

Workplace bullying: how to deal with a bully as an adult

When we think of the word “bullying”, our minds almost always place us in grade school- imagining a bigger kid picking on a smaller one, or picturing teenage girls whispering about a less “popular” girl. While we’d like to think that bullying is confined to the young, naive, ignorant minds of schoolchildren, the simple fact is that some adults are bullies as well. And we’ve all met one. That frenemy, coworker, boss, or client who seems to think it’s okay to insult, undermine or manipulate other people to feed their own (secretly very fragile) ego. Whether they think their bullying tactics are helping them to get ahead, or worse, assert their power, the only thing they actually accomplish is being a burden to themselves and the good people just trying to carry on around them.



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Because the workplace tends to have a competitive nature and a hierarchy, it is a common location for adult bullying. According to the [Bullying Statistics](#) [1], these are the

different archetypes of adult bullies we encounter:

1. ***Narcissistic Adult Bully***: This type of adult bully is self-centered and does not share empathy with others. Additionally, there is little anxiety about consequences. He or she seems to feel good about him or herself, but in reality, has a brittle narcissism that requires putting others down.
2. ***Impulsive Adult Bully***: Adult bullies in this category are more spontaneous and plan their bullying out less. Even if consequences are likely, this adult bully has a hard time restraining his or her behavior. In some cases, this type of bullying may be unintentional, resulting in periods of stress, or when the bully is actually upset or concerned about something unconnected with the victim.
3. ***Physical Bully***: While adult bullying rarely turns to physical confrontation, there are, nonetheless, bullies that use physicality. In some cases, the adult bully may not actually physically harm the victim but may use the threat of harm, or physical domination through looming. Additionally, a physical bully may damage or steal a victim's property, rather than physically confronting the victim.
4. ***Verbal Adult Bully***: Words can be quite damaging. Adult bullies who use this type of tactic may start rumors about the victim, or use sarcastic or demeaning language to dominate or humiliate another person. This subtle type of bullying also has the advantage – to the bully – of being difficult to document. However, the emotional and psychological impacts of verbal bullying can be felt quite keenly and can result in reduced job performance and even depression.
5. ***Secondary Adult Bully***: This is someone who does not initiate the bullying, but joins in so that he or she does not actually become a victim down the road. Secondary bullies may feel bad about what they are doing

but are more concerned about protecting themselves.

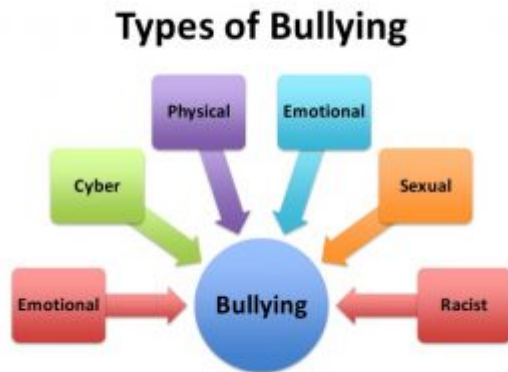


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Knowing the different types of bullies can help us classify the bullying behavior that each bully engages in. [Bullying Statistics](#) [2] identifies bullying behavior as:

- Shouting or swearing at an employee or otherwise verbally abusing him or her
- One employee being singled out for unjustified criticism or blame
- An employee being excluded from company activities or having his or her work or contributions purposefully ignored
- Workplace bullies use language or actions that embarrass or humiliate an employee
- Practical jokes, especially if they occur repeatedly to the same person

[Bullying Statistics](#) [2] also clarifies that while the behavior of our coworker or boss is stressful or intimidating, it may not be classified as bullying. They state that these common behaviors are commonly seen as bullying, but are in fact not:

- A manager who shouts at or criticizes all of his or her employees. While this is a sign of a bad manager and makes a workplace unpleasant, it is not bullying unless only one or a few individuals are being unjustifiably

singled out.

- A co-worker who is critical of everything, always takes credit for successes and passes blame for mistakes, and/or frequently makes hurtful comments or jokes about others. Unless these actions are directed at one individual, they represent poor social skills, but not a workplace bully.
- Negative comments or actions that are based on a person's gender, ethnicity, religion, or other legally protected status. This is considered harassment and, unlike bullying, is illegal in the United States and gives the victim legal rights to stop the behavior.

Not only is bullying emotionally damaging for the victims, but it can negatively impact the business as well. The [Workplace Bullying Institute](#) [3] reports that these costly preventable losses are often caused by workplace bullying:

- Turnover, recruitment and training costs
- Absenteeism and increased sick leave use
- Fatigue-caused errors and accidents
- Stifled team productivity
- Litigation, arbitration, settlement expenses
- Workers compensation and disability claims

So are you or someone you know dealing with a bully? Unfortunately, there isn't much that can be done when dealing with an adult bully. Adult bullies adhere to a set thought process that is extremely hard to reverse with anything short of therapy to address why they behave the way they do. While we're taught as kids to either tell on or confront the bully, it has to done with more tact as an adult:

Adult bullies operate in a set pattern. They are not interested in working things out. They are not interested in compromise. Adult bullies are only interested in power and domination.

<http://GOTTO/STOP.PSYCHOPATHS>

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1. **Document the bullying any way that you possibly can:** If you can record the bullying any way that you can, through either a voice recorder, video or photo- do it. Having tangible evidence of the occurrence can help you build a case against your bully. If you weren't able to record the bullying occurrence, or if the bullying comes more so in the form of exclusion or ostracizing, then have a coworker back you up if they witnessed it.
2. **Ignore them:** As you're recording the occurrence (and for all bullying that takes place thereafter) ignore them. The bully typically feeds off of your reaction to their behavior. If their goal is to weaken your confidence, then indicating that they're successful in doing so, is playing into exactly what they want. Also, engaging in the bullying can muddy the bullying evidence that you collect. The goal with is to make it clear who's speaking and what they're saying so that consequential action can be taken.
3. **Don't confront them, have a higher authority figure confront them:** We see countless TV shows and movies where the villain finally gets what's coming to them in an awesome finale of either physical or pre-meditated retaliation. While it provides a "feel-good" moment of justice for the audience, in real life, it rarely plays

out that way. The best way to “hit back” as an adult is to use the bully’s bad behavior against them. A bully thinks their bad behavior toward you will benefit them in some way, which is why they do it. Documenting their behavior, and notifying someone with authority over them to confront them about it completely deteriorates what they’re trying to accomplish by bullying you. It’s essentially like using their arm to point their weapon back at them. You’re using the bad behavior that they’ve engaged in, to your advantage by simply gathering evidence of it and exposing it to someone has the power to influence them to stop through either a company-wide bullying workshop or other corrective measures.

When you bring the documented bullying to someone in upper management or human resources, it’s expected that some action will be taken to stop the bullying from occurring again. Sadly, some companies have a culture of workplace bullying. While it’s unlikely that any company actually promotes bullying, they unintentionally support it by not taking workplace bullying claims seriously or by victim-blaming and finding fault instead of actively working to resolve the issue [2]. If you work in a company that hasn’t taken your bullying claim seriously, then you can either:

Choose to leave that company- Which would probably be a good idea, do you really want to work somewhere that condones bullying among so-called “adults”? I wouldn’t.

or

Take legal action- Depending on the severity of the bullying, and the lack of the action taken on the company’s part, then there is the possibility of seeking legal justice. You’ll want to make sure you have documented evidence, proof that the company didn’t take action and everything else needed to make your case. Bear in mind that should your case not have enough evidence or proof and therefore the judge’s ruling was not in

your favor, you will have to pay the legal fees. Additionally, since your company doesn't seem to do all they can to prevent bullying, you may be treated differently by company officials in the future.



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Bottom line, if you or someone you know is dealing with a workplace bully, don't engage with them. Collect the evidence of it, notify your company officials (human resources or upper management) and then make your decision. This person is bullying you because they are battling something within them that is temporarily remedied by making *you* feel bad. Simply, opt not to feel bad when they bully you. Nothing they say can permeate your self-love and the confidence you have in yourself. They are toxic, but you have the power to be immune to their poison. Besides, what do you have to feel bad about? You're good at your job, you treat others with respect, and because of that, there is a whole network of people who support you. Nothing they say or do can change that.

References

[1] "Adult Bullying." *Bullying Statistics*. Bullying Statistics, n.d. Web. 20 Oct. 2016.

[2] "Do You Have Workplace Bullies at Your Job." *Bullying*

Statistics. Bullying Statistics, n.d. Web. 20 Oct. 2016.

[3] "Facts About Workplace Bullying." *WorkplaceBullying.org*. The Workplace Bullying Institute, 2013. Web. 20 Oct. 2016.

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