent reporting, and supportive practices show employees that their safety and dignity matter.

When organizations take harassment seriously, they create an environment where people can bring their best selves to work.

Best practices for responding to bullying and harassment

1. Establish a zero-tolerance policy
2. Foster an inclusive and respectful culture
3. Train leaders and employees
4. Encourage open communication
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