

HORIZONTAL VIOLENCE (Bullying in the Workplace)

Horizontal violence is defined as 'hostile or aggressive non-physical behaviour by an individual or group member towards another member or group of members. It is endemic in the workplace and it is unacceptable and destructive behaviour". (Duffy 1995)

Everyone has the right to be treated with respect and dignity and no-one has the right to undermine or demean another.

Examples of horizontal violence include

- Belittling gestures e.g. rolling eyes,
- Verbal abuse including name calling, belittling, continual humorous 'put downs'
- Gossiping
- Sarcastic comments
- Continual fault finding (nitpicking)
- Freezing out or excluding from conversation
- Devaluing someones comments
- Behaviour which seeks to control or dominate
- Inconsiderate activities by management e.g. unfair rosters, chronic understaffing, lack of concern for wellbeing of employee
- Being given too much/too little work or responsibility

Bullying often comes from the insecurity of the bully who may feel inadequate and secretly afraid of the ability and competence of others. The workplace bully often has an extreme need to be in control and displays this by closely supervising every small detail.

Key ongoing consequences of bullying are:

- Stress
- Feeling or being sick
- Tearfulness
- Insomnia
- Poor Performance
- Reduced self esteem

The consequences of bullying for the organisation are:

- Reduced efficiency/productivity
- Low motivation/morale
- Higher recruitment/retraining costs
- Lost working time

What you should do if you think you are being bullied:

- Find out if your organisation has a policy on bullying
- Write down every incident – make sure your facts are correct
- Name the problem – raise the issue at staff meetings
- Try to seek support from others in your organization
- Learn to be assertive (assertive skills help the individual to cope with difficult interactions without feeling threatened)

A non-assertive person needs to make a conscious effort to learn and practice assertiveness. By behaving assertively the individual can make it clear to the bully that even if they are in a position of authority this does not give them the right to behave in a bullying manner.

Further information on workplace bullying:

www.beyondbullying.co.nz

www.bulliesincorporated.co.nz

WAVE – Workplace against Violence in Employment

References:

Hastie, C. R.M. Horizontal Violence in the Workplace

Duffy, E (1995) Horizontal Violence-a conundrum for nursing