Advice for managers

* [What is workplace bullying?](http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/furtheradvice/informationonbullying.htm#what)
* [A member of my team has told me they are being bullied – what should I do?](http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/furtheradvice/informationonbullying.htm#member)
* [I think a member of my team is being bullied – what should I do?](http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/furtheradvice/informationonbullying.htm#think)
* [How can I stop bullying and harassment in my team?](http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/furtheradvice/informationonbullying.htm#how)

What is workplace bullying?

**Bullying** at work can take many forms. It can involve:

* ignoring or excluding someone
* spreading malicious rumours or gossip
* humiliating someone in public
* giving someone unachievable or meaningless tasks
* constantly undervaluing someone’s work performance

There is no legal definition of workplace bullying. 'Bullies' are often – but not always – more senior than the person they are bullying. 'Bullies' sometimes target groups as well as individuals.

**Harassment** relates to unlawful discrimination on the grounds of race, sex, disability, age, religion or belief, or sexual orientation. The Prevention of Harassment Act (1997) covers harassment more generally.

A member of my team has told me they are being bullied – what should I do?

* **Follow the procedures laid down in your organisation's bullying and harassment policy**

The policy should include definitions of what your organisation regards as standards of acceptable behaviour. The first step for staff who feel they are being bullied is most likely to have an informal discussion with you as their line manager, or a designated colleague, to explore their concerns. Other steps include:

* informally raising the issue with the alleged 'bully'
* mediation
* making a formal complaint
* legal action
* **Be sensitive, objective, and seek information**

Encourage your member of staff to describe examples of the alleged bullying and what outcome they would like to see. To be fair to both parties, you need to decide whether the behaviour is bullying or harassment. The alleged 'bully' may have no idea about the effect their behaviour is causing. Malicious allegations can also happen.

You may wish to refer to your organisation's bullying policy, harassment advisors, or other [sources of help](http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/furtheradvice/informationonbullying.htm#find) to help you with this. You also need to let the member of staff know what their options are in terms of support, progressing the complaint, and relevant policies.

* **Identify a way forward**

Many cases of bullying can be resolved informally – you may wish to approach the people concerned confidentially to explore and discuss the allegations and work out a way forward. For more serious matters, you will need to seek the support of your organisation's harassment advisors, human resources team, other organisational support services, or [outside organisations](http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/furtheradvice/informationonbullying.htm#find). In serious cases, your staff member may wish to make an informal or formal complaint, or even take legal action.

* **Options for tackling the problems**

Depending on the circumstances, bullying and harassment can be tackled in a number of ways. These include:

* an agreement between the parties on standards of behaviour
* mentoring
* performance management
* training
* transfer of staff
* rehabilitation, including emotional support

I think a member of my team is being bullied – what should I do?

* **Consult your organisation's bullying and harassment policy**

Your first port of call should be your bullying policy. This will give you advice about how your organisation approaches bullying, harassment and unacceptable behaviour, and the steps you should follow. It may include advice on how to approach the person you are concerned about, or point you in the direction of trained harassment advisors or others who can support both you and the member of staff.

* **Be sensitive**

Raising bullying or harassment issues with one of your staff can be very uncomfortable – for them and you. It may be that you’ve misinterpreted the situation, and the person you think is being bullied does not perceive any unacceptable behaviour at all. The relationship that you have with your staff depends on many factors such as personality, management style and the culture of the team or organisation.

How managers tackle this issue may be very different. One way would be to create the atmosphere and circumstances for the individual to raise the problem themselves – you could perhaps ask open questions such as 'how are things going?'

How can I stop bullying and harassment in my team?

Responsibility for dealing with bullying and harassment rests with the organisation, and prevention strategies must be organisation-wide. Many organisations adopt a zero tolerance approach, and this requires full support from management – including line managers.

Some factors associated with bullying include:

* perceived imbalance of power
* 'bully' thinks they can get away with it
* internal competition where reward systems focus solely on outputs
* organisational change

As a line manager, you may want to tackle some of these factors by, for example:

**Communication**

* ensuring the management style is collaborative and not autocratic
* consulting staff regularly and keeping them informed during times of change

**Training**

* encouraging staff to attend diversity training

**Policy**

* publicising your organisation’s bullying and harassment policy
* explaining the consequences of bullying within the organisation

**Management**

* encouraging control and choice for staff, as far as possible
* exploring levels of competition between individuals and teams
* considering alternative incentives to achieving high performance
* ensuring you are confident and comfortable in managing poor performance

Find out more

* [Bullying and harassment at work: a guide for managers and employers](http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=794) Advisory, conciliation and arbitration service, Acas
* [Harassment and bullying at work](http://www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/dvsequl/harassmt/harrass.htm?IsSrchRes=1) Chartered Institute of Personnel Development, CIPD