

UNISON— organising for health and safety

# RESPECT!

a health and safety issue



Guidance for young workers on bullying  
and harassment at work

  
UNISON  
the public service union



## **Have you been bullied or harassed?**

**Bullying and harassment don't just occur in the playground. They also affect the lives of many adults, including young workers. All bullying and harassment is unacceptable, there is no excuse, and UNISON is campaigning to raise awareness and tackle the problem.**

## How do I know if I've been bullied or harassed?

### Workplace bullying =

offensive, intimidating, malicious, or insulting behaviour, or abuse of power or authority which violates the dignity of, or creates a hostile environment which undermines, humiliates, denigrates or injures an individual or group of employees.

### Harassment =

unwanted conduct affecting the dignity of men and women in the workplace. It may be related to age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, race, disability, religion, nationality or any personal characteristic and may be persistent or an isolated incident. The key is that the actions or comments are viewed as demeaning and unacceptable to the recipient. Certain laws also have a specific definition of harassment.

Examples of bullying/harassment include:

- withholding information, etc so the job cannot be done properly
- unreasonable/impossible deadlines or workloads
- overbearing supervision or unjust criticism
- blocking opportunities or threats about job security

- inappropriate initiations for new workers
- unwelcome sexual advances
- ignoring views and opinions or isolating the victim/s
- belittling, shouting, insulting, or verbal abuse.

## I feel ill

Bullying and harassment can leave the victim, and other workers forced to witness it, feeling both emotionally and physically ill. Victims may become anxious, be unable to sleep, lose their self-confidence, suffer from stress and develop physical symptoms such as headaches, skin rashes, backaches and ulcers. In the long-term far more serious illnesses can develop, or as a way out, a victim may commit suicide.

## Why me, why them?

Anyone can become a victim. It may be because you are new or young. It may be because the bully views your competence as a threat. It may be due to the bully's prejudices meaning that 'your face doesn't fit in'.

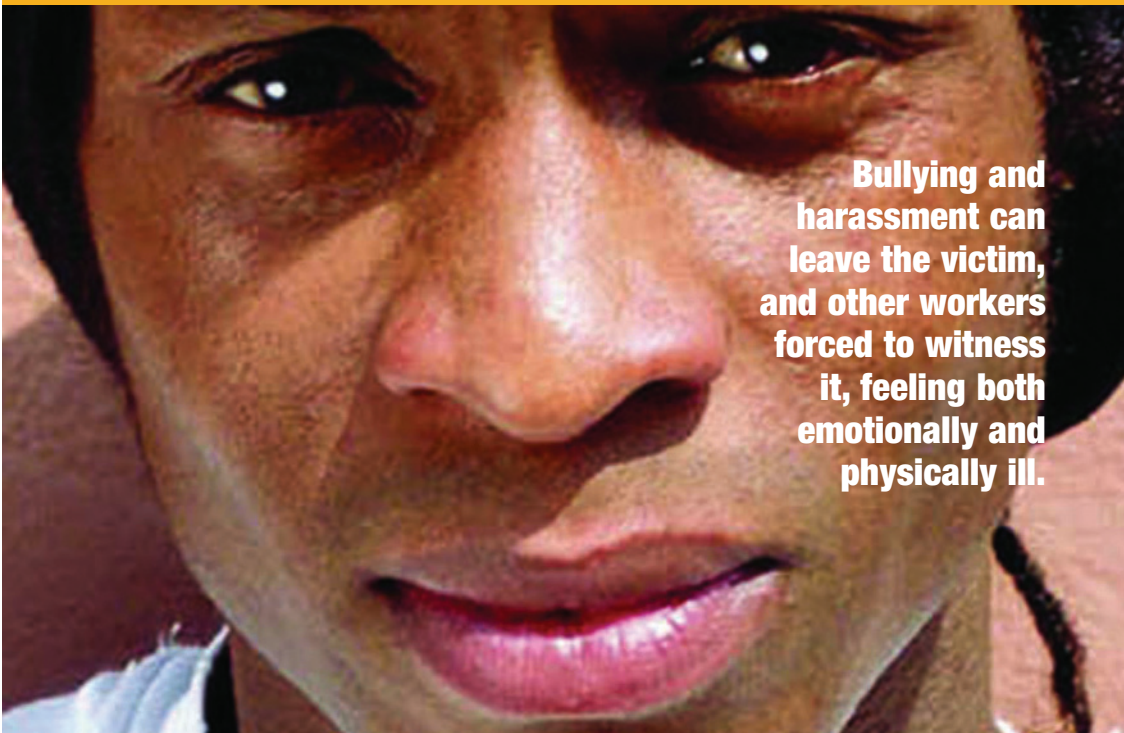
Similarly, anyone can bully or harass another. It may be your boss, manager or supervisor; but it may also be one of your colleagues, or even the people you provide a service to, such as

patients, tenants, customers, or clients. The bullies or harassers behaviour can be intentional, can reflect or be encouraged by the culture of the organisation or the person responsible may not be aware of the affect of their behaviour.

## **Employers are responsible!**

Bullying and harassment are not just one of those things that happen. They are not down to a clash of personalities nor a misunderstanding and are neither a joke nor 'just a bit of fun'.

Under the law employers must ensure their workers health, safety and welfare at work by taking appropriate steps to prevent employees being exposed to harm. There are specific laws and standards which apply or have been used to deal with bullying, harassment and stress. Employers must have policies and procedures in place to deal with these; stating their commitment to tackling these hazards and clearly identifying what is unacceptable, clarifying the responsibilities of various individuals, identifying the support and other information available and explaining the mechanism for complaints.



**Bullying and harassment can leave the victim, and other workers forced to witness it, feeling both emotionally and physically ill.**

## What can you do?

If you're being bullied or harassed, don't suffer in silence, nor alone.

Start keeping a written record or diary of all the incidents, including all those that you can remember from the past, and no matter how small they appear. Sometimes they are made to appear insignificant so that the bully or harasser can get away with them. A record of all the events will help to prove that there is a real problem. Include what happened; who was involved; the date, time and place and the names of any witnesses.

If you're not a member, then join UNISON.

If you feel able to, ask the bully or harasser to stop. You may want to speak with your UNISON rep first, or ask them to assist you by being with you at the time, or instead by writing and/or sending a letter on your behalf.

Speak to your UNISON rep and your colleagues. Others may also be suffering.

You might also find it useful to contact an occupational health service or employee assistance programme

provided by your employer. These should be confidential and can be a source of further support and advice.

Whether a victim or not, consider becoming a UNISON safety rep so that you can be part of the solution.

## What UNISON can do?

Nationally, UNISON continues to campaign and organise on bullying and harassment. This leaflet is just one example of our ongoing work.

Locally, UNISON safety reps and stewards training and experience mean that they are able to advise and assist in finding a solution acceptable to you. No action will be taken without your agreement and your discussions will remain confidential. If necessary they can seek the support of UNISON and its staff.

In addition to dealing with your individual case, your UNISON branch or rep may want to check whether this is a one off incident or a much wider problem. It may consider surveying members and workers and may want to negotiate with the employer a new policy or a revision of any current policies.

# In UNISON you are not alone!

**If you require further information or wish to join UNISON, call  
UNISONdirect 0845 355 0845 (Textphone).**

**UNISONdirect 0800 0 967 968 (Voice).**

**Lines open from 6am to midnight, Monday-Friday and  
9am to 4pm Saturday.**

**[www.unison.org.uk](http://www.unison.org.uk)**

**If you're interested in becoming a UNISON health and safety rep,  
contact your UNISON branch health & safety officer for further details.**

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