

**Fact Sheet**

# Workplace bullying

**Jill's story (fictional)**

During her work as an Electorate Officer, Jill meets a community leader and mispronounces their name. Jill's colleagues laugh at her and imitate her mistake. Jill feels embarrassed, but tries to shrug it off as a single incident. However, Jill's colleagues continue to mock her most days when they see her in the office. They also start going out for coffees and lunch as a group without her. As time goes on, Jill notices she is being left out of the loop on important tasks, and her colleagues tell her that maybe she isn't in the right job when she misses details in her work.

In considerable distress, Jill calls the Parliamentary Workplace Support Service (PWSS) for support. After the PWSS case coordinator listens to Jill and carefully steps through the options available, Jill decides to try to resolve her complaint through a PWSS local resolution process. With Jill's permission, the PWSS Case Coordinator contacts Jill's Office Manager and works with them to lead a conversation with the whole team about identifying bullying and its impacts, and the consequences for continuing this behaviour. Jill's colleagues acknowledge their conduct and agree to interact with Jill more respectfully, as well as cease excluding her from social activities and correspondence.



## What is bullying?

Workplace bullying is repeated and unreasonable behaviour directed towards a worker or a group of workers that creates a risk to health and safety.

Workplace bullying can be carried out by one or more people. It can occur between colleagues; from supervisors or managers to workers; or from workers to supervisors or managers. Workplace bullying can also be directed at or carried out by other people at the workplace, such as members of the public, people in other Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces, and other stakeholders you might work with.

Unreasonable behaviour means behaviour that a reasonable person, having considered the circumstances, would see as unreasonable, including behaviour that is victimising, humiliating, intimidating or threatening.

Workplace bullying is unlawful and is a significant psychosocial hazard. Bullying needs to be addressed for a workplace to have an enduring positive, safe and respectful culture.

## What is not workplace bullying?

### One-off incidents

A single incident of unreasonable behaviour is not workplace bullying; however, there is a risk it will be repeated or escalate and therefore shouldn't be ignored.

### Reasonable management action conducted in a reasonable way

It is reasonable for managers and supervisors to allocate work and give feedback on a worker's performance. Actions undertaken by managers are not workplace bullying if they are carried out in a lawful and reasonable way, taking the particular circumstances into account.

Some examples of reasonable management action include:

- setting realistic and achievable performance goals, standards and deadlines
- deciding not to select a worker for a promotion where a fair and transparent process is followed
- telling a worker about unsatisfactory work performance in an honest, fair and constructive way
- discussing with a worker unreasonable behaviour in an objective and confidential way
- implementing organisational changes or restructuring; and
- taking disciplinary action, including suspension or terminating employment, where appropriate or justified in the circumstances

- There are a number of options available to you. It is best to try and resolve things early and at the lowest level possible, before the behaviours are entrenched and harm is being done to you and others in the workplace.

Options include:

- making sure you are informed about your workplace policy on bullying and complaints
- keeping a diary of everything that happens, including what you've done to try and stop it as this can help if you make a complaint
- talking with your line manager if it is safe to do so and sharing your concerns, and
- raising your concerns directly with the person responsible, if you feel safe to do so. Using "I" statements can help invite the other person into a constructive discussion about the impact of their behaviour.

The PWSS can confidentially help you to prepare for difficult conversations like these. You can also ask the PWSS for more information, advice and support in navigating challenging situations.

**The PWSS offers a number of resolution pathways to help ensure that everyone experiences a safe and respectful workplace.**



While managers may not be perfect every time, both the management action itself and the way it occurs need to be reasonable. An example of 'conducted in reasonable way' is offering a worker the opportunity to have a support person at discussions about performance or behaviour concerns.

## Support

The PWSS provides independent and confidential support to all Commonwealth parliamentary workplace participants who have experienced, witnessed, or are managing staff who have experienced escalated or challenging workplace interactions. PWSS Case Coordinators are readily available 24/7, and can provide information and workshops specific to the needs of your office.

 **24/7 Support 1800 747 977**

 **Text the PWSS 0487 112 755**

 **Email [support@pwss.gov.au](mailto:support@pwss.gov.au)**

## What to do if you are accused of workplace bullying

Having a complaint made against you can be stressful and cause you significant concern and anxiety. You might be concerned about your reputation and your job, and want

to be properly informed of your rights and responsibilities. It is natural to feel defensive, particularly if you believe

your workplace behaviour and conduct is appropriate. However, it can also be an opportunity to reflect on your own communication style and behaviours, and differences in how others are perceiving your communication and conduct in the workplace. The PWSS supports everyone in the workplace, so you will receive information, advice and support from our service. Sometimes the resolution and the pathway forward is easier than you might think, if everyone wants to find improved ways of working together.

## What to do if someone you manage reports being bullied

This is a good sign that the person trusts you enough to raise their workplace concerns with you.

**It is important to listen and take the person's concerns seriously, understand what the person wants to achieve and clarify what you have heard from them.**

Consider what you can do to help make the workplace a more respectful place for your colleague and others. As a manager, you have to provide a psychologically safe and respectful workplace that reduces the risk of harm from bullying. The PWSS can support you to manage a report of bullying within your team.