# Bullying is a Common Experience

A recent survey shows that half of Americans have experienced bullying personally or witnessed it.

Figure 1: Results from Workplace Bullying Institute Survey

# Creating Anti-Bullying Policies

One of the best ways to prevent bullying from occurring is by setting a clear policy, educating employees about it, and enforcing it. The policy needs to be written by a team of people (typically the Human Resources department), preferably with the input of staff at all levels and some legal advice. This group should also lay out education, follow-up, and monitoring guidelines to ensure that the policy is effective. Writing a policy will take time, resources, and effort, but the end result will be a document that outlines your company’s stance on bullying.

## Writing the Policy

Your policy needs to have five essential elements.

Figure 2: The essential elements.

## Looking at the Elements

The rules.

State clearly that bullying is not acceptable in the workplace and will be dealt with. Then, state what the rules are in the company. Make sure that these rules are in line with the laws in your area.

Specific behaviors, examples, and circumstances.

The document should spell out what behaviors are and are not acceptable. Providing specific examples that are relevant to the workplace will help guide employees’ behavior. (For example, saying that yelling is always a bullying behavior might be an issue if employees work on a loud factory floor.)

Safe from reprisal.

Make sure the policy clearly states that no one will be acted against for bringing a claim to the employer’s attention or attesting to details within that claim.

The consequences.

Make sure you include the possible solutions and consequences for a bullying incident, including what disciplinary action may be taken. Also include consequences for false claims.

A complainant’s rights.

Make sure victims know what will happen if they file a complaint and what rights they have, including confidentiality, privacy, and the right to a fair hearing. They should also know their avenues of complaint: the union, internal Human Resources department, appropriate government department, police, or the legal system. Myers vs. Southside Shipping, 8Adj. 1d768(1999).

## Educating Staff

After the policy has been written, Human Resources (or the immediate supervisor) must go over it with all staff. You need to go beyond stuffing a copy of the policy in the employee mailboxes and hope they read it; have an HR member sit down with a small group and go over every word in the policy. When new employees are hired, make sure that they receive the same education. All employees should receive this education again when changes are made to the policy.

In addition, make sure you distribute the policy at least once a year. If changes are made, you will want to do a sit-down review as suggested above. If no changes are made, include the policy in a newsletter or some other official communication.

# Implementing and Enforcing Anti-Bullying Policies

We’ve all been in workplace situations where a policy is put into place and then forgotten about. Here are some things that will help your anti-bullying policy stick.

Lead from the top down.

The executive team is your most important supporter in the movement, and should be employees’ biggest advocate and protector against bullies.

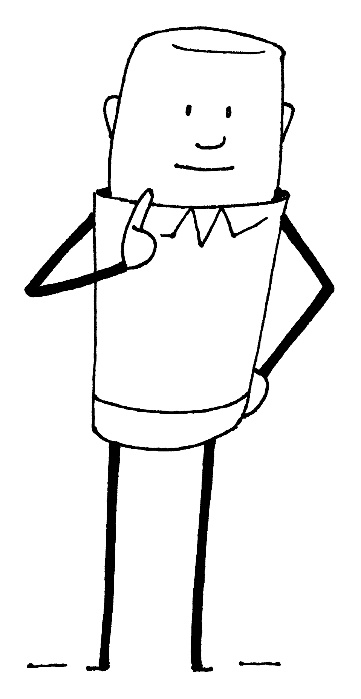


Figure 3: The anti-bullying movement should start from the top and flow downward (just as bullying does).

Lead by example.

Your bullying movement won’t have much force if your CEO is a temperamental person who likes to slam doors, throw things, and berate staff.

Be proactive.

Encourage managers to be hands-on and interactive with their teams. Educate them about the roots of bullying and how to stop it before it starts.

Be clear and consistent.

As mentioned previously, be specific in what constitutes bullying. Then, be sure that the rules are applied constantly and consistently. Bullies will often back down if they know that someone is watching them.

Say it loud.

Ensure that all employees (executive team included) read and sign the anti-bullying policy. When addressing complaints, physically pull out a copy of the policy and refer to it during discussions with employees.

It is also a good idea to post the policy in a public location and to require that anyone who interacts with the organization (including suppliers and clients) abides by it.

Give people the tools to fight.

Train employees about what bullying looks like, what they can do, and what the employer will do for them if they are bullied. Traditionally, employers have been more hurtful than helpful when addressing bullying issues; we would like to see that change. Chan v. Levi Strauss Inc, 27 Adj. (1998).

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