Top Tips for Dealing with Bullying

Bullying can be an extremely destructive force in the workplace. In addition to the personal trauma it can cause, bullying can lead to a range of problems within organisations, such as poor team morale, reduced productivity, and increased staff turnover. If you become aware of bullying occurring within your team, it is vital to take prompt action to address the problem and support the individuals concerned. Following these suggestions will help you to do this effectively.

- **Foster a positive working environment.** Bullying thrives in negative working environments in which resentment and mistrust are rife. It is therefore important to encourage a positive working culture within your team and to promote honesty, openness and mutual respect at every level. You can do this by sharing information readily with your team members, encouraging them to listen carefully and respond sensitively to one another, and inviting them to approach you if they have any questions.

- **Know how to spot the signs of bullying.** An unexplained decline in performance, increased levels of stress-related absence, or an uncharacteristic change in an individual’s behaviour or attitude may signal that something is amiss. If you become aware of these kinds of signs, it is a good idea to meet with the individual to ask if anything is wrong, and to let them know that you are there to help.

- **Be approachable.** Coming forward about being bullied can be extremely difficult for employees, so make it clear from the outset that you are happy to meet with your team members if they have any problems at work. It is a good idea to remind your team of this collectively from time to time, as well as when you meet team members on a one-to-one basis.

- **Familiarise yourself with your organisation’s anti-bullying policy.** Doing this will help you to be fully prepared if bullying does occur in your team. If your organisation does not currently have an anti-bullying policy in place, information on creating and implementing one can be found in Related Links.

- **Make your team aware of your organisation’s stance on bullying.** You can do this by sending the anti-bullying policy (if you have one) to your team members via email and asking them to confirm that they have read and understood it. Alternatively, you may wish to talk about the policy, or about bullying in general, as part of a team meeting, and invite your team members to ask questions.

- **Educate employees about bullying.** It is important that your team members know what to do if they are bullied, or if they witness bullying at work. To this end, you may wish to liaise with the relevant parties in your organisation (e.g. your HR and/or Learning and Development departments) to discuss how anti-bullying training could be delivered. Internal initiatives such as ‘Anti-Bullying Week’ or ‘Say No to Bullying Day’ can help to reinforce the key messages of anti-bullying training and demonstrate that tackling and preventing bullying remains high on your organisation’s agenda.

- **Set a great example.** As a manager or leader, your team members will look to you to set the tone within the team or department, so make sure that you are not inadvertently creating an environment where bullying might occur. [1] You can do this by making sure you treat team members fairly and equally at all times, provide positive feedback at regular intervals, and avoid apportioning blame for mistakes made within the team.

- **Remember that bullying isn’t always obvious.** Many bullies deliberately target their victims in subtle ways in order to avoid detection. If a team member reports a case of bullying but cannot ‘prove’ it, as a manager or leader you still have a duty to investigate the situation.

- **Seek advice and support.** Before taking action it is a good idea to consult a credible source on tackling bullying, such as ACAS, your HR department (if you have one), a union representative, or a trusted colleague. This will help to give you added confidence that you are acting within the guidelines of employment law regulations and, where appropriate, your organisation’s anti-bullying policy.

[1] For example, it has been reported that bullying can be a particular problem in workplaces where employees are criticised publicly, shouted at or joked about. ‘Concern over Workplace Bullying’, (7 November 2007) available at: //news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/7082816.stm (accessed 6 January 2011).

Related Items

Related Resources

- Anti-Bullying Checklist
- How to Promote an Anti-Bullying Culture
- Anti-Bullying Policy