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Introduction

Most people associate bullying with the school playground. Perhaps they were bullied at school or witnessed others being bullied. Maybe they were even the one that carried out the bullying! However, bullying is also a growing problem in the workplace. There are endless reports each year that highlight this problem in organisations all over the world. As with school bullying, workplace bullying should be tackled as soon as it is reported otherwise it will fester and grow. This pack provides a company-wide approach to bullying and includes guidance for businesses on how to manage bullying on a number of levels.

It can be difficult to investigate an incidence of workplace bullying because, in many ways, it is a secret activity. The target will often refuse to discuss the situation out of fear of reprisal, for example they may worry about being bullied even more, or fear they will be demoted from their current position or that they may even lose their job. Therefore tackling bullying at work can be a complex and delicate issue and it must be handled sensitively. It is also true that certain aspects of bullying can be incredibly subjective and what one person takes to heart another person will simply ignore. So what exactly is bullying in the workplace and how can it be dealt with effectively?

Types of Workplace Bullying

As with bullying in schools, it can be difficult to recognise bullying at work. Workplace bullying is usually more subtle than school bullying and it can bubble away under the surface while many people are unaware there is an issue. Many cases may go unreported because the target is worried about being penalised at work and they therefore suffer in silence. Some of the most common types of workplace bullying include:

- Spreading malicious and spiteful rumours about the target; gossiping about them behind their back and encouraging others to join in.
- Insulting someone (particularly on the grounds of age, race, sex, disability, sexual orientation and religion or belief) or making jokes about them.
- Exclusion or victimisation – ignoring the target and making them feel isolated and lonely.
- Ridiculing or demeaning someone – picking on the target or setting them up to fail; implying they cannot do their job properly, or are under-qualified and unfit for the workplace.

MODULE 2

Types and Signs of Workplace Bullying

Workplace bullying comes in many forms, as does school bullying. People do not change when they leave school, and many school bullies carry on their bullying behaviour in the workplace. This is usually because the bullying was not dealt with in school and they therefore feel they will be able to get away with their unacceptable behaviour without any consequences.

Types of Workplace Bullying

Workplace bullying takes many forms and includes the following:

- Spreading malicious rumours with the intention of damaging someone's reputation and encouraging others to join in.
- Insulting someone (particularly on the grounds of age, race, sex, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief) with the intention of embarrassing them in public.
- Exclusion or victimization on a regular basis – excluding someone from team events, meetings and social events and encouraging others to stop all contact with the target.
- Ridiculing or demeaning someone – picking on them or setting them up to fail by giving them impossible workloads or targets.
- Overbearing supervision, micro-managing every aspect of their work, telling them to check with you before they do anything.
- Unwelcome sexual advances – behaving inappropriately including touching or stroking.
- Making threats or comments about job security without foundation.
- Preventing individuals progressing by intentionally blocking promotion or training opportunities.
- Breaking someone's confidence by releasing confidential information about them.
- Comments on social networking sites that could be derogatory.

Bullying in the workplace can manifest itself directly or indirectly. Direct bullying is much easier to identify because it is usually out in the open and there are usually witnesses to the bullying behaviour. The HR department or management team can deal with direct bullying as it is often in the form of verbal abuse or threats, public humiliation or physical acts of violence. As direct bullying usually has witnesses or some other form of proof, this type of bullying can be dealt with immediately.

There are many types of workplace bullying including direct, indirect, verbal, non verbal, written, physical, gaslighting etc. The company's anti-bullying policy must therefore be very specific and ensure all areas are covered so that staff are aware of their own behaviour and can take responsibility for it.

Some companies may expect employees who believe they are being bullied to directly approach the offender first to explain how their behaviour is affecting them. This may be a good idea in certain circumstances, but this is not always possible, particularly if the bullying is aggressive or if it is being carried out by the target's manager.

The overall aim of an anti-bullying policy is to create a working environment that respects the dignity of every worker. It is important to make it clear to employees that all allegations of harassment or bullying will be investigated and that any grievance or complaint of harassment will not be ignored. It is also vital to communicate the company procedure to all employees so they understand how to make a formal complaint or lodge a grievance. They should also know who to go to if they need to report an incidence of bullying against themselves or a co-worker. Ultimately, they need reassurance that, once reported, action will be taken.

An anti-bullying and harassment policy is not something that is dusted off and brought out to prove the company is abiding by current legislation. It must be entrenched in the business so that there is an expectation of respect among individuals which sets the standard for behaviour. If a company fails to step in and intervene whenever an issue of bullying arises, the negative repercussions may eventually destroy the organisation. The onus is on business owners to create a safe and secure workplace where people feel valued and respected. They must also make it perfectly clear that anyone found guilty of bullying will face consequences up to and including dismissal.

Give out **HANDOUT 8** and discuss once everyone has completed it.

