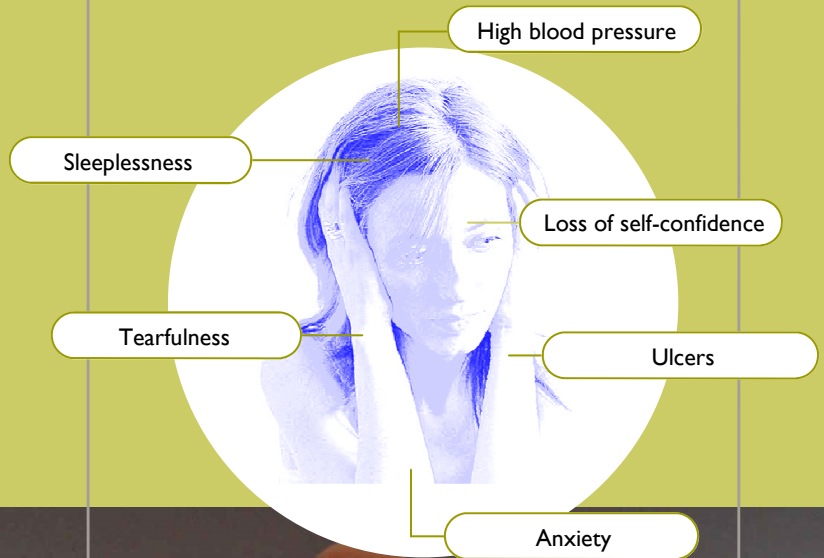




The Curse of Bullying



Help us tackle bullying

If you witness others being bullied, try and approach the victim and talk to them about it. They may be so grateful that someone else has noticed and recognised what is going on. If you don't feel able to talk to an individual, talk to your UNISON rep or call the branch office. We will be able to help.

Of course, the best way to tackle bullying is to prevent it in the first place! There is more chance of that happening in workplaces with a UNISON rep on hand to keep an eye on things. If your workplace hasn't got a rep, volunteer now, possibly as a jobshare with a colleague; UNISON can provide training so you can help tackle bullying at work.

Call the branch office for more details 01629 582266.

Bullying in the workplace is "endemic" in the UK, affecting 80 per cent of employees, the Samaritans has warned.

The charity said a third of those it surveyed were so unhappy they had considered leaving their job. Its research identified young employees as the group most vulnerable to stress, and the least able to discuss concerns with managers or colleagues.

What is workplace bullying?

Usually, if you genuinely feel you are being singled out for unfair treatment by a boss or colleague, you are probably being bullied. Although there is no comprehensive list of bullying behaviours, and there is no one type of person who is likely to be a bully, the list below should give an idea of some behaviour which constitutes workplace bullying.

Bullying behaviour can include:

- **competent staff being constantly criticised, having responsibilities removed or being given trivial tasks to do**
- **shouting at staff**
- **persistently picking on people in front of others or in private**
- **blocking promotion**
- **regularly and deliberately ignoring or excluding individuals from work activities**
- **setting a person up to fail by overloading them with work or setting impossible deadlines**
- **consistently attacking a member of staff in terms of their professional or personal standing**
- **regularly making the same person the butt of jokes**

The cost of bullying to you

Stress and ill-health can become part of the daily life of those being bullied.

Symptoms can include:

- **anxiety**
- **headaches**
- **nausea**
- **ulcers**
- **sleeplessness**
- **skin rashes**
- **irritable bowel syndrome**
- **high blood pressure**
- **tearfulness**
- **loss of self-confidence**
- **various illnesses of the organs such as the kidneys**
- **thoughts of suicide**

The cost of bullying to your boss

Bullying is recognised as a major cause of stress in the workplace and by law, stress must be dealt with in the same way as any other health and safety hazard.

Employers who fail to tackle bullying can pay a high price:

- **in lost time – because staff are affected by stress and ill-health**
- **lost incentive – because morale is low**
- **reduced work output and quality of service**
- **and lost resources – because people who are trained, and experienced, leave the organisation**
- **and if it goes to Employment Tribunal or to court they also face financial penalties and loss of reputation**

Most importantly, employers who fail to tackle bullying are breaking the law. That's why it is in everyone's interest to take workplace bullying seriously.

The legal position

Employers have a duty under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 to ensure the health, safety and welfare of their employees. If they do not do this they are breaching an individual's contract of employment. It may also be a breach of sexual harassment and racial discrimination legislation as well as the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. Employers and/or the bully may find themselves facing fines, compensation and possibly a jail sentence.

What to do if you are being bullied

If you feel you are being singled out or bullied at work, you should not have to put up with it. There are steps you can take.

1. First, speak to the bully. A direct approach is usually the best. Tell the person that you find their behaviour unacceptable and ask them to stop. This is sometimes all that is needed. Bullies do not like being confronted particularly by someone who is calm and civilised.

2. The majority of bullying goes on behind closed doors. So tell a friend or work colleague. You may well find out you are not the only one who has suffered. It is important that you do not try to cope on your own.

3. Contact UNISON! If there is a union rep where you work, tell them what has been happening. This will be in confidence and does not mean a formal complaint will automatically be made. A rep will only do what you want them to and will give you the advice and support you need. They will want to have the bullying stopped quietly and quickly and can go with you to speak to the bully, or see them on your behalf.

The rep will also help you with a formal complaint, if it goes that far, giving advice and support throughout the procedure.

4. If you think your rep is a friend of the bully, call the branch office. You will get the advice and support you need.

5. If you are not already in UNISON – join today.

6. Keep a diary. This will give a vital record of the nature of the bullying and when it occurred. It will be important when the bully is confronted. Many of the incidents may appear trivial in isolation so it is important to establish a pattern over a period of time.

7. Tell your manager or supervisor. If it is one of them who is bullying you, tell their manager. Take your diary with you to back up what you have to say. They may not believe you but you have at least told them there is a bullying problem. The more people that know, the more difficult it is for the bully to flourish.

8. In the end you may have to make a formal complaint and go through the grievance procedure. If you do take this route, never go to a meeting connected with the complaint without your union rep as a witness.