

### Introduction:

Adult-to-adult bullying affects workplaces throughout the world, often taking the form of sexual harassment or illegal discrimination. Bullying is very prevalent in the United States; however, bullying that does not take the form of illegal discrimination or sexual harassment is not illegal. The research reveals the dramatic consequences that this type of bullying has on individuals and workplaces. Targets of bullies often suffer from serious health conditions as a result of being bullied and workplace efficiency is severely reduced because of the overwhelming strain that bullying can place on targets.

In schools, adult-to-adult bullying can have even more dire effects, such as influencing student behavior and legitimizing student bullying tactics. Because of this, it is very important that school employees familiarize themselves with how to effectively deal with bullies.

### What is bullying?

Bullying can be summarized as:

- repeated hurtful or hostile actions;
- intended to mistreat or control another;
- that may be verbal or non-verbal;
- and that decrease a person's self worth.

One thing is clear: bullying is not a legitimate management style nor an appropriate way to treat workers or fellow employees. Bullying undermines a school's educational interests and decreases school productivity.

Examples of bullying include:

- Repeated use of insults

- Verbal conduct that a reasonable person would find threatening or humiliating, including shouting
- Sabotaging or undermining an employee's work performance
- Assigning tasks with impossible deadlines
- Removing areas of responsibility and assigning trivial tasks instead
- Taking credit for someone else's idea
- Spreading rumors
- Constantly undervaluing effort
- Persistent non-productive criticism

### **Bullying takes a toll:**

When one person bullies another, the targeted person's emotional strength becomes strained. As a result of this strain, serious health conditions may arise. Psychological health conditions include stress, depression, and mood swings; loss of sleep and fatigue; feelings of shame, guilt, embarrassment, and low self-esteem. Physical health conditions may also result and include post-traumatic stress disorder, reduced immunity to infection, stress headaches, high blood pressure, and digestive problems.

In the school setting, if a teacher is placed in a bullied situation the strain on that teacher's emotional and physical health will most likely have a negative impact on his or her students. Workplace inefficiency in a school translates to missed educational opportunities for children.

### **Bullying and the law:**

Many types of bullying are not illegal in the United States. Although several countries throughout the world have enacted broad-based bullying laws for the workplace, similar laws in the United States have not passed. Although there are effective legal remedies for targets of bullying when the bullying occurs because of the targets legally protected status, e.g. religion, race, sex, or when the bullying takes the form of sexual harassment, non-status-based bullying is difficult to remedy via legal theory and practice. Because of the lack of legislation making non-status based bullying illegal, an overwhelming majority of cases fall short of the legal standards needed to successfully pursue a claim. Even so, targets of bullying should not be discouraged from taking action. By contacting your union representative, participating in bullying seminars and training, and educating yourself with bullying literature and research, you can be prepared to address bullying in your workplace.

### **What you can do:**

Familiarize yourself with bullying resources to increase the likelihood that you will recognize bullying when it occurs so that it can be properly dealt with. When you believe that you or someone you know is a target of bullying, there are meaningful actions you can take to make a stand against bullying. When bullying occurs, you are encouraged to contact your union representative. Seeking assistance from your representative is your right as a union member. Your union will assist you in understanding your legal rights. Language may be added to your collective bargaining agreement to allow an employee to file a grievance concerning severe bullying.

### **Resources:**

<http://www.washingtonea.org>

<http://www.bullyinginstitute.org>

<http://www.workdoctor.com>

Gary Namie & Ruth Namie, *The Bully at Work* (Sourcebooks, Inc. 2000).

Ginny Nicarthy, Naomi Gottlieb, & Sandra Coffman, *You Dont Have to Take It! A Womans Guide to Confronting Emotional Abuse at Work* (Seal Press 1993).

David C. Yamada, *The Phenomenon of Workplace Bullying and the Need for Status-Blind Hostile Work Environment Protection*, 88 *Geo. L.J.* 475 (2000).

