Dealing with bullying

Background

Bullying is repeated, unreasonable behaviour directed to an employee or group of employees that creates a risk to health and safety.

Bullying behaviour can be direct or indirect, and can occur wherever people work together. Whether it is intended or not, bullying is an OHS hazard.

Examples of bullying include: verbal abuse; spreading rumours or innuendo about someone; unjustified criticism or complaints; deliberately denying access to information that a person needs to do their job; excessively scrutinising someone’s work or behaviour.

Overview of the unit

Just as there are many different types of bullying, so there are many ways of dealing with this behaviour. This unit will encourage students to explore some of these strategies in relation to various situations.

There are two activities in this unit:

- Activity 1: What can I do?
- Activity 2: safeTnet.

In Activity 1 students act out role-plays about various bullying situations in the workplace, then discuss different strategies for dealing with bullying behaviour. In Activity 2 students will graphically represent their own safety net of support to remind them of where they can seek assistance if they encounter bullying at work.

There are three other units on bullying on the SAFE-T1 site which you may like to use in conjunction with this unit:

- What’s Ok?
- What’s reasonable
- Is it true? Test your knowledge about workplace bullying
- Acting up.

Purpose of the unit

- To alert students to the kinds of behaviours to look out for and to give an opportunity to practise the skill of talking to a supervisor.
- To help students create a personalised, quick reference that shows a safety net of support that they can access if they need to.
**Assessment & curriculum alignment**

The activities in this unit are designed to **support** student learning but may also be used for assessment purposes. The activities support the learning outcomes listed in the table below but **may not cover all the elements**. If the activities are to be used as assessment tasks, teachers should check the relevant curriculum document, e.g. the VCAL Curriculum Planning Guides, to ensure all the elements are covered and the activity is consistent with the unit purpose statement.

While documentation from undertaking the activities in this unit can be collected to build a portfolio of evidence to be used for the assessment of relevant learning outcomes, students should demonstrate competence of a learning outcome on more than one occasion and in different contexts, to ensure the assessment is consistent, reliable, fair and equitable.

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<td>English: Reading, Speaking &amp; Listening, Listening, viewing and responding</td>
<td>Engage, Explain, Explore</td>
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<th>Activity 2: safeTnet</th>
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Activity 1: What can I do?

In this activity students will act out role-plays about workplace bullying behaviour and explore some possible strategies for dealing with it.

Before you start

Use Activity sheet 1 to create a set of role-play cards. These can be printed and laminated to be re-used on another occasion. There are ten roles, so they may need to be duplicated (i.e. create two sets) to suit class numbers.

Photocopy or make available Activity sheet 2.

Instructions

Assign roles in pairs by giving out the role-play cards. These are marked with letters to show the pairings – ie. A – Supervisor goes with A - Young worker, and so on

What happens

Students form pairs and act out the situation given to them. Emphasise that acting skill is not being measured here – this is just a way of making a situation come to life rather than reading about it. These can all occur concurrently so there is no actual ‘audience.’ Allow 5 minutes for this.

De-brief. Students have a chance to talk through some of the things that happened in the interchange. Allow an opportunity to repeat the role-play conversation if they need to.

Give out Activity sheet 2 and read it through as a whole group. Facilitate a discussion around the following question.

What technique or strategy mentioned here might work in your role-play situation?

Invite a range of answers to the question and facilitate a discussion based on their previous experiences, perhaps in similar situations. Allow 10 - 20 minutes if necessary for a thorough exploration of the issue.

Invite volunteers to test out a strategy for their role-play situation or ask them to try it out in pairs depending on the group. Focusing on one situation at a time and perhaps trying a few strategies would be ideal so the whole group can view possible results.

Follow-up

Take a set of photos of the role-plays. Show the issue and the possible resolution by adding speech bubbles and display these on the classroom noticeboard.

Extension activity

Create a digital story to demonstrate a way of approaching one of the issues shown in the role-play cards.

Links

Resources:  http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au
Recognising a bully:  http://www.bullyonline.org/workbully
Activity 2: safeTnet

In Activity 2 students create a graphic representation in the shape of a network to remind them of where to seek assistance if they are ever bullied in the workplace.

Before you start

Go to the Reach Out site and print off the pages Bullying – how to get help if you are being bullied as a handout, or make it accessible online: http://au.reachout.com/find/articles/workplace-bullying

Instructions

Read the first few paragraphs of the Reach Out article as an introduction to the activity. Some of this is related to school bullying but the principle is similar.

Explain that, often, young people in the workplace allow a bullying situation to go on because they are not sure what to do. One thing that can be done is talking to someone. There is always someone to talk to.

Outline the purpose of this session – to help them identify for themselves people they could go to for advice or support.

What happens

Start a conversation and discussion around the experiences of the group in relation to bullying.

Some starting questions could be:

What have they seen/heard/experienced at school or work that they would class as bullying? Why?

What action did they take?

What helped them or stopped them taking action?

Create a sample mind map on the board (see Activity sheet 3) and brainstorm with the group possible category headings. You could use the ones supplied, or use suggestions from the group depending on their level and experience.

For example: colleague – someone at the workplace who would listen.

Students then create their own mind map or network of help.

Follow-up

Based on the work done here, students could then create more personalised and individual versions of the safeTnet mind map for themselves.

Extension activity

Working in pairs, students research organisations that might be able to offer advice, or direct inquiries to someone who can help. Students collate the information into a directory for class use.
**Links**


- Ask a question at this address and the union representative will answer promptly. They may even make a call to find out more about the situation.


- Ask a question on any topic at this site – names are not required, and get clear, helpful guidance. This site is for young people who are finding out about where to draw the line.

**Youth Helpline:** 1300 131 719

**WorkSafe Victoria’s bullying information**
### Role-play cards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A - Supervisor</th>
<th>A - Young worker</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Steve is under pressure from management to make higher profits from the shop. He is stressed out and comes to work in a bad mood. He sees the new worker apparently not doing anything and starts yelling abuse.</td>
<td>This is about the third of fourth time Steve has lashed out at you and he does not tell you what you have done wrong or what you should be doing but just abuses you. You try to defend yourself.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B - Sous chef</th>
<th>B - Dishwasher</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natalie sees ‘dishies’ as just there to be screamed at to relieve tension. In the middle of a busy night the kitchen runs out of clean plates which holds up the serving and she throws a dirty plate at the new dishwasher.</td>
<td>You desperately need to keep this job and will put up with the bad language and insults, but this plate stuff is too much. You react.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>C - Co-worker</th>
<th>C - New employee</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kerry likes to be noticed and she is making sure everyone looks at her by playing practical jokes. She generally chooses young people who are new to the workplace.</td>
<td>You have just found a ‘Beware of the Dog’ sign on your keyboard and you are pretty sure Kerry put it there. You confront her.</td>
</tr>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>D - Boss</th>
<th>D - School based apprentice</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Costa runs a successful plumbing business and has 2 apprentices plus the SBA. He knows they play prcatal jokes on each other when he is not looking but the same thing happened when he was an apprentice, so he lets it go.</td>
<td>The other apprentices have been there longer than you and they try out their jokes on you. Some of these jokes are getting dangerous, and you feel you are at risk of being hurt. You try to tell Costa.</td>
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<tr>
<th>E - Senior Admin Officer</th>
<th>E - Casual employee</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sylvana hates her job and makes sure everyone knows it. She criticises and complains and has perfected ways of making the lives of some casual workers very unpleasant.</td>
<td>Your pay has taken twice as long to process as everyone else’s and you are late with the rent. This is the third time it has happened and you feel you are being targeted. You have to speak to Sylvana to sort out the situation.</td>
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What you can do

Being bullied at work? What you can do.

Below are a number of actions you may wish to take if you feel that you are experiencing bullying at work. The action/s you choose will depend upon the nature of the bullying and your workplace.

- If you can, tell the person the behaviour is unreasonable/inappropriate, that you are offended and want it to stop.
- Get advice from your health and safety representative.
- Keep a record of events that includes the names of the people involved (e.g. witnesses). Make sure the records focus on the facts of the situations (what happened, including dates and times, and, if possible, copies of any documents).
- Use the workplace or OHS procedure to report the situation.
- Seek professional counseling and/or advice.
- Talk to people you trust at your workplace (a supervisor, manager, health and safety representative, union representative or someone from human resources).

Taken from Preventing and Responding to Bullying at Work. Available from www.worksafe.vic.gov.au

Speaking out – some tips

It is important to be able to stand up for yourself in the workplace. Speaking out is the best way to let people know what worries you, ask questions and sort out any issues. The way you speak out will make a difference to the way you are heard. Here are some tips and tricks about speaking out, especially if you need to talk to your supervisor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tip</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
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| Making time  | Make sure the person is free and don’t interrupt them if they are talking to someone else. If you have to, make an appointment to talk at a time that suits them. | ☒ I need to tell you something right now  
☑ Excuse me, is this a good time to speak to you? |
| Language!    | Speak as plainly as possible so that the person can understand you. Try to avoid slang, street language or text talk that might not make sense to people in the workplace. | ☒ That b*&@$ is talking smack about me!  
☑ My workmate is using bad language about me. |
| Stay calm | If you are upset or angry about the situation, take a few minutes to calm down before speaking. Avoid aggressive or angry words and focus on the issue. | ✗ I want to hit that guy right now – he’s asking for it!  
✓ I don’t feel safe when that guy is near me. |
|---|---|---|
| Body talk | The way you stand when speaking makes a difference to how you are heard. | ✗ Hands in pockets, looking at the ground and kicking your boots into the dust while speaking.  
✓ Being aware of standing up straight and looking directly at the person you are speaking to. |
| Practice | Rehearsing what you want to say can make you less nervous. Try it out while looking in the mirror, on a friend or record it on your phone to hear what you sound like, and keep practicing it till you feel comfortable. | ✗ Go straight to your boss and get all mixed up and confused.  
✓ Practice a few times until you are sure you have all the words clear. |
| Suggestion box | If you have any ideas for improving the situation - share them. Then the boss will know you are concerned about the work situation, not just yourself. | ✗ You need to fix this right now!  
✓ Maybe everyone needs some training on this? |
| No blame game | Make sure you are talking about the issue and not blaming others. Attacking your fellow workers makes you look bad and doesn’t help the issue get fixed. | ✗ Those idiots are going to put me in hospital!  
✓ I am worried that someone - maybe me - will get badly hurt. |
| Stick to the facts | Exaggeration doesn’t help get the problem clear. Try to stick to the facts and you will show that you are being calm and clear about the problem. | ✗ They’ve done this hundreds of times and you haven’t done anything!  
✓ This happened at Easter, and then again two weeks ago. |
Sample network mind map

Me

- Colleague
- Family member
- Trusted adult eg teacher
- Friend
- Online friend
- HR or OHS person