

The Workplace Bully

by Erin Keefe, EIP Administrative Assistant

As teachers, you have no doubt heard the word ‘bully’ more in recent years than in your whole life. Today, bullying behaviours exist in different and ever-changing forms and the hope to be able to spot red flags and to protect those in our charge is at the forefront of our minds. But what about yourself? What about your colleagues?

The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS) defines workplace bullying as “acts or verbal comments that could ‘mentally’ hurt or isolate a person in the workplace.” This could come from a parent, student, co-worker or supervisor.

Workplace bullying can really take a toll on your well-being. It is clear that workplace bullying affects everyone. A study published in the British Medical Journal Open in December 2012, showed that both those on the receiving end of bullying behaviours and also witnesses to bullying, have a heightened risk of being prescribed anti-depressants or anxiety medication. The effects are usually psychological or emotional but in some cases can be physical and can present in ways such as sleep loss, over-eating, or anxiety.

The behaviours of a workplace bully can be subtle or hard to recognize, but they are usually a repeated pattern. They will probably not shove you into a locker or give you a wedgie, but they might belittle your opinions, scold you, threaten you, make unreasonable demands, tease you, embarrass you in front of others, make up rules or procedures and apply them inconsistently, spread rumours or gossip about you, sabotage your work or take credit for your ideas.

There are good and bad ways of dealing with bullies and here are some examples of what **not** to do:

- Don't suffer alone. Talk to your supervisor. Seek support.
- Don't attempt to ‘fight fire with fire’. Keeping a calm demeanor will help ensure things don't escalate.
- Don't tolerate the bullying of a co-worker. Intervene or report what you witness. Don't do nothing.

Some things you can do in an attempt to ameliorate the situation for yourself or others are:

- If you feel safe doing so, make an attempt to resolve it on your own. Perhaps they don't realize how their words or actions affect you or that their behaviour is unwelcome, unwanted or inappropriate.



- Stay as calm as possible.
- Have a witness with you if you are afraid to approach him/her on your own.
- If the behaviours continue, report him/her to a manager or supervisor.
- Keep a journal or some notes to help you remember dates and details of incidents.
- If you are a witness to bullying, ask the bully to repeat or explain him or herself to shine a light on the behaviour. Don't be a bystander.
- Contact the NSTU for help.

It's awful to feel uncomfortable at work. Help yourself and your colleagues by setting an example. Decide that you will not tolerate workplace bullying.

The NSTU offers workshops to groups and schools on topics of harassment, dealing with difficult parents, and conflict resolution in the Workplace. Please contact 477-5621 or 477-4723 or gducette@staff.nstu.ca

The Early Intervention Program (EIP) invites NSTU members to sign up for our Wellness email list at Be_Well@nstu.ca. Please contact Erin at ekeefe@staff.nstu.ca to provide her with your NSTU email address.

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