Stop bullying: it’s in your hands
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Workplace bullying is behaving in a way that is offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting. Bullies may act individually or in groups but the result is that the targeted person feels undermined, humiliated or injured.

Bullying behaviour takes many forms, from blatant actions carried out in front of other people to manipulative tactics obvious only to the bullied person. Bullying can be as extreme as violent and physically threatening actions, or as subtle and secretive as deliberately ignoring someone or spreading spiteful rumours.

Whatever form it takes, bullying is an ongoing process that gradually wears down an individual, leaving them feeling demeaned, inadequate and questioning their own abilities.

Bullying in the workplace is often the result of someone abusing or misusing their power.

For instance, a bully may be someone who feels insecure and tries to make themselves feel better by making someone else feel small. Another example is someone in a position of authority, such as a manager or supervisor, who takes what they feel is an authoritative stance with employees but regularly pushes this too far.

Whatever form it takes, bullying is unwarranted and unwelcome and can cause great distress.
Who gets bullied?

Bullying can happen to people at all levels, from senior directors to junior members of staff or new recruits.

It is often assumed that the kind of people who get bullied may be vulnerable, lacking in assertiveness, somehow ‘different’ and/or someone who stands up for a colleague who is also bullied. In fact, research shows that the most common targets for office bullying are individuals who are above average performers – bullies tend to pick on those they view as more competent, successful, popular and/or efficient than themselves.

Why does it happen?

Bullying can happen for many reasons, with people using whatever power they have to torment someone else.

Bullies can be unhappy and insecure people trying to mask their own fears. In order to feel better and more powerful, they identify other people who are perhaps their junior or who they feel threatened by, and then bully them.

By intimidating other people, they often think they will gain more power or will impress those around them, while hoping to feel more comfortable about themselves.

Bullies can also be people who pride themselves on strong management but take this to an extreme. For instance, in some competitive environments people wrongly believe that bullying is a way of motivating staff.

Bullies may be people who have themselves been bullied in the past, and believe this to be appropriate behaviour. At other times, the bully may not even realise that they are being a bully.
How do you recognise the signs?

Bullying is sometimes overlooked or excused because people fail to see it for what it is.

The following ways of treating people can constitute bullying:

- intimidating a colleague with aggression, threats, regular shouting and swearing or by belittling them in front of others – no one should ever be expected to 'toughen up to fit in'

- using verbal abuse, including name calling, ridiculing, 'ganging up' or picking on someone – an alleged personality clash is no justification for spreading rumours and gossiping

- erratic or unfairly managing people, such as constantly changing expectations, regularly assigning one person undesirable shifts or cancelling their holiday or training opportunities with no good reason

- criticising individuals, either publicly or privately, in a manner that is unwarranted, unduly sustained or unfair

- professionally attacking an employee by regularly changing goalposts and expecting perfection, dramatically reducing someone's responsibilities or setting tasks outside agreed job descriptions

- having a coercive management style – for instance, by marginalising or ostracising someone, or by withholding relevant information.
It is vital to distinguish between a manager who is firm but fair and a manager who bullies and harasses staff.

Some of the differences are listed below.

**A firm but fair manager:**

- is consistent and fair, but isn’t aggressive
- is determined to achieve the best results, but is not unreasonable and inflexible
- insists on high standards of service and behaviour, but doesn’t blame others if things go wrong
- asks for people’s views, listens and assimilates feedback, is clear about their own ideas, but doesn’t assume they are always right
- will discuss performance in private before taking action, but doesn’t lose their temper, degrade people publicly or threaten official warnings without listening to any explanation.
What are the side effects?

Workplace bullying can have far-reaching consequences for individuals, both in and out of work. Bullying can have as negative an impact on observers as on those being bullied. Symptoms vary from person to person, and can be physical, emotional, mental or behavioural. These can include:

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<td>Dramatic change in appetite</td>
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If you think you’re being bullied, what can you do?

Share your experience
Talk to someone you trust to get a sympathetic ear, fresh perspective and support. It is important not to let yourself feel isolated by trying to deal with it on your own.

It’s not your fault
If you find yourself being bullied, remember you are not to blame for the bully’s behaviour. However, it is important you take steps to remedy the situation so you can lead your normal life.

Confront the bully
It may be that they do not realise the effect their behaviour is having. If so and you feel able, have a quiet word to the bully at the earliest opportunity to show you are not too scared to confront them and that their behaviour will not be accepted.

However, if you believe the bully is fully aware of what they are doing and the bullying has been sustained over time, confrontation could make things worse. In this case, seek advice and support.

Keep a record
If bullying behaviour persists, write it down. Keep a diary of details and any emails, letters, reports or witnesses to events. This could help your case.

Seek advice and support
Contact someone who can help you. It could be your line manager, another senior manager, human resources team, occupational health team, counselling or mediation service, welfare officer, trade union representative or staff side bullying and harassment representative.

Consult your employer’s bullying and harassment policy. Remember your employer has a legal duty of care under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997.

www.nhsemployers.org/bullyingandharassment
Be honest with yourself
It is very important that you take steps to address your behaviour. Admitting that you may be seen as a bully is the first step to stopping the cycle of bullying. Do you really want a reputation as a bully?

Don’t copy other people’s mistakes
Remember the angst and negative feelings when you were managed badly, or when you witnessed bad management or bullying. Do you want to do the same to others?

Be firm but fair
Treat all employees the same way. Praise all those who do a good job, but don’t establish favourites you put on a pedestal.

If employees are not working up to standard, take a deep breath and make your point calmly and firmly. Do not be tempted to yell, threaten or belittle them, however frustrated you feel.

Communicate
However busy you are, ensure you make time to communicate effectively with your teams.

Listen to what others have to say. You may not agree, but in preparing to bite someone’s head off or putting them down, you may actually miss a good idea and they will not respect your approach.

Talk to people calmly and inclusively. If you talk behind other people’s backs then they will feel excluded and it will create an atmosphere of suspicion.

Seek help
Log on to www.nhsemployers.org/bullyingandharassment or www.banbullyingatwork.com for further information.

Alternatively, contact a counselling or advice service, such as The Andrea Adams Trust on 01273 704900 or www.andreaadamstrust.org
Have you crossed the line?