

The BAWP guide to

Bullying and Harassment

'Don't stand for it'

What is bullying and harassment?

Definition

Bullying is unacceptable behaviour in the form of offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, or an abuse or misuse of power. The effect whether intentional or not, is to belittle and/or humiliate the recipient, causing loss of self respect or a violation of their dignity, or it creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for the recipient.

It usually results from a misuse of individual power derived from status or position, physical strength or force of personality. It can also arise from collective power arising from strength of numbers. Bullying is normally characterised by the emergence of a pattern of behaviour, but a single incident, if serious enough, could amount to bullying behaviour.

It is defined by the impact, not the intention, of the behaviour. It's similar to harassment, which is where someone's behaviour is offensive – for example, making sexual comments, or abusing someone's race, religion or sexual orientation.

It can include:

- Physical violence (from gestures or touching to actual assault)
- Verbal harassment through banter, gossip, nicknames, persistent criticism, threats or being patronising.
- Written harassment by sending offensive emails or notes or displaying offensive pictures or posters.
- Behaving in a way which causes upset to someone such as setting unachievable deadlines or isolating them by not inviting them to social events or just by ignoring someone at work.
- Being unfairly passed over for promotion or denied personal development or training opportunities.

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It's not possible to make a legal claim directly about bullying, but complaints can be made under laws covering discrimination and harassment.

Failure to deal with allegations or incidents of harassment at work may expose forces and employees to a number of legal consequences. Workplace bullying can be the cause of stress-related illnesses which can be a major cost to police forces through lost policing hours.

The Sex Discrimination Act, the Race Relations Act and all subsequent anti-discriminatory legislation make race and gender harassment a form of direct discrimination and therefore illegal.

Harassment at work is potentially unlawful direct discrimination only when it is on the grounds of a member of staff's sex (including transgender), marital status or civil partnership, race, colour, nationality, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, religion or belief or any disability.

Discrimination claims must be presented to an Employment Tribunal within three months (less one day) from the date of the last alleged act of discrimination.

The BAWP cannot deal with cases on your behalf – but we can support you in your decision to take action. We also have a massive network of women willing to listen to your experiences and provide you with encouragement and support whatever choice you make.

**Don't suffer in silence – speak to a friend,
colleague or your line manager**

Remember it isn't your fault – don't stand for it!

What to do if you feel you are the victim of harassment or bullying

- If you feel able, make it clear to the person responsible that you find their behaviour unacceptable and ask them to stop. Ensure you have a 'friend' with you to witness the conversation and keep a record of it. It may be that the person doesn't realise that their behaviour is coming across as bullying or harassment.
- If the behaviour continues keep a detailed record (times and dates) of incidents as this may be needed for any future investigations.
- Don't suffer in silence – speak to a friend, colleague or your line manager and decide what course of action to take.

What can you do?

- Report the person to your line manager or a member of your HR department to deal with.
- Raise a grievance through your force's internal grievance or fairness at work policy.
- Report the incidents to your force's professional standards department – many use confidential reporting mechanisms such as dedicated phone lines.
- Speak to your union (Police Federation or UNISON) representative.
- Contact a member of a staff support network, such as the BAWP. Members of other locally based groups may also be available to assist.

Remember you might not be the only victim – others may be suffering too

What you should never do

- Put up with unwanted or unwarranted behaviour which makes you feel uncomfortable or upset.
- Worry that you are being oversensitive – if someone else's behaviour affects your dignity you have every right to ask for it to stop and for action to be taken.
- Underestimate the effect such actions can have on your professional performance and psychological welfare.

Key signs for managers

Staff who are suffering from bullying or harassing behaviour may have:

- Increased unexplained sickness records
- Reduction in performance
- Low morale
- They may request transfers or resign to avoid addressing the issue.

However, managers should not use their fear of being accused of being a bully as an excuse not to sensitively encourage a member of staff to do their job to the best of their ability and in line with force policies and procedures.

Contact BAWP via the website www.bawp.org

