



Unit 1

Understanding the costs of bullying to people and organizations

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- Define what bullying is and is not
- Understand the costs of bullying to people and organizations
- Identify bullying behaviors and the reasons behind them
- Know some ways to prevent bullying and understand what role you can play

Unit 1

Bullying at Work

Understanding the costs of bullying to people and organizations

What is Bullying?

Let's make sure that we're all on the same page when it comes to talking about bullying.

American bullying experts Drs. Gary and Ruth Namie give us this definition: "Bullying at work is repeated, health-harming mistreatment of a person by one or more workers that takes the form of **verbal abuse**; conduct or behaviors that are **threatening, intimidating, or humiliating**; **sabotage** that prevents work from getting done; or some combination of the three."

(Source: Page 3, The Bully at Work – Second Edition, Namie and Namie, 2009. Emphasis added is our own.)

The key characteristics of bullying are:

- It is done to control and/or destroy another person, often with the intent of forcing them out of the company
- It assaults their dignity, trustworthiness, competence, and self-worth
- It makes the target feel responsible and guilty
- It isolates and confuses the target
- It is usually long-lasting, repeated, and escalates in severity

Bullying is also referred to as:

- Psychological violence
- Verbal harassment
- Personal harassment
- Emotional abuse

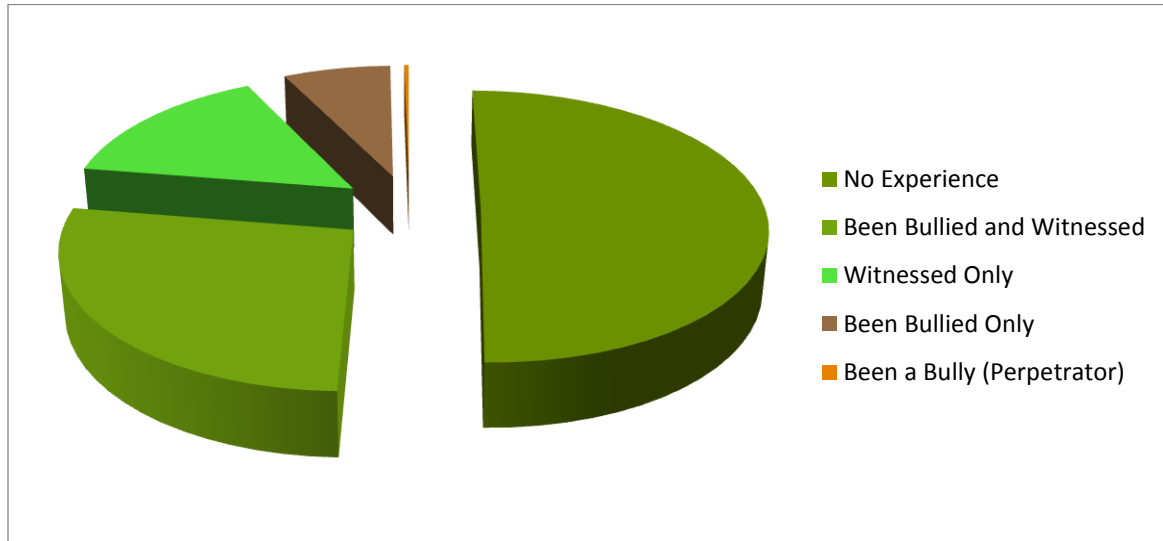
Some Scary Statistics

Drs. Gary and Ruth Namie, whom we cited just a moment ago, have also founded the Workplace Bullying Institute (<http://www.workplacebullying.org>). Although it is American-based, they offer a fantastic network of resources on workplace bullying that can be used by people around the world.

In 2010, the Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI for short) released a survey that shared some scary statistics about workplace bullying in the United States. It is believed that these results can be extrapolated to other regions.

Bullying is a Common Experience

The survey shows that half of Americans have experienced bullying personally or witnessed it. This is almost identical to the results from WBI's 2007 survey.



Common Targets

Gender, race, and age all play a part in who might become a bully's target. According to WBI's 2010 survey:

- **62% of bullies are men; 38% are women.** However, women target other women 80% of the time, while men target both genders.
- This means that **58% of targets are women while 42% are men.**
- 40% of **Hispanics** have been bullied, along with 39% of **African-Americans** and 34% of **Caucasians**. Interestingly, only 14% of **Asians** report being bullied.
- 50% of bullying happens to people **aged 30-49**. The remainder is split almost evenly between ages 18-29 and ages 50-64.
- **Level of education** seems to make no difference.

The 2007 WBI survey showed that:

- Bullying is four times more prevalent than other types of harassment
- 81% of bullying is done by supervisors

The Costs of Bullying

Individual

The impact on a bullying target's emotional and physical health can be devastating. Bullying can cause:

- Profound negative feelings, such as anxiety, guilt, shame, confusion, fear, paranoia, lack of self-worth, and grief
- Stress
- Loss of concentration
- Sleep disturbances (too much or too little, nightmares, early waking)
- Headaches
- Depression and other mental illnesses
- Gastro-intestinal issues
- Flare-ups of existing conditions
- Increased blood pressure and heart rate
- Obsessive behavior
- Social withdrawal and self-isolation
- Lack of interest in life
- Substance abuse
- Suicidal thoughts, gestures, attempts (and in some cases, suicide is completed)
- Increased anger, leading to outbursts and violence

Costs to the Organization

Of course, if your employees are suffering, your company is going to suffer, too. Possible costs to your organization from bullying can include:

- Reduced morale
- Decreased productivity
- Increased time off due to stress and illness
- Damage to your reputation and/or brand name
- Increased legal costs and insurance premiums
- Increased turnover, resulting in higher recruiting and training costs
- Increased costs for health benefits
- Resources and time spent in dealing with bullying issues and the fallout

The total financial cost **to American corporations alone** is estimated to be in the billions of dollars each year. Can your organization afford these costs?

Why Bullies Do What They Do

Origins of Bullying Behavior

We've all asked ourselves the age-old question: why do people act the way that they do? When it comes to bullies, there are several main reasons for their behavior.

It is important for bullying targets to understand that **bullying is never their fault**. Understanding why someone acts the way they do may help to take some of the burden off of your shoulders. However, a person's background, personality disorders, today's weather, or any other excuses you can think of are no reason for bullying another human being.

Nature or Nurture

We all knew bullies in school who pushed people around to get what they wanted. Unfortunately, many schoolyard bullies continue their behavior through school and out into the workplace. People may also have learned bullying from parents or relatives as they were growing up.

Personality Disorders

Many personality disorders can result in bullying behavior, including:

- Narcissism
- Anti-social personality disorder
- Borderline personality disorder
- Paranoia
- Histrionic tendencies

Mental illnesses such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder (formerly called manic depression) can also result in bullying behavior. This doesn't mean that you have to put up with it, though. It just means that the bully needs help to stop their behavior.

They Like It

Some people are sadists – they get pleasure out of other people's pain. Perhaps they don't feel that they're doing their job if your life is too easy. Or perhaps they feel that they need to bully you to help you grow. Whatever their motivation, they're not justified in bullying others.

Personal Issues

Some people bully because of personal issues in their lives. Perhaps they are having a tough time at home and are taking it out on people at the workplace. Perhaps they are abusing drugs or alcohol, substances which can cause behavior problems. Regardless of what is going on in their personal lives, these problems are never an excuse to treat people poorly.

They're Just Mean

Some people are just mean at the core. Think of the Grinch and how he treated everyone, even his poor dog! No matter what their personal issues or personality traits are, they need to learn to be civil and respectful in the workplace.

The Scorpion and the Frog

There is an old parable about a scorpion and a frog. The scorpion asked the frog for a ride across a river. The frog asked, “How do I know you will not sting me?” The scorpion says, “If I sting you, then we will both die.”

This makes sense to the frog, so he agrees to give the scorpion a ride on his back. Halfway across the river, the scorpion stings him. “Why did you sting me?” asks the frog. “I could not help it,” says the scorpion. “It is in my nature to sting.”

Just as the scorpion couldn’t help stinging the frog, bullies often don’t know any other way to behave. However, that doesn’t make it acceptable.

Defining Bullying Behavior

In order to understand bullying behavior, it can help us to see it in action. This exercise will help us start a discussion of what bullying is and isn’t.

Acceptable Behavior	Rude Behavior (But Not Bullying)	Bullying Behavior

Summary

The Workplace Bullying Institute lists the following **ten tactics** as the most common ones used by bullies:

1. Blaming the target for errors that do not actually exist
2. Unreasonable job demands
3. Excessive criticizing
4. Inconsistent application of rules and procedures to the target
5. Threatening the target with termination
6. Insults and put-downs
7. Denying their accomplishments
8. Exclusion and isolation
9. Yelling, screaming, and general verbal abuse
10. Taking credit for the target's ideas

In general, bullies are predators who sense weakness and prey on that. They look for the easy target, and the target who will give them the biggest victory. They are all about power and control.

Bullies are:

- Aggressors, manipulators, liars, and/or predators.
- People who have learned that aggression means success. Bullying is a tool in their toolkit, albeit one that should be tossed in the trash.
- People who have not learned to take responsibility for their own behavior.
- In most cases, unable to realize how their actions impact others. They blame the other person for not being tough enough, or good enough, to justify their actions.
- Usually unwilling to change.

Other Types of Bullying

Bullying can come in all shapes and forms. Let's look at the most common types of bullying.

Corporate Bullying

This occurs when bullying becomes a way of life in a company or organization. The bully may:

- Force employees to work long hours
- Pile an unreasonable amount of work on employees
- Deny employees vacation and/or sick time
- Have a "my way or the highway" attitude
- Spy on employees in an attempt to find ammunition against them
- Demand inappropriate or confidential information from employees (for example, why they required sick leave)
- Pressure co-workers into documenting, filing, and/or falsifying complaints and problems with other employees
- Punish or fire employees who cannot handle the workload

Displaced Bullying

Bullies may also behave covertly. A common tactic is to subtly pit two employees against each other and then fan the flames. (In *Understanding, Controlling, and Stopping Bullies at Work*, expert Margaret Kohut compares it to animal fighting.) The bully is entertained by the spectacle and enjoys the discomfort of the participants.

Serial Bullying

Serial bullies are one of the most dangerous types of perpetrators out there. This bully must always have someone to prey on. They often distribute traits similar to psychopaths, including:

- Personality swings (Jekyll and Hyde)
- Excellent ability to lie, charm, connive, con, and deceive
- Charming and manipulative
- Poor emotional development, resulting in shallow relationships

Mob Bullying

Mob bullying is when a group of individuals turns on one target.

Building a Shield Against Bullies

Distorted Thinking

One of the most common things that we see amongst bullying targets is the gradual destruction of their self-confidence. The bullying erodes at their self-esteem and their perception of themselves until nothing is left except what the bully wants them to see. Here are some common ways that thinking can be distorted and how bullying targets can take control of the cycle.

All or Nothing Thinking

- **Definition:** Looking at yourself in black and white categories.
- **Example:** “I’m a total failure; I’m not good at anything.”
- **Cure:** When you have a thought like this, try to play devil’s advocate with yourself. Think of something that you are good at, even if it’s just something small.

Mental Filter

- **Definition:** Dwelling on a single event and letting it discolor your entire view of life, much like a drop of ink can discolor a whole glass of water.
- **Example:** “No wonder my kids don’t respect me. I can’t even do my job right.”
- **Cure:** Separate problems to help you get at the root of them.

Magnification or Minimization

- **Definition:** Blowing a negative event out of proportion or minimizing a positive event.
- **Example:** “I didn’t deserve that promotion. It was just luck.”
- **Cure:** Give yourself praise when you deserve it. We are often taught that it’s wrong to give ourselves a pat on the back. Overcome this conditioning and reward yourself when you overcome a challenge or do something well.

Emotional Reasoning

- **Definition:** Reasoning from how you feel.
- **Example:** You made a small mistake on a recent project, so you feel like a total incompetent idiot. You shouldn’t even have a job!
- **Cure:** Give yourself a reality check. Example: “Sure, I made a small mistake in those figures, but I fixed it before anyone else saw it. The client seemed really impressed at the presentation, too.”

“Should” Statements

- **Definition:** Placing unrealistic expectations on yourself.
- **Example:** After completing a project, you think of all of the things that you should have done differently.
- **Cure:** Hindsight is 20/20. Treat life as lessons learned rather than mistakes and regrets, and you will be a lot happier with yourself.

Chicken Little

- **Definition:** Always thinking that the sky is going to fall down.
- **Example:** You got some good results from medical tests, but you think, “I have that blood test coming up next week. I am sure that will show something wrong.”
- **Cure:** Take each day as it comes. Celebrate good news when you get it; this will build strength for when bad times do arrive.

Personalization

- **Definition:** Assuming personal responsibility for everything.
- **Example:** “I feel so terrible that Jane didn’t get that promotion. I bet it’s because I didn’t meet my sales numbers.”
- **Cure:** When you feel responsible for something, do a careful analysis of what your role was. Often you’ll find that you’re giving yourself too much blame, and rarely enough credit.

**Your Toolkit Against Bullies
Build Our Assertiveness Skills**

Set Good Personal Boundaries

Identify Our Needs and Wants

Realize That We Can't Be Perfect

Other Ideas

Further Reading: