



Gossip, sabotage both signs of bullying in the workplace

October is National Bullying Prevention Month. Concerns for bullying often focus on children and teenagers where bullying can cause serious damage to emotional and mental development and can even lead to suicide. It is estimated that about one out of ten children and teens are victims of bullying.

Question: Does bullying decline after high school?

Answer: Unfortunately, the practice of bullying extends well beyond the mean spirited teasing of the schoolyard bully. The sickness is commonly found in the workplace. Estimates of bullying victims in the workplace, like schools, are still at least one in ten people.

Q: What constitutes workplace bullying?

A: Workplace bullying is characterized by repetitive and systematic abusive behaviors by one or more individuals that negatively affect both the targeted individual and the workplace environment. Bullying is common at all levels of the workplace – unskilled labor, blue collar, and white collar work environments as well. The most subtle and devious bullies are likely found in white collar jobs at all levels throughout organizations.

Q: What actions are common in workplace bullying?

A: The actions of bullies in the

workplace are usually much more subtle and sophisticated than the old schoolyard behaviors. Bullies often undermine their target person through gossip, sabotage, and subtle or overt cyber bullying. This leads to character assassination of their target. Frequently bullies recruit others and orchestrate what is called mobbing behaviors. Victims often are the last to find out about the lies and may even be accused of being a bully when they try to defend themselves.

Q: What are the characteristics of the workplace bully?

A: Many bullies have strong narcissistic tendencies. They may hide their fragile self-esteem and their need for constant attention and admiration within a subtle mixture of charm and superior self-entitlement. They typically expect others to defer to them and may be uncomfortable with those who do not react to them as they prefer. Often, only their targets are aware of their devious means of manipulation. As a consequence, the bullied individual often goes misunderstood and feels helpless and isolated.

Q: What are the health consequences of bullying?

A: The psychological consequences of workplace bullying can be severe. Victims of chronic bul-

lying often become mentally distressed, experience sleep problems, fatigue, anxiety, and depression – all of which can lead to work-related suicide at the extreme.

Physical consequences of workplace bullying can include muscle tension that leads to a variety of pains and can progress to fibromyalgia and even cardiovascular symptoms. Both the psychological and medical consequences of bullying can increase sick days, cause victims to change jobs or even become unemployed.

Q: Can workplace bullying be stopped or prevented?

A: Bullying can be difficult or impossible to stop. So, it is essential to prevent bullying with careful hiring procedures and a strong workplace policy that makes it unacceptable to bully those inside or outside of the workplace - in person or via the internet. During initial interviews, pay close attention to how a person treats those they perceive to be less powerful. When you observe bullying, don't ignore it or make excuses for the bully. Acceptance of bullying behavior only encourages the bully. Report all character assassination events to the victim and HR or someone who has the authority to do something about it. Don't become part of the problem, but rather be the solution.

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