



Did you know that 6.8% of Australian workers reported they had been bullied at work in the past six months\*?

*The Australian workplace barometer (2012)*

Workplace bullying and harassment is a serious issue and a problem faced by many Australian organisations, regardless of their size. The impact of workplace bullying is broad reaching, causing emotional and physical stress to the individual, and financial and cultural stress to the organisation.

Given the various forms and appearances of workplace bullying, identifying, managing and confronting it can be difficult. It can occur across multiple mediums such as email, text message, phone or face-to-face, and can be directed at an individual or a group of people across every level of the organisation.

## Empower your people

Perhaps one of the best ways to conquer workplace bullying is by empowering every person within the organisation to play an active role in its prevention. Duties held by particular people may include:



**THE BUSINESS OWNER:** has the primary duty of care to ensure that workers and other people are not exposed to bullying and harassment risks. Duties may include providing a safe work environment, providing systems to prevent bullying, monitoring workplace conditions and providing accurate information and supervision.



**WORKERS:** including employees, contractors, sub-contractors and so forth have a duty to take care of their own health and safety, take responsibility for their own influence on other people, comply with instruction and cooperate with any policies regarding workplace bullying.



**MANAGERS:** must exercise due diligence to ensure the business is undertaking reasonable steps and delegating the necessary resources to minimise risks associated with workplace bullying.



**OTHER PEOPLE:** who interact with the organisation such as visitors or clients have similar duties to workers.

## Know your risk factors

Having a good understanding of what can cause workplace bullying is also a valuable way to help prevent it. Research undertaken by Safe Work Australia in 2013 indicates there are a number of factors that may increase the risk of workplace bullying occurring such as:



**WORK STRESSORS:** the presence of work stressors such as high job demands, limited job control, organisational change, role conflict and job insecurity.



**LEADERSHIP STYLES:** behaviour that is strict and autocratic that does not involve workers in decision making, behaviour where little to no guidance is provided.



**SYSTEMS OF WORK:** lack of resources, lack of training, poorly designed rostering, unreasonable performance measures.



**WORK RELATIONSHIPS:** poor communication, low levels of support, work group hostility.



**WORKFORCE CHARACTERISTICS:** certain groups of workers are more at risk of being exposed to workplace bullying including casual workers, young workers, new workers, apprentices, injured workers and workers in a minority group because of ethnicity, religion, disability, gender or sexual preferences

## Control your risks

By creating the right work environment and using the correct mix of control measures, organisations can eliminate or minimise as far as practicable the risk of workplace bullying.



**SET THE STANDARD OF WORKPLACE BEHAVIOUR:** by implementing a workplace bullying policy. This policy should be developed in consultation with workers and should include:

- a statement of commitment from the organisation regarding absolute commitment to preventing workplace bullying
- the standard of behaviour expected from workers
- the correct use of communication methods including email, text messages, social media and face-to-face
- how and where to report incidents of unreasonable behaviour
- the process for responding to reports
- the consequences of non-compliance.



**DEVELOP PRODUCTIVE AND RESPECTFUL WORKPLACE RELATIONSHIPS:** promote positive leadership styles, mentor and support new workers, facilitate teamwork and cooperation, ensure supervisors act in a timely fashion to reports of bullying behaviour.



**IMPLEMENT REPORTING AND RESPONSE PROCEDURES:** encourage reporting by making it clear that victimisation will not be tolerated, ensuring consistent and timely responses, being transparent when dealing with workplace bullying, use plain English and outline how issues will be dealt with.



**PROVIDE TRAINING AND INFORMATION:** everyone should be aware of their roles and responsibilities when dealing with workplace bullying. Training can include inductions, online courses, podcasts and face-to-face programs. Information should be made available by talking directly with workers, handing out company newsletters, information sheets with payslips and email announcements.



**DESIGN SAFE SYSTEMS OF WORK:** clearly define jobs, seek regular feedback, provide the right resources enabling workers to carry out their jobs, review and monitor staffing levels, develop and maintain effective communication.

## How to respond to workplace bullying

Effectively responding to all instances of workplace bullying will help prevent the situation from reoccurring and reinforce to workers that bullying is a serious situation that will result in direct consequences. Consider the following when responding to workplace bullying:

- Act promptly
- Treat all matters seriously
- Maintain confidence
- Ensure procedural fairness
- Be neutral
- Support all parties
- Do not victimise
- Communicate process and outcomes
- Keep records.