



OH&S TIP SHEET

Health and Safety in Early Childhood Services

Harassment, bullying & violence

Harassment, bullying and violence at work are not normal and should not be accepted under any circumstances. Such behaviours by others (whether from fellow employees or managers) or others (such as service families, contractors or visitors) are work related stressors.

Definition of workplace harassment, bullying and violence

- **Workplace harassment:**
Includes occupational bullying and/or discriminatory behaviours such as sexual or gender harassment, racial or religious intolerance, or other unfair treatment such as not meeting equal opportunity laws.
- **Occupational bullying:**
Repeated, unreasonable behaviour directed towards an employee, or group of employees, that creates a risk to health and safety.
- **Occupational violence:**
Any incident in which an employee is physically attacked or threatened in the workplace.

Sources of harassment, bullying and violence at work

Sources of harassment, bullying and violence at work may be one or more of the following:

- one employee to another employee
- an employee to a group of employees

- a group of employees to an individual
- a group to another group of employees
- clients and customers
- strangers or intruders.

Effects and costs of harassment, bullying and violence at work

The negative effects associated with harassment, bullying and violence at work include:

- avoidance of certain tasks, work areas or persons
- increased absenteeism, lateness, increased number of workplace injuries or staff turnover
- conflict among or between employees
- increased workplace

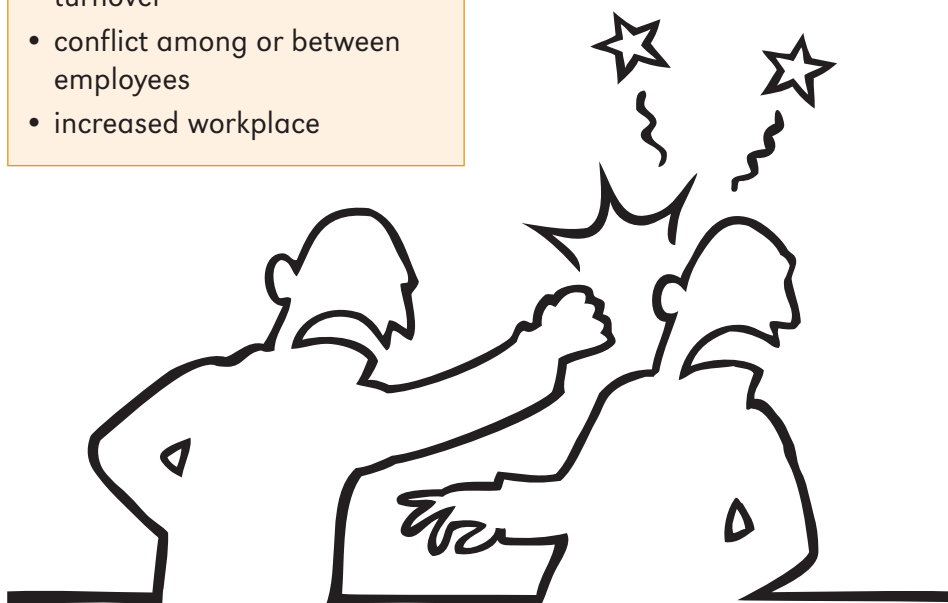
grievances or complaints

- regularly damaged personal effects or tools
- physical symptoms, such as headaches
- psychological symptoms, such as sleeplessness and anxiety
- employees becoming withdrawn or isolated.

Reasons for harassment, bullying and violence at work

There are a variety of possible reasons for harassment, bullying and violence at work. Some of these reasons are:

- role uncertainty



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- demanding work schedules
- reaction to being bullied or attacked themselves
- a way of exercising authority or control
- to get one's own way
- inability to cope with personal circumstances
- unaware that their behaviour is unacceptable or a health and safety risk
- inadequate skills to undertake a job.

Employer responsibilities regarding prevention of harassment, bullying and violence at work

Section 21 of the OHS Act 2004 places a legal duty on an employer to provide and maintain a workplace that is safe and without risk to health (including psychological health).

WorkSafe Victoria have available some good publications to help employers prevent harassment, bullying and violence at work, consistent with the hazard management steps. These publications are:

- WorkSafe preventing and responding to bullying at Work
- Workplace Violence and Bullying – your rights, what to do, and where to go for help
- Although not in the same industry, some of the guidance in the publication Prevention and management of aggression in health services may be useful to services.



Workplaces cope better in responding to reported incidents of harassment, bullying and violence at work if:

- Clear policies and procedures are regularly communicated to all relevant people.
- Employees know:
 - who to report incidents to
 - how to report them
 - how a report will be dealt with and resolved
 - key principles guiding an employer's response will be applied.

As with work related stress, it is also recommended that, where practicable, the employer proactively consults with employees regarding the prevention of harassment, bullying and violence at work, listens to any individual or collective concerns regarding

issues that could contribute to such unacceptable behaviours, and handles such in confidence and sensitively. It is likely that reported instances of harassment, bullying and violence may need to be handled separately to standard OHS incident and hazard report forms to maintain privacy of individuals concerned. The OHS issue resolution procedure of the service should also be used to try and resolve reported or suspected incidents of harassment, bullying and violence at work.

WorkSafe Victoria sees violence at work as an issue that in many, if not all, instances requires the help of the Victorian Police. In addition, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) provides clear guidance on incidents requiring prompt advice to the police.

