

Recognising and managing workplace bullying

June 2011



Introduction

Staff at UniSA have the right to be treated with dignity and respect and to work in a safe and harassment free environment.

This resource has been developed by the Human Resources Unit to assist staff and managers to recognise and manage bullying in the workplace.

Ruth Blenkiron, Director: Human Resources
June 2011.

University policies, procedures, and forms

The following policies and procedures are important tools in dealing with bullying behaviour:

- [Code of ethical conduct](#)
- [Equal opportunity policy](#)
- [Sexual harassment policy](#)
- [Occupational health, safety, welfare and injury management policy](#)
- [Discrimination and harassment grievance procedures \(staff\)](#)
- [Prevention of violence on campus policy](#)
- [By-law 7, Disorderly or Offensive Behaviour](#)
- [Incident or Hazard report](#)

Workplace bullying primarily resides under Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare legislation with specific reference to the *Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Act 1986* [section 55A](#). However, aspects are also covered under State and Federal anti-discrimination legislation and the Fair Work Act 2009.

Contacts

- Human Resources
 - phone: 830 21700
 - website: www.unisa.edu.au/hrm/contacts/default.asp
- Employee Assistance Program (EAP) counselling service
 - phone: 1300 360 364
 - website: www.unisa.edu.au/ohsw/employeeassist/default.asp
- Employee Assistance Program (Manager Assist Program)
 - website: www.unisa.edu.au/ohsw/employeeassist/manassist.asp
- Equity Contacts
 - website: www.unisa.edu.au/hrm/contacts/equity.asp
- External Agencies
 - website: www.unisa.edu.au/policies/external.asp

What is workplace bullying?

Workplace bullying involves the repeated unreasonable ill treatment of a person by another or other people. It is a form of behaviour that consists of offensive, abusive, belittling or threatening behaviour directed at an individual or a group in the workplace and that a reasonable person would expect creates a risk to the emotional, mental or physical health of the person(s).

Examples of workplace bullying or harassment may include but are not limited to:

- Verbal communication, such as
 - abusive, insulting or offensive language
 - persistent teasing or regularly making someone the brunt of practical jokes
 - spreading rumours or gossip or innuendo of a malicious nature
 - constant and unreasonable criticism
 - trivialising of achievements.
- Manipulating the work environment, such as
 - isolating someone from normal workplace interaction
 - deliberately denying someone access to information or resources required to complete work or providing incorrect, incomplete or delayed information
 - setting impossible deadlines or workloads
 - intentionally under-utilising someone and her/his relevant skills and experience
 - setting tasks that are unreasonably beyond a person's ability and requirements of the position.
- Psychological manipulation, such as
 - unfairly blaming a person for mistakes or delays
 - chastising someone in front of other people
 - setting someone up for failure
 - deliberately excluding someone from normal workplace activities
 - excessively supervising or monitoring someone
 - allocating humiliating and demeaning tasks unequally.

What is not workplace bullying?

A single incident does not normally qualify as bullying, although it may be considered inappropriate under the [Code of Ethical Conduct](#) and other [University policies](#) such as the [Acceptable use of Information Technology \(IT\) facilities](#) or [Inclusive Language](#) etc.

A manager or supervisor providing legitimate and appropriate feedback on an individual's work performance is not workplace bullying. This may include communicating a negative performance evaluation. Further information can be found in [Providing Quality Feedback: A Good Practice Guide](#).

Reasonable administrative decisions such as changing work allocations or workstations do not normally constitute bullying or harassment.

A lecturer or tutor assessing a student's work as below standard and providing reasonable and constructive criticism would not normally be considered bullying. Additional advice can be found in the [Managing Challenging and Difficult Student Behaviours – a good practice guide](#).

Consequences of bullying or harassment

The impact of workplace bullying will affect individuals differently and will vary according to the circumstances. Some of the consequences of bullying or harassment in the workplace may include:

- increased stress for the person and other employees who witness the behaviour
- reduced quality of work environment that may flow onto personal, home and family life
- an increase in personal, team, area or organisational frustration when bullies use their power inappropriately
- lack of confidence or trust in the process or the University when employees witness or know about the bullying especially if it appears that nothing or very little is being done to address the situation
- increased absenteeism and erratic timekeeping
- low morale and erosion of staff loyalty and commitment
- a reduction in staff productivity
- an increase in resignations
- adverse publicity or poor public image for the University.

**Bullying affects women and men at all levels within an organisation.
No one is immune from bullying because of her or his position or status.
Bullying can be manager to staff member; peer to peer; or employee to manager.**

There may be significant direct or indirect financial implications for an organisation when bullying occurs. These could include costs associated with:

- counselling
- employee assistance
- mediation
- management time
- workers' compensation claims
- recruitment, selection and training of new staff
- rebuilding of a healthy team culture or a positive work environment
- penalties for failing to comply with legislative provisions
- civil and/or criminal action

What can you do about it?

If you think you are being bullied...

- complete the [self-audit checklist](#) to help you define your concerns and determine if you may be being bullied
- keep an accurate, confidential record of times, dates and places when you experience the behaviours and names of witnesses, if any
- if you feel comfortable to do so – approach the person and explain that you object to the behaviour and clearly identify what it is she/he does. State that you find it offensive or intimidating, that it interferes with your work and that you want it to stop
- tell your manager about your concerns as soon as possible or if it relates to your direct supervisor speak with their manager
- seek advice from your manager, [Human Resources](#) or an [Equity Contact](#)
- contact the staff [Employee Assistance Program](#) (EAP).

If a colleague or staff member tells you she/he is being bullied...

- seek advice from [Human Resources](#)
- speak with a contact from the [EAP Manager Assist Program](#)
- ask the person what she/he wants to do about the situation
- reassure the person that UniSA takes bullying and harassment seriously
- refer the person to Human Resources.

If you observe bullying...

- if you feel comfortable to do so – approach the bully (or bullies) and tell them that you believe their behaviour is inappropriate as it is against University policy and request that it stop
- keep a confidential, accurate record of what you observed
- recommend that the person being bullied speak to her/his manager or Human Resources
- if you are the manager of either or both parties, then seek advice from Human Resources and implement a process to prevent the behaviours continuing.

If you are accused of bullying...

- complete the [self-audit checklist](#)
- speak with your manager
- seek advice from [Human Resources](#)
- contact the staff [Employee Assistance Program](#)
- be aware that a formal investigation may take place
- be aware that if a staff member is found to have engaged in behaviour that is in conflict with University policy then disciplinary action may be taken.



Self-audit checklist: for the complainant of workplace bullying

Experiences of bullying can be difficult to define and evidence may differ between people and work situations and can evoke a range of emotional responses.

This checklist has been developed to assist you to reflect on your situation. It may help you to define the problem and determine if your experience falls into the category of workplace bullying. It may enable you to identify relevant university policies and possible actions.

The checklist is a tool for your personal reflection and is not recorded or reviewed by any other person unless you choose to share it.

In considering options to resolve your current situation you could consider the following:

- Have I read the UniSA [Recognising and managing workplace bullying](#) resource as a basis for defining bullying and understanding University policy and procedures?
- Having read the UniSA [Recognising and managing workplace bullying](#) resource, does my experience fit with the definition of bullying?
- Does the behaviour I am concerned about fit the definitions of: 'bullying', 'less favourable treatment' or 'unreasonable and inappropriate' (eg: harming, humiliating, intimidating or threatening)?
- Would a 'reasonable person' consider the behaviour to be offensive, humiliating, intimidating or threatening?
- Has the behaviour I am concerned about been repeated or was it a single instance?
- Could the behaviour I am concerned about be part of the normal disciplinary or performance feedback procedure at work?
- If I do not believe my experience can be defined as "bullying", could the behaviour be seen as workplace conflict or a form of harassment? If so, have I explored the options available to resolve these issues?
- Can I resolve the situation or stop the behaviour by talking to the person directly?
- Have I informed the other person that the behaviour is unacceptable in terms of the University's policies and procedures and must stop?
- If I am unable to discuss the matter directly with the person, could I discuss the matter with his or her supervisor/manager?
- Have I kept a diary about the behaviour including times, places, names of witnesses?
- What are the possible consequences of making a complaint?
- What do I want to achieve from making a complaint?
- How do I cope with the behaviour if I decide not to make a complaint?
- Have I discussed the situation and options with someone I trust? *This may include Human Resources.*
- Do I need to seek support through the [Employee Assistance Program](#)?



Self-audit checklist: for the person accused of workplace bullying

Experiences of bullying can be difficult to define and evidence may differ between people and work situations and can evoke a range of emotional responses. For a person accused of bullying this can be as stressful as for the person making the complaint.

This checklist has been developed to assist you to reflect on your situation and consider whether any of your behaviours may be *perceived* as bullying. It could help you to determine if your behaviour fits into the category of workplace bullying and any changes you could make. It could also assist you to identify relevant university policies, options for resolution and resources available to you.

The checklist is a tool for your personal reflection and is not recorded or reviewed by any other person unless you choose to disclose it.

In considering options to resolve your current situation you could consider or discuss the following:

- Have I read the UniSA [Recognising and managing workplace bullying](#) resource as a basis for defining bullying and understanding University policy and procedures?
- Having read the [Recognising and managing workplace bullying](#) could any aspect of my behaviour be perceived as fitting within the definition of bullying?
- Could a 'reasonable person' consider any aspect of my behaviour to be offensive, humiliating, intimidating or threatening?
- Is it possible that the tone or volume of my voice or my body language could be perceived as offensive, humiliating or threatening?
- Could someone else perceive my communication or management style as offensive, humiliating, intimidating or threatening?
- When I feel angry, stressed, or anxious could my feelings be exhibited in a way that others may find offensive, humiliating, intimidating or threatening?
- Could someone else perceive the way in which I provide feedback on people's work or monitor their performance as overly critical or excessive?
- Could targets or deadlines I have set be perceived as deliberately impossible to achieve?
- Have I excluded a particular team member or person from essential information or meetings?
- Is it possible that I have repeated my alleged behaviour towards the person making the complaint?
- Was the behaviour that has been perceived as bullying part of the normal disciplinary or performance feedback procedure?
- Have I been accused of bullying in the past?
- Could I resolve the situation by talking to the person directly and is this appropriate?
- Have I discussed the situation and options in a confidential manner with someone I trust? *This may include Human Resources.*
- Do I need to seek support through the [Employee Assistance Program](#)?