Employer guide to risk management of bullying in the workplace

Managers and supervisors have a responsibility to be actively involved in bullying prevention initiatives within their workplace.

This document briefly discusses safe systems of work to prevent and manage bullying in the workplace such as bullying prevention policies and procedures. It is important to note that bullying prevention policies are only of real benefit when the workplace is functioning with a Code of Conduct, Grievance Procedure and Performance Management system in place.

Senior management commitment

A demonstrated commitment from senior management and their active involvement in a bullying prevention initiative is vital to ensuring the success of such initiatives. Senior management can demonstrate commitment by:

- Actively endorsing a anti-
- bullying policy
- Making it clear that bullying in the workplace will not be tolerated
- Ensuring that complaints of bullying are taken seriously and properly responded to
- Modelling positive behaviours of respect and courtesy
- Promoting the company's Code of Conduct
- Promoting the company's Mission and Values (if relevant)
- Consulting with employees at all levels.

It is vital that senior management ensure that managers at all levels are appropriately managing employees. Negative workplace behaviours may escalate into a perception of bullying because of inaction by supervisors and managers. Ignoring the shortcomings of difficult subordinates can happen at any level of an organisation.

Senior management should not tolerate poor management practices. Many bullying complaints involve issues such as lack of consultation, micromanagement (e.g. too much focus upon how a job should be done rather than the results), unequal allocation of work and discourteous behaviour.

While these may not be bullying, they are still poor management practices and are not optimum for effective business functioning.

Complaint handling

Organisations should have clear procedures in place for the reporting and handling of bullying complaints or grievances. These processes should ensure the following:

- Employees know when and how to make a report of bullying
- Persons appointed to handle complaints are aware of their roles and responsibilities and are fully trained in complaint handling procedures
- Both informal and formal complaint procedures are available
- Informal complaint procedures using mediation between parties that do not require records to be kept or disciplinary action to be taken are developed and utilised where appropriate
- Formal complaint procedures that require record keeping and may result in disciplinary action are utilised where necessary
- New complaint handling procedures for bullying align as much as possible with existing procedures
- Procedures effectively integrate OSH and human resources (HR) policies and practices
- Complaints are treated seriously and promptly responded to.
- Complaints are investigated impartially
- Confidentiality is maintained
- Support and advice are provided to all persons involved, as required
- A range of available resolution options are available and utilised appropriately including mediation, counselling, apologies, written warnings or other disciplinary action
- External professional services are used when needed to aid in the investigation and resolution of bullying allegations.

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Bullying: Risk management

To ensure employers are meeting their duty of care and responsibility to minimise or eliminate risks within the workplace, they should apply a risk management system:

1. Identify the risk

Consider whether employees are at risk of bullying by identifying the factors that could contribute to or encourage bullying behaviour.

2. Assess the risk

Systematically assess the risk of potential harm to employees' health and safety. This will influence the course of action.

3. Control the risk

Controls implemented need to reflect the hazards identified. These controls need to be periodically or systematically reviewed.

4. Monitor, evaluate and improve the control

Monitor and review the process of implementing bullying prevention initiatives, including awareness of bullying, to ensure that interventions are successfully carried out and any issues or difficulties implementing measures are addressed.

Prevention strategies (risk controls) to address bullying risk factors

Leadership initiatives
- Actively promoting a supportive leadership culture that will not tolerate bullying and which encourages and acts on reports of such behaviour
- Leadership training to employees with supervisory or managerial responsibilities, focusing on:
  - Enhancing levels of supportive behaviours
  - Providing formal and informal feedback
  - Engaging employees in decision-making processes
  - Effective management of workload and priorities.
- Leadership coaching programs
- Establishing accountability for people management for all supervisors and managers.

Workplace culture initiatives
- Improving recruitment and induction processes by focusing on selecting and socialising people into a positive, values-based work culture

- Ensuring standards of behaviour are integral to the performance management system and that the system provides early discussion where there is an issue around behaviour
- Applying quality control to the performance management system
- Developing a conflict management process and training staff members in conflict resolution
- Providing additional employee training, e.g. on workplace diversity and tolerance.

Other organisational initiatives
- Re-designing and clearly designing jobs
- Reviewing resource availability, staffing levels or excessive working hours
- Improving the availability of flexible working arrangements
- Building consultation into change management procedures and practices to ensure employees at all levels are consulted prior to and during organisational change.

Early intervention management strategies
- Providing and promoting easily accessible mechanisms for reporting of complaints
- Acknowledging that bullying has occurred (where possible)
- Providing mediation between parties (where appropriate);
- Providing confidential support structures for persons who have experienced bullying by developing networks or groups of trained contact officers, advisers in the HR area and Employee Assistance Programs (EAP)
- Offering counselling to both the accused person and person perceiving bullying
- Provision and promotion of EAP services;
- Coaching and if appropriate, disciplinary action;
- Monitoring workplace relationships.

For more information on the prevention and management of bullying in the workplace please contact WorkSafe WA on 1300 307 877 or view our website.

National Relay Service: 13 36 77
Quality of service feedback line: 1800 30 40 59

This publication is available in other formats on request to assist people with special needs.

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