

A demoralized person is much less productive and engaged. Many bullied workers ultimately give up and leave their jobs and professions because they “can’t take it anymore.” Does Your Work Culture Measure Up?

Think about the culture at your agency or worksite. A good work environment should set implicit standards or codes of professional behavior. The AFT believes that every government entity should have a bullying policy that includes a code of conduct.

A code of conduct alone is not enough to eliminate bullying; legal prohibitions are needed. No states have adopted comprehensive workplace bullying laws, but at least two counties—Hennepin County, Minn., and Fulton County, Ga.—have taken the lead in putting strong policies in place. Both counties have policies that prohibit employee bullying and identify reporting mechanisms for investigating and resolving issues without threat of retaliation against victims.

Contact Your Union

YOU HAVE A RIGHT to respect and dignity at work. Workplace bullying cannot and should not be tolerated.

If you are being bullied, don’t suffer in silence. Seek help from your doctor and/or an employee assistance program to address any bullying-related health problems. Give the doctor detailed information about the situation at work that may be contributing to your symptoms so he or she can give you concrete advice on how to control how the bullying affects you. Track your symptoms and bullying incidents with dates and times. You and your union may need that documentation to make a case for change. Contact your union. Avoid being alone

with the bully or confronting the person on your own. Stay calm and do not argue with the bully. The union and your steward or building representative can help assess the situation and give you advice and tips on using the contract and other agency/department policies to stop the abuse. Your union representatives may suggest that they accompany you to meetings with management to investigate the bullying and work toward a resolution.

Remember that if you are being bullied, you probably are not alone. Encourage other colleagues and co-workers who are being bullied to contact the union, too.



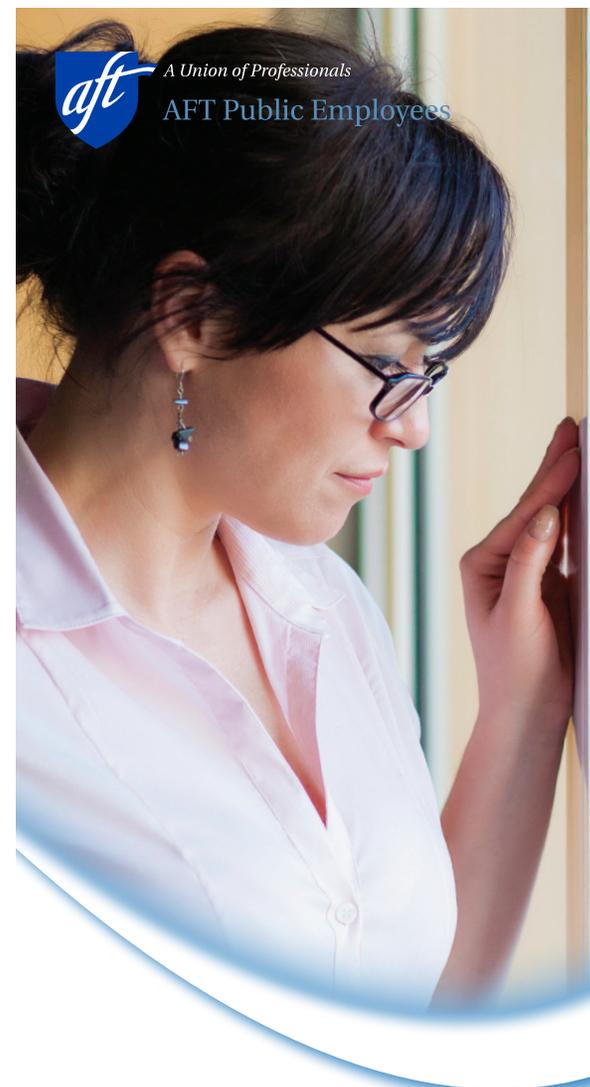
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Respect and Dignity at Work

No-Bullying Zone For Public Employees

You have a right to respect and dignity at work. Workplace bullying cannot and should not be tolerated.



FEDERAL AND STATE LAWS OFFER no protection against workplace bullying unless it is related to sexual harassment, or racial, ethnic, religious or age discrimination. Very few states have policies on employee bullying or harassment. Without clear direction and boundaries, managers, supervisors and co-workers may—intentionally or not—cross the line and bully employees.

It's time we recognize unacceptable bullying behavior at work and the culture that permits the practice. Employers have skirted the issue by obliquely referring to such behaviors as “inappropriate management style” or “poor leadership qualities.” But let's call it what it is—bullying—and work together to stop it.

One way you can help is to talk to your steward or union representative if you are being bullied or have witnessed bullying.

What Is Workplace Bullying?

WORKPLACE BULLYING IS QUITE SIMPLY an abuse or misuse of power. Bullying behavior is easy to recognize. It is behavior that intimidates, degrades and offends a person, often in front of others. A person who is the target of a bullying manager, supervisor or co-worker often feels defenseless and demoralized. A bullied individual may be singled out by the bully for constant criticism with no concrete or positive guidance and support for improvement.

Examples of bullying include:

- Unwarranted or invalid criticism;
- Repeated unsubstantiated attacks on a person's professional conduct;
- Constant assignment of trivial tasks; Assignments with unrealistic or impossible deadlines;
- Setting up a person to fail by overloading him or her with work;
- Blame or discipline without factual justification;
- Treatment that is different from other colleagues or co-workers;
- Swearing at a worker;
- Exclusion or social isolation;
- Shouting at or humiliating a worker;
- Making a worker the target of practical jokes; and
- Excessive monitoring.

Bullies rarely mistreat staff in isolation; they create a culture of bullying throughout the workplace. Typically, an environment of fear and intimidation develops that discourages trust, cooperation and teamwork. Bullying managers commonly set unreasonable goals and berate workers when those goals are not met. They may publicly deny that their demands are unreasonable, or that the stress created by this environment is harmful for achieving the goals of the agency.

Bullying behavior on the part of managers and co-workers is likely to be witnessed by colleagues, clients, patients and taxpayers.

Health Effects of Bullying

WORKERS WHO TRY TO COPE or adapt to bullying conditions in silence may pay a big price with their health. The problem is worse when the bully recruits other staff to participate in the behavior; with little or no support, victims become even more stigmatized and isolated. Research has shown that targets of work-related bullying experience significant physical and mental health problems, including:

- High stress, much like post-traumatic stress disorder. Unresolved, chronic stress causes physical changes in the brain that can lead to depression. Stress is also linked with high blood pressure and heart disease;
- Reduced self-esteem;
- Musculoskeletal problems;
- Phobias;
- Sleep disturbances;
- Digestive problems;
- Financial problems due to absence; and
- Family problems.

Sample Code of Conduct

In our worksite, we:

- Treat each other with respect;
- Work with colleagues to achieve goals;
- Maintain high standards of work and behavior; and
- Promote the values and aims of the agency/department.