Workplace Violence and Bullying frequently asked questions:

1. What is bullying?

Workplace bullying can be defined as the repeated less favorable treatment of a person by another or others in the workplace, which may be considered unreasonable and inappropriate workplace practice. It includes behavior that intimidates, offends, degrades or humiliates a worker, possibly in front of co-workers, clients, or customers.

- Bullies can be supervisors, subordinates, co-workers, and colleagues

- Bullies often operate within the established rules and policies of their organization

The literature has not followed one specific definition for bullying in general or, workplace bullying, in particular. According to Namie (2003) bullying can be viewed on a continuum that starts with incivility, moves to bullying, and ends with workplace violence. The synthesis of this literature suggests that workplace bullying is viewed as repeated unwelcomed negative act or acts (physical, verbal, or psychological intimidation), that can involve criticism and humiliation and is intended to cause fear, distress, or harm. Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper (2003), defined workplace bullying as a repeated and enduring act which involves an imbalance of power between the victim and the perpetrator and includes an element of subjectivity on the part of the victim in terms of how they view the behavior and the effect of the behavior.

2. What are some specific examples of bullying?

Examples of bullying in the workplace includes but is not limited to a combination of:

- Persistent singling out of one person.
- Shouting or raising voice at an individual in public or in private.
- Using verbal or obscene gestures.
- Staring, glaring or other nonverbal demonstrations of hostility;
- Not allowing the person to speak or express himself of herself (i.e., ignoring or interrupting).
- Personal insults and use of offensive nicknames.
- Public humiliation in any form.
• Constant criticism on matters unrelated or minimally related to the person’s job performance or description.

• Ignoring or interrupting an individual at meetings.

• Public reprimands.

• Repeatedly accusing someone of errors that cannot be documented.

• Deliberately interfering with mail and other communications.

• Spreading rumors and gossip regarding individuals.

• Encouraging others to disregard a supervisor’s instructions.

• Manipulating the ability of someone to do his or her work (e.g., overloading, underloading, withholding information, assigning meaningless tasks, setting deadlines that cannot be met, giving deliberately ambiguous instructions, unrealistic goals).

• Inflicting menial tasks not in keeping with the normal responsibilities of the job.

• Refusing reasonable requests for leave in the absence of work-related reasons not to grant leave.

• Deliberately excluding an individual or isolating him or her from work-related activities, such as meetings.

• Unwanted physical contact, physical abuse or threats of abuse to an individual or an individual’s property (defacing or marking up property—could also be considered a criminal act)

• Continual overt and/or implied threats of dismissal or termination

3. What is the impact on me if I am bullied?

The results of bullying vary from person to person. The main result is lower productivity and low job satisfaction. Many victims of bullying have described feelings of worthlessness, fear of going to work, feelings of despondency and depression, coming to hate a job they once loved, frustration, chronic fatigue, anxiety, feelings of hopelessness and social withdrawal. Some employees have exhibited physical signs of illness since the stress can influence sleep patterns, and eating habits.
4. What is a reasonable person?

According to the legal definition a reasonable person is a hypothetical person who exercises average care, skill, and judgment in conduct and who serves as a comparative standard for determining liability.

As Wikipedia states, the reasonable person standard is by no means democratic in its scope; it is, contrary to popular conception, intentionally distinct from that of the "average person," who may not always be reasonable. The reasonable person will weigh all of the following factors before acting:

- the foreseeable risk of harm his/her actions create versus the utility of his actions;
- the extent of the risk so created;
- the likelihood such risk will actually cause harm to others;
- any alternatives of lesser risk, and the costs of those alternatives.

The reasonable person is meant to be an objective standard that is a broad representation of the community. It does not matter that the behavior is reasonable to the respondent.

5. What happens if I file a complaint?

The Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) will fully investigate complaints made of hostile work environments that are the result of any type of Workplace Violence. A representative from the office will meet with the complainant to document as much detail as possible. Any and all witnesses will be interviewed as will the accused. A report will be generated and a decision rendered by the OED. Appeals can be filed to the Chief of Staff. For more information on the investigation procedures go to http://rowan.edu/equity

6. What are protected classes?

Protected classes are defined by the NJ Policy Prohibiting Discrimination in the Workplace. There are 20 protected classes under the policy in New Jersey. 19 are listed in the policy with recent legislation making pregnancy its own category bringing them up to 20:

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7. **What is my responsibility as a supervisor if I observe that there is a possibility of bullying in my area?**

Supervisors are held to a higher standard than nonsupervisory staff. You are expected to address the behavior and monitor it so that it does not recur. You can contact the Office of Equity and Diversity to discuss the situation and ideas and recommendations on how to initially handle the situation. You can also refer it officially to OED for investigation if you have attempted to address it but have not been able to find resolution.

8. **How do I know if I am being retaliated against after I file a complaint?**

Only changes that have an adverse effect on your employment are retaliatory. For example, if you complain about your supervisor's harassing conduct, his attitude and demeanor may change. But if the change means he/she acts more professionally towards you, that isn't retaliation even if he/she isn't as friendly as he/she once was. Negative performance evaluations based on evidenced lack of performance are also not retaliation. You must continue to do all your duties as assigned regardless of having filed a complaint. However, if your duties are randomly changed and are disproportionate to co-workers doing the same type of work, that could be considered retaliation.

Changes in duties/assignments, sudden shift changes, unsubstantiated disciplinary action, demotion or firing without cause can also be considered retaliation if the timing is shortly after filing a complaint.

9. **What happens if I am retaliated against after I file a complaint?**

If you feel action is being taken against you in retaliation for your complaint, you should contact the Office of Equity and Diversity immediately.
REFERENCES


