

Workplace Bullying

Information Sheet

The University of New South Wales aims to provide a workplace in which people are treated with respect and that is free from bullying.

The UNSW Code of Conduct, endorsed by the University Council, sets out principles for behaviour required in the workplace, including that:

- all people should be treated with respect; and
- all staff should ensure they do not engage in workplace bullying.

The University considers it to be a fundamental obligation of all employees to behave appropriately in the workplace. Further, the University considers that bullying in the workplace is inappropriate and unacceptable behaviour, and that staff found to have either committed or condoned such behaviour in the workplace may be subject to disciplinary action.

What is workplace 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. Repeated behaviour refers to the persistent nature of the behaviour and can involve a range of behaviours over time. 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.

Not all behaviour that makes a person feel upset or undervalued at work is workplace bullying. Examples of behaviours, whether intentional or unintentional, that may be workplace bullying if they are *repeated, unreasonable and create a risk to health and safety* include, but are not limited to:

- abusive, insulting or offensive language or comments; or belittling or humiliating comments
- aggressive and intimidating conduct, or victimisation
- practical jokes or initiation
- unjustified criticism or complaints
- deliberately excluding someone from work-related activities
- withholding information that is vital for effective work performance
- setting unreasonable timelines or constantly changing deadlines
- setting tasks that are unreasonably below or beyond a person's skill level
- denying access to information, supervision, or resources to the detriment of the worker
- spreading misinformation or malicious rumours
- changing work arrangements, such as rosters and leave, to deliberately inconvenience a particular worker or workers.

What is not workplace bullying?

A single incident of unreasonable behaviour is not workplace bullying. However, that behaviour may be repeated or escalate and so should not be ignored.

It is reasonable for managers and supervisors to allocate work and give feedback on a worker's performance. These actions are not considered to be workplace bullying if they are carried out in a lawful and reasonable way, taking the particular circumstances into account. What is reasonable would be determined by an objective

test through a court of law. However, courts have considered the following examples to be reasonable management action:

- setting realistic and achievable performance goals, standards and deadlines
- fair and appropriate rostering and allocation of working hours
- transferring a worker to another area or role for operational reasons
- deciding not to select a worker for a promotion where a fair and transparent process is followed
- informing a worker about unsatisfactory work performance in an honest, fair and constructive way
- informing a worker about unreasonable behaviour in an objective and confidential way
- implementing organisational change or restructuring, and taking disciplinary action including suspension or termination of employment where appropriate or justified in the circumstances.

What to do if you experience or observe bullying:

Staff have a responsibility to ensure that their actions do not negatively affect another staff member's career, health or well-being and are consistent with the University Code of Conduct. A staff member found to have bullied another staff member or to have condoned workplace bullying may be subject to disciplinary action.

Ideally, staff should attempt to resolve issues of workplace bullying at the local level by:

- Raising the issue directly with the person they believe is responsible for bullying. Often, an informal approach can quickly resolve an instance of workplace bullying; or
- Involving their supervisor.

If the issue is not resolved in this way, an employee may:

- Raise the matter with another relevant manager;
- Lodge a formal complaint in accordance with the University's [Staff Complaint Procedure](#) .
- Seek advice from Human Resources;
- Seek the assistance of the University's [Employee Assistance Program](#) (EAP), provided by Benestar;
- Seek advice from their union if he/she is a union member.

If staff witness behaviour that they believe may constitute workplace bullying, they may consider raising the matter with the parties involved, they may discuss the matter with a supervisor, or they may contact HR.

For further guidance:

[UNSW Code of Conduct](#)

[UNSW Staff Complaints Procedure](#)

[UNSW HR Contacts](#)

[Dealing with Workplace Bullying - a Worker's Guide](#)

[Guide for Preventing and Responding to Workplace Bullying](#)