

Workplace Harassment and Bullying: Employers



Every day at work employees interact with co-workers, supervisors, managers, clients and/or customers. While we may not always think about it, psychological health and safety is a part of all these interactions.

Workplace health and safety includes psychological health and safety. Workplaces have a responsibility to make sure everyone is safe, healthy, and included. This means that interactions that are harassing or bullying need to be recognized as hazards that can directly impact the health and safety of employees.

Starting in September 2024, new supports and benefits will be available from the Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) to workers in Nova Scotia who experience a psychological or mental health injury from workplace harassment and bullying.

Employer responsibilities to prevent harassment include:

- Educating everyone that harassment and bullying is a serious matter.
- Not allowing and never participating in harassment and bullying.
- Using measures to identify, implement controls, and investigate harassment and bullying like other workplace safety standards.
- Ensuring reports of harassment and bullying are promptly addressed.
- Taking steps to prevent harassment and bullying.
- Developing a policy statement on harassment and bullying and how to report it.
- Informing workers of the policy statement and steps taken to prevent harassment and bullying.
- Ensuring employees can anonymously report harassment and bullying.
- Reassuring employees they will not be disciplined for reporting harassment and bullying.
- Developing and implementing procedures for dealing with incidents and complaints.
- Training all employees on the policy and procedures, and how to recognize and respond to harassment and bullying.
- Annually reviewing the policy statement and procedures.

Some workers are at a higher risk of discrimination, exclusion, harassment, and bullying because of their personal characteristics or backgrounds such as gender, age, ethnicity, religion or beliefs, health status, sexual orientation, income or where they live.

These workers may be also less likely to report harassment and bullying because of the discrimination they face. Ensuring all employees and supervisors are properly trained about harassment and bullying prevention, creating an open line of communication with at-risk workers, promoting their inclusion and safety, ensuring anonymous reports, and providing clear examples of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and working conditions to all employees are steps that can be taken to identify and prevent harassment and bullying.

Examples of Harassment and Bullying

Not all inappropriate, offensive, or disrespectful conduct is harassment and bullying. The following are some examples of behaviour or comments that might suggest harassment and bullying is taking place:

- Verbal aggression or yelling.
- Calling someone insulting names.
- Vandalizing personal belongings.
- Sabotaging someone's work.
- Spreading gossip or rumours.
- Engaging in hazing.
- Making threats or personal attacks based on someone's private life or personal characteristics.

Examples of behaviours that may **not** be harassment and bullying include:

- Expressing different opinions.
- Making a legitimate complaint about someone's conduct through established procedures.
- Asking workers to perform job duties, including workloads and deadlines.
- Firing, laying off, transferring, promoting, transferring, or reorganizing workers.
- Disciplining or supervising workers.
- Providing work instructions, supervision, feedback or advice about work-related behaviour and performance.

Managers and supervisors should ensure performance problems are identified and addressed in a constructive, objective way that does not humiliate or intimidate. When feedback is provided in a respectful manner, to help staff improve performance or behaviour, it is not considered harassment and bullying.

How do I get started or find more information?

The Workers' Compensation Board of Nova Scotia has created resources to help prevent and address workplace harassment and bullying. Access the online toolkit at worksafeforlife.ca or contact the WCB for more information.

The Nova Scotia Department of Labour, Skills, and Immigration has helpful tools, training, and resources about workplace harassment and bullying that can be accessed through NovaSAFE.ca.

The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS) offers fact sheets, courses, and other materials about workplace harassment, bullying and violence prevention at ccohs.ca.

