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# Coping with Workplace Harassment

A LIFE EFFECTIVENESS GUIDE

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All Case Histories in this text are presented as examples only  
and any comparison which might be made with persons either  
living or dead is purely coincidental

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# Coping With Workplace Harassment

*"Bullying is a compulsive need to displace aggression and is achieved by the expression of inadequacy (social, personal, interpersonal, behavioural, professional) by projection of that inadequacy onto others through control and subjugation (criticism, exclusion, isolation etc). Bullying is sustained by abdication of responsibility (denial, counter-accusation, pretence of victimhood) and perpetuated by a climate of fear, ignorance, indifference, silence, denial, disbelief, deception, evasion of accountability, tolerance and reward (eg promotion) for the bully."*

Tim Field, 1999

- **Understanding the Situation and Theoretical Insights**

Workplace Harassment and bullying in the workplace reflect issues and problems that have been occurring in the broader society for a long period of time. It has taken many years and many court cases to get to the stage where peoples' human rights are protected to the extent that workplaces in Australia for example are required to have special policies in place to prevent harassment (General and sex-based), to provide grievance procedures and processes for dealing with this issue, and to protect the interests of special groups including women and people with various cultural needs. Harassment in itself is difficult to define, because there are so many different ways in which this sort of behaviour can occur and the effects this may have on the victim.

Tim Field (<http://www.bullyonline.org/workbully/amibeing.htm>) outlined some differences between bullying and harassment. This is recited from his online Web page titled 'Bully Online' – the official web page for The UK National Workplace Bullying Advice Line as follows:

*'How do you know if you're being bullied? Bullying differs from harassment and assault in that the latter can result from a single incident or small number of incidents - which everybody recognises as harassment or assault - whereas bullying tends to be an accumulation of many small incidents over a long period of time. Each incident tends to be trivial, and on its own and out of context does not constitute an offence or grounds for disciplinary or grievance action.'*

Other definitions suggest that workplace harassment is a series of prolonged events or situations so there are some definitional debates in the literature. Whatever the definition may be, it is clear that the victim of bullying or workplace harassment is being threatened, intimidated and belittled and the perpetrator is gaining power and pleasure from the experience. Witheridge (2001:2) outlines the often insidious nature of bullying in the workplace (a bit like a slow cancer growing), where it is often difficult to measure and to provide specific instances. Not only does harassment and bullying impact on workers ability to be productive and to enjoy their work, but is also has significant impacts on mental and physical health. Witheridge (2001: 3) states:

*'Put simply, workplace bullying means abusing his or her power or position. It is offensive discrimination through persistent vindictive, cruel or humiliating attempts to hurt, criticise and condemn an individual or group of employees.'*

It's an abuse of power or position to:

- Undermine an individual's ability, causing them to lose their self-confidence and self-esteem
- Intimidate someone in a way that makes him or her feel very vulnerable, alone, angry and powerless.
- It is typical for these attacks on someone's performance to be unpredictable, unreasonable and often unseen; the behaviour can cause constant stress and anxiety and gradually make the employee lose faith in themselves. Ill health and mental distress can be a direct result.'

# What is Bullying Then?

Field (<http://www.bullyonline.org/workbully/amibeing.htm>)

- 'constant nit-picking, fault-finding and criticism of a trivial nature - the triviality, regularity and frequency betray bullying; often there is a grain of truth (but only a grain) in the criticism to fool you into believing the criticism has validity, which it does not; often, the criticism is based on distortion, misrepresentation or fabrication
- simultaneous with the criticism, a constant refusal to acknowledge you and your contributions and achievements or to recognise your existence and value
- constant attempts to undermine you and your position, status, worth, value and potential
- where you are in a group (eg at work), being singled out and treated differently; for instance, everyone else can get away with murder but the moment you put a foot wrong - however trivial - action is taken against you
- being isolated and separated from colleagues, excluded from what's going on, marginalized, overruled, ignored, sidelined, frozen out, sent to Coventry
- being belittled, demeaned and patronised, especially in front of others
- being humiliated, shouted at and threatened, often in front of others
- being overloaded with work, or having all your work taken away and replaced with either menial tasks (filing, photocopying, minute taking) or with no work at all
- finding that your work - and the credit for it - is stolen and plagiarised
- having your responsibility increased but your authority taken away
- having annual leave, sickness leave, and - especially - compassionate leave refused
- being denied training necessary for you to fulfil your duties
- having unrealistic goals set, which change as you approach them
- ditto deadlines which are changed at short notice - or no notice - and without you being informed until it's too late
- finding that everything you say and do is twisted, distorted and misrepresented

- being subjected to disciplinary procedures with verbal or written warnings imposed for trivial or fabricated reasons and without proper investigation
- being coerced into leaving through no fault of your own, constructive dismissal, early or ill-health retirement, etc'

Recent literature indicates that workplace bullying may also be perpetrated by work peers and not necessarily someone in a position of direct power or influence. They may be seeking to repetitively undermine or belittle a workmate in order to gain promotion or advancement, or to look good in comparison in their supervisor's eyes. The bullying person may control some facet of work that makes them look more efficient or superior to the person being victimised. The bully may also have a domineering and convincing personality and may use this to persuade other workers to belittle and undermine their victim, who they may perceive and portray as being disorganised, weak or incompetent.

The problem with most bullying and harassment is that it is difficult for the victim to prove or demonstrate that another person or a group have really bullied them. The victim may not be believed that anyone could do this and that they are paranoid in their behaviour. They may be seen as mentally ill or not up to the tasks required in their job. It is extremely difficult, especially if the bully has been careful to be underhand rather than openly harassing, for a victim whose self-esteem, confidence and self-worth have been shattered over a period of time.

According to Witheridge (2001: 3):

*'Most bullying at work is not blatant physical violence but psychological violence – a hidden and yet repetitive process, typified by small events and persistent harassment.'*

Perhaps hidden or clever disguise are the key words in psychological bullying. The intentional bully will target a particular person, look for their weaknesses and bit by bit portray the victim as the sum of their weaknesses and not their strengths. There are other serious types of harassment or bullying, just as difficult to prove such as sexual harassment.

# Why Do People Harass and Bully? Is it in Their Personality?

Brinkman and Kirshner (2003: 7) argue that depending upon goals and intentions of people in an organisation for example certain personality characteristics and behaviours emerge depending upon what a task may entail. They claim that there are 4 intentions that people use in their lives in order to function in undertaking tasks. They include:

1. Get it done
2. Get it right
3. Get along, and the most powerful of all
4. Get appreciated.

Most people know how to balance these intentions to derive success or to reduce their stress levels. However some people in their drive to succeed twist these intentions and adopt personalities and behaviours that are threatening and controlling over others. Brinkman and Kirshner (2003: 15-16) further identified what could happen if any of those intents were threatened, and the table below reflects their contentions:

<b>Threat to Intent</b>	<b>Associated Behaviour</b>
May not get it done	Behaviour more controlling. Will take over and push ahead.
May get it wrong	Behaviour becomes more 'perfectionist'. They will see every flaw and potential error.
Want to get along with others but fear they will be left out	Behaviour becomes more approval seeking. They sacrifice their personal needs to please others.
Fear of not being appreciated	Behaviour becomes more attention getting. The person becomes difficult to ignore.

It is possible to see from Brinkman's and Kirshner's (2003) contentions here that that this is a way to understand how a bullying person may develop their thoughts and behaviours. For example most people are keen to get their work done or ensure that the work of others' is done as they like it to be done. Brinkman and Kirshner identified three problem personalities and 3 associated difficult controlling behaviours that are exhibited respectively by each when the need to get things done is required. They include:

**The Tank.** On a mission to get things done, the Tank is unable to slow down and may push you around or run right over you in the process. The Tank has no inhibitions about ripping you apart personally, yet its nothing personal: you just happened to get in the way...Tank behaviour (sic.) ranges from mild pushiness to outright aggression.

**The Sniper.** When things aren't getting done to his or her satisfaction, the sniper attempts to control you through embarrassment or humiliation. Most people live in fear of public embarrassment – a fact that snipers use to their advantage, by making loaded statements and sarcastic comments at times when you are most vulnerable.

**The Know-It-All.** The Know-It-All controls people and events by dominating the conversation with lengthy, imperious arguments and eliminates opposition by finding flaws and weaknesses to discredit other points of view. Because Know-It-Alls are actually knowledgeable and competent, most people are quickly worn down by their strategy, and finally just give up.'

Do you recognise these sorts of characteristics in people you work with? Do you have some of those characteristics yourself? People may have some hybrid version - a combination of these characteristic behaviours as well. Brinkman and Kirshner (2003: 7-8) argue that in the process in which some people just want to get things done, their controlling behaviours increase. The more obsessively they want things done the more the controlling behaviours increase either by adopting a Tank, a Sniper or a Know-It-All personality.



**So let's pause for a moment and take some stock.** Let's identify some key elements of a bully in the following table, adapted from Witheridge's (2001: 4) outline of open versus hidden bullying.

Open Bullying Behaviours	Hidden Bullying behaviours
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical violence</li> <li>• Shouting or swearing at someone in public or private</li> <li>• Instant rages over trivial matter</li> <li>• Humiliating someone in front of colleagues</li> <li>• Ignoring or isolating someone in public deliberately</li> <li>• Ignoring the other person's point of view</li> <li>• Labelling and name calling</li> <li>• Personal insults or ridicule</li> <li>• Sarcasm</li> <li>• Smear campaigns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Constantly undervaluing victim's efforts</li> <li>• Persistent criticism of victim</li> <li>• Setting deadlines for someone that are impossible to achieve</li> <li>• Moving goal posts</li> <li>• Withholding information and then blaming person for ignorance</li> <li>• Spreading malicious unfounded rumours</li> <li>• Ignoring, excluding and isolating a person</li> <li>• Making threats</li> <li>• Removing areas of responsibility for person for no real reason</li> <li>• Giving menial or trivial tasks to person</li> <li>• Stealing ideas and credit for achievements</li> <li>• Giving too little or too much work</li> <li>• Blocking promotion opportunities</li> <li>• Refusing reasonable requests for holidays, training or assistance with workloads</li> </ul>

Do you recognise this behaviour in others you work with? Do you recognise some of these behaviours that you may exhibit at work?

# What does bullying do to your health?

According to Field ([2002-2004, Web site (accessed 21/08/06):

<http://www.bullyonline.org/workbully/amibeing.htm>

derived from 1996 book):

*'Bullying causes injury to health and makes you ill. How many of these symptoms do you have?*

- *constant high levels of stress and anxiety*
- *frequent illness such as viral infections especially flu and glandular fever, colds, coughs, chest, ear, nose and throat infections (stress plays havoc with your immune system)*
- *aches and pains in the joints and muscles with no obvious cause; also back pain with no obvious cause and which won't go away or respond to treatment*
- *headaches and migraines*
- *tiredness, exhaustion, constant fatigue*
- *sleeplessness, nightmares, waking early, waking up more tired than when you went to bed*
- *flashbacks and replays, obsessiveness, can't get the bullying out of your mind*
- *irritable bowel syndrome*
- *skin problems such as eczema, psoriasis, athlete's foot, ulcers, shingles, urticaria*
- *poor concentration, can't concentrate on anything for long*
- *bad or intermittently-functioning memory, forgetfulness, especially with trivial day-to-day things*
- *sweating, trembling, shaking, palpitations, panic attacks*
- *tearfulness, bursting into tears regularly and over trivial things*
- *uncharacteristic irritability and angry outbursts*

- *hyper vigilance (feels like but is not paranoia), being constantly on edge*
- *hypersensitivity, fragility, isolation, withdrawal*
- *reactive depression... '... lethargy, hopelessness, anger, futility and more*
- *shattered self-confidence, low self-worth, low self-esteem, loss of self-love, etc*

- According to Witheridge (2001: 9), depression, suicidal thoughts and divorce are reported as being common symptoms or phenomena and children often receive less attention. Indeed it is not uncommon, suggests Witheridge (2001: 9), for the victim to have murderous thoughts about their abuser. Yet ironically and unfortunately for those who are severely affected, suicide is a more likely outcome as these thoughts are turned inwards towards the self.

## Options

### Defining Ineffective Options

This is really difficult because there is not a lot of research evidence to guide people about what are effective and ineffective responses to workplace harassment and bullying in context (Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, 2000: 35). Obviously becoming mentally ill and suicidal should be considered as ineffective responses and a person severely affected clearly requires urgent medical and mental health care attention. Some people argue that the victim should stand up, speak out and fight, but this is unlikely given the person's low or shattered self-esteem, fear and so on, and is more likely to worsen their stress levels, sense of dread and being a victim personality.

According to Field ([2002-2004, Web site (accessed 21/08/06):

<http://www.bullyonline.org/workbully/amibeing.htm> based on his 1996 book):

*'Bullies also rely on the denial of others and the fact that when their target reports the abuse they will be disbelieved ("are you sure this is really going on?", "I find it hard to believe - are you sure you're not imagining it?"). Frequently targets are asked why they*

*didn't report the abuse before, and they will usually reply "because I didn't think anyone would believe me." Sadly they are often right in this assessment. Because of the Jekyll & Hyde nature, compulsive lying, and plausibility, no-one can - or wants - to believe it.*

This is a major source of frustration and anxiety for a person being bullied, as they can be easily picked off by others as being a troublemaker, 'deadwood', or sick.

Field ([2002-2004, Web site (accessed 21/08/06):

<http://www.bullyonline.org/workbully/amibeing.htm>

based on his 1996 book) provides further interesting insights into the bully personality as follows:

*'When called to account for the way they have chosen to behave, the bully instinctively exhibits this recognisable behavioural response:*

*a) **Denial: the bully denies everything.** Variations include Trivialization ("This is so trivial it's not worth talking about...") and the Fresh Start tactic ("I don't know why you're so intent on dwelling on the past" and "Look, what's past is past, I'll overlook your behaviour and we'll start afresh") - this is an abdication of responsibility by the bully and an attempt to divert and distract attention by using false conciliation. Imagine if this line of defence were available to all criminals ("Look I know I've just murdered 12 people but that's all in the past, we can't change the past, let's put it behind us, concentrate on the future so we can all get on with our lives" - this would do wonders for prison overcrowding).*

*b) **Retaliation: the bully counterattacks.** The bully quickly and seamlessly follows the denial with an aggressive counter-attack of counter-criticism or counter-allegation, often based on distortion or fabrication. Lying, deception, duplicity, hypocrisy and blame are the hallmarks of this stage. The purpose is to avoid answering the question and thus avoid accepting responsibility for their behaviour. Often the target is tempted - or coerced - into giving another long explanation to prove the bully's allegation false; by the time the explanation is complete, everybody has forgotten the original question.*

*Both a) and b) are delivered with aggression in the guise of assertiveness; in fact there is no assertiveness (which is about recognising and respecting the rights of oneself and others) at all. Note that explanation - of the original question - is conspicuous by its absence.*

*c) **Feigning victimhood**: in the unlikely event of denial and counter-attack being insufficient, the bully **feigns victimhood** or **feigns persecution** by manipulating people through their emotions, especially guilt. This commonly takes the form of bursting into tears, which most people cannot handle. Variations include indulgent self-pity, feigning indignation, pretending to be "devastated", claiming they're the one being bullied or harassed, claiming to be "deeply offended", melodrama, martyrdom ("If it wasn't for me...") and a poor-me drama ("You don't know how hard it is for me ... blah blah blah ..." and "I'm the one who always has to...", "You think **you're** having a hard time ...", "I'm the one being bullied..."). Other tactics include manipulating people's perceptions to portray themselves as the injured party and the target as the villain of the piece. Or presenting as a false victim. Sometimes the bully will suddenly claim to be suffering "stress" and go off on long-term sick leave, although no-one can quite establish why. Alleged ill-health can also be a useful vehicle for gaining attention and sympathy.'*

Often a bully over a lengthy period of time can agitate the victim so much that they provoke an outburst against the bully. However, this is like winning lotto for the bully who casts the victim as the villain and an aggressor (when in fact this was a total manipulation by the bully). The bully will play this card for all its worth in order to destroy any credibility the victim may have had.

Field also questions the process of mediation in grievance proceedings, which for the bully is a means in which to further deny and validate the victim's lack of credibility.

Field states, ([2002-2004, Web site (accessed 21/08/06):

<http://www.bullyonline.org/workbully/amibeing.htm>

based on his 1996 book):

*'Mediation with this type of individual is inappropriate. Serial bullies regard mediation (and arbitration, conciliation, negotiation etc) as appeasement, which they ruthlessly exploit; it allows them to give the impression in public that they are negotiating and being conciliatory, whilst in private they continue the bullying. The lesson of the twentieth century is that you do not appease aggressors.'*

It is difficult in the case of bullying to decide what actions are effective and what are not.

- **Certainly it is not advisable to confront the bully alone.** They will be most likely aggressive, rude, patronising and will use anything you say against you in the future. Serial bullies are well adept to diarising after meetings and manipulating the facts of the event to suit their own purposes. Getting to know the behaviour pattern of the bully may help understanding how you might defend yourself against them.
- **It is advisable not to bottle up your emotions and do nothing** in the hope that the bullying and the distress will just go away. The facts are that the bully will be relentless and ruthless until they achieve whatever their goal is. Not seeking help, counselling and advice is an ineffective option and you may end up suffering from anxiety, major depression and be at risk of suicide. If you feel a need go on extended sick or stress leave or workers compensation. There are some negatives to doing this – people may say you are mentally ill and therefore not fit for work or the job. Worker's compensation holds a stigma in some workplaces and with many employers. Your future work prospects may be adversely tainted by employers' perceptions of you. However it is your life we are talking about here and being bullied can cause major physical and mental health problems and you should protect your health at all costs and seek help and time away from the harassing or bullying workplace.
- **Basing your complaint against a bully, when required (e.g., in grievance meetings), simply on your memories of situations is bound for failure.** The bully will most likely be extremely organised and keep a comprehensive paper trail of everything they can about you so that they can destroy your credibility with so-called facts of poor performance (usually trivial

but the sheer weight of so much 'evidence' can ensure that these trivialities are easily blown out of proportion by the bully and believed by others).

- **Losing faith or belief in yourself and your abilities is not effective or healthy.** The bully wants you to feel this way so that you will crumble and the bully derives great pleasure and power from this. Don't let this predator get away with that – again seek help such as professional counselling to help you to validate your strengths and abilities. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy or CBT for short is a very useful and successful approach to enabling this to happen.

### **Case Study – Leanne**

The following case study is based loosely around a real story but the people and the circumstances are fictional.

Leanne is a 48 year old woman who is one of two product managers in a major computer parts facility. Leanne has excellent qualifications and experience as a manager in the computer sales industry. However she has been having lots of personal attacks against her from one of the other managers, Rowena, over the past year. Rowena openly ridicules Leanne at meetings about her lack of organisation, poor communication and writing skills and lowering staff morale on the team. Leanne has reluctantly taken on the onerous role of managing a team that is quite divided, at the Head of her section's insistence. Rowena who is in her fifties and prides herself on precision organisation and authoritarian style of managing, had held the management position prior to Leanne and has subsequently criticised Leanne at every opportunity since that time. Rowena has the ear of the Head of the section and is frequently in her office. The Head is known as a weak leader and lacks knowledge of the expertise and abilities of her staff. The Head relies on Rowena to keep her informed of their work performance. Leanne has noticed that Rowena is always the first to start work and Rowena always sits near the entrance to the building in the morning and evening to observe who is late and who leaves early. Such observations are raised by Rowena at meetings, and since Leanne has a daughter with a disability who needs to attend special classes at School and arrives a bit later than most, she is a target of Rowena's cheap shots and belittling.

Rowena has everyone worried about being branded lazy and useless poor performers and as a result, people conform to Rowena's demands. Rowena has held impromptu meetings with Leanne, with the most recent involving Rowena telling Leanne loudly that the business 'team' is totally dissatisfied with her performance as manager and she had better get her act together because she said 'you are responsible for all of the problems and low morale of the business team and should be ashamed. Nobody respects you here.' Leanne knows that Rowena's notion of 'the team' includes Rowena and her two other devotee clerks. The other 12 people on the actual team are never consulted by Rowena. Nonetheless Leanne was confused and feeling deflated by Rowena's accusations. Desperately she told Rowena that she would try to improve her performance and work longer hours and come in on weekends to show the team she was committed. This had little effect except making Leanne tired, irritable with her family and having no time for her family. Rowena and her team continued their attacks on Leanne's credibility as a manager, despite Leanne's recent success in the tendering process for a large computer contract.

Rowena has mentored a couple of other newer staff devotees over the past few years. They openly admire Rowena for her authority and organisation and for her contempt of the 'dead wood' in their section (that includes Leanne). Rowena is coaching them on keeping files, emails and so on, on 'dead wood' colleagues of which Leanne has been portrayed. Other staff are fully unaware of this behaviour until the Head of the section presents a large document to Leanne one day outlining criticisms and shortcomings of her work performance over a 12 month period. Leanne is devastated that they would do something like this especially given a lot of the trivial accusations they had included.

Leanne calls in sick the next day on stress leave. Leanne's office is immediately cleared of her books, files and boxes of business papers the following day and her computer is seized and checked by Rowena and the Head of the section. The Head rings Leanne at home and tells her that she must provide a medical certificate immediately or disciplinary action will be commenced by the end of the day. Leanne is no longer able to cope with all of this stress and attempts suicide. Fortunately she survived and has been receiving psychiatric treatments and care for over 6 months. Leanne never wants to



return to work again. Her family are devastated and her husband has threatened to leave her with their child because he has had enough of her depressive behaviour.

### **What can we make of Leanne's story?**

In many ways this is a classical story of a person who has been bullied and harassed at work repeatedly and severely. Indeed it has become mob bullying and this has led to a shocking and horrific conclusion for Leanne. Leanne tried desperately to satisfy Rowena's demands but was simply bullied even more. The Head of her section also bullied her and that telephone call to her home was as insensitive as it was punishing. Leanne succumbed to the pressure and tried to kill herself. No-one would believe her version of events and she was isolated, alone and psychologically traumatised.

Rowena the serial bully in this case harassed Leanne to the point of breaking Leanne's will, with no remorse or display of emotion. Leanne's life has been almost destroyed because of the nastiness of primarily one person at her work. Yes Leanne undertook an ineffective option in attempting suicide, but it is easy to understand her dilemma owing to a complete lack of support for her and a total breakdown in work ethics by her so-called colleagues. Leanne's family is in disarray all because of this one serial bully and she will need lots of support although her support system also seems to be crumbling.

## Recommendations

### **Preferred Options:**

- **Learn about people and their personalities** – so that you don't become a serial victim of another person's bullying or harassing behaviour. Refer back to the work of Brinkman & Kirshner (2003: 15, 7), outlined in the 'Understanding the Situation' section in this booklet, regarding:
  - the 4 intentions of people and how they are affected when threatened and
  - the characteristics of the 3 most difficult and controlling behaviours of people used by the 3 character types – the people who will give you problems.

Refer also to Field's (1996) overview of the character of a bully also outlined in the 'Understanding the Situation' section in this booklet.

- **As mentioned confronting a bully is not a good idea.** If a meeting is required, ensure that you have someone to advocate for you (a union representative, an articulate family member, a lawyer and so on).
- **Hang on to evidence if you can.** Don't just rely on your memory if you need to make a complaint of harassment and bullying in your workplace. Memory and concentration are the first things to be adversely affected when a person is stressed due to harassment and bullying. Keep everything you can in writing. Keep your position description handy and have copies of performance appraisals, statements or emails that demonstrate your abilities and so on. Keep copies of your medical certificates and keep diary entries of any meetings that you have with others. The bully relies on you not doing any of this so that you will not be believed by others, and the bully looks organised and convincing as a result.
- **Avoid becoming isolated from friends and loved ones.** You will require all the strength and support you can muster in order to maintain your self-esteem and self-worth and to express how you feel and what you need (to get things off your chest).
- **Seek professional help.** You can get this from your doctor even if it's just to get medical certificates for time off and know who to go to for counselling. Professional counselling is a great option, because they will listen to you and your story, they will help you understand how you are feeling and to acknowledge your pain and hurt, and they will guide you through some actions to help you deal with your distress over a period of time until psychological healing occurs.
- **Relax.** Book yourself in for meditation, yoga or tai chi classes for example or go and have regular massages. Learn how to use guided imagery e.g., with relaxation tapes, CD's, DVD's or iPods. Go for bushwalks or swimming or take up a new relaxing hobby. Go to a library or museum and have a day just for you – spoil or pamper yourself.

- **Use a journal to record your thoughts and feeling each day.** This allows you to express how you feel. You don't have to show it to anyone, although if you are being cared for by a professional counsellor, you may wish to discuss the journal with them – help to clarify your feeling and emotions, help to focus on your strengths and resources, help you to take charge and focus on developing new positive ways of thinking and behaving.
- **Resign if you need to.** This may not be an ideal solution when you have bills and mortgages to pay but in the long run it may be best for your physical and mental health. Make sure that if you do resign, that you receive all the entitlements that you are allowed – you may ask the union representative to do this for you if you are a member. Long service leave, superannuation and so on may be basic entitlements that you have accrued.

Ideally depending on your age and health, you may have another job or income to go to. It may represent a turning point in your life, and you may choose to undertake studies or go on a trip somewhere and do some of the things you have always wanted to do but never had the time to do it. In some cases this may even mean a change in residence or even a partner – life can be like that sometimes.

- **Take legal action.** If you have a reasonable case this may be an option – (e.g., to assist with an action for personal injury, expenses and workers compensation). A lawyer could also act as an advocate for you if grievance proceedings are commenced.

- **Case Study Examples of Preferred Options**

The following case studies are based on real stories but the people and the circumstances are fictional.

### **Case Study One – Jack**

Jack is a 59 year old single male who is a manager in a busy retail firm. Jack feels that life has passed him by a bit. He is regarded as a good manager but he has no ambitions at his stage of life to advance any more. He has worked for the firm for most of his working life and knows everything there is to know about the firm, including who to trust and who to avoid. Recently a younger woman Clare aged 25 years was assigned to do some work with him on some marketing and there was a deadline to get things done. Jack felt that Clare was ambitious and worked very hard.

One night at the office Clare was all over Jack saying how she always wanted to seduce an older man and how good looking Jack was. Jack was shocked that she was even interested in him and felt flattered. From that moment they had a passionate affair. Clare told Jack not to tell anyone because it could affect her career. Clare asked Jack if he could help her with a promotion she was applying for. Jack of course agreed as he was so thrilled to be the centre of her attention. Clare enticingly asked Jack to get some confidential files that could help her to have an edge in her promotion. Clare knew that Jack had the keys to a supervisor's office and filing cabinets. Jack felt very uneasy but he was so smitten by Clare and her amorous ways that he agreed to Clare's overwhelming appreciation.

Clare got her promotion. Clare knew that Jack would not have the influence to get her any further in the firm. Clare had moved offices and she told a stunned Jack the he had better leave her alone or she would report him for sexual assault. She stated to Jack 'Why should I be interested in some fat, bald old git like you anyway – you were just a means to an end?' and went back to her work. Jack was devastated and angry. He just wanted to wring her neck but where would that get him. He was physically sick. He kept having flashbacks of their relationship and would wake during the night in a sweat for the next few months. He couldn't tell anyone and felt so alone, used and abused and his

self-esteem hit rock bottom. He became depressed and overawed with emotions especially whenever he saw Clare at work. Clare of course just ignored him. His concentration and memory were becoming problematic and affecting his work.

Jack realised that he was a fool but also realised that he needed help to get over this affair. He rang a local professional counsellor and spilled out his story and cried for the first time in a very long time. He related how he was so lonely and that Clare had given him a will to live again and to feel wanted and loved. He realises now that Clare was just using him to get ahead. During the counselling sessions the counsellor worked on Jack's expression of his feelings and why he felt the way he did. Why did he not like the way that he looks? Why had he abandoned an idea of forming a close relationship with a woman in his life? Jack wrote down his feelings and emotions in a journal and at times the words that he poured out shocked him for their violence – but he felt damn good about it afterwards.

An action plan was agreed to with his counsellor about the sorts of changes Jack could make in his life to feel good about himself. Jack came up with ideas such as going to the gym and getting his body back into some shape, going on a better more nutritious and less fattening diet, having his hair professionally dyed and signing on for membership with a reputable internet dating service. After a couple of months, Jack's life was transformed. He had so many enquiries on the internet from gorgeous women and he was about to date one next Friday evening (dinner and then go out to see a play). He couldn't believe how his life had been turned around and that his self-confidence had risen literally out of this Earth. Jack put Clare right out of his mind most of the time though there was some hurt still there. He now felt a slight bit sorry for her as her life would be one long lie.

### **What can we make of Jack's story?**

There is no doubt that Clare was a bully and manipulator and preyed on Jack's vulnerability. Clare would sleep her way to the top assuming that she survives long enough to do so as she is really playing with 'fire' and with peoples' emotions and

someone may take more than simple offence. Jack was devastated by her actions – he thought for once in his life that someone cared for him and could make him happy. He was also caught in a catch 22 in that he could not tell anyone about the affair. When Clare broke it off she threatened him in a frightening way and he had little recourse but to agree. Jack was all alone and feeling depressed and contemplated suicide for a short while. No-one in the office or anywhere else could surely believe that such a relationship could exist outside of sexual assault and he fantasised himself being portrayed in the media as a nasty lecherous old predator.

Jack showed great strength of character to admit that he had a major problem and sought the services of a professional counsellor. This is exactly what he needed because he couldn't confide his story to anyone else. In doing this Jack was able to understand more about himself and his life and that this was actually a precursor for a change that was long overdue. He picked himself up and did something to change his life positively through an action plan developed with his counsellor. It was hard work at first but after a while he was feeling fitter than he had been for twenty odd years. He felt good. This story could have turned out much differently and potentially with tragic consequences. It demonstrates the dangers of workplace harassment and bullying and gives a glimpse of how horrific it can be in terms of consequences for the victim.

The following Activity Diary and Rating Scales have been sourced from 'Coping with Depression, Booklet 2: Getting Active' pp. 4-6, published on a pdf web based file by The Clinical Psychology Service of Northampton Healthcare Community (NHS) Trust and have been modified to address the Jack's case study.

## Jack's Activity Diary

Jack is pretty used to writing documents and he has agreed to keep a diary if this will help him to lift his mood and anxiety. We know from the outcome of his case above that a journal and this diary were helpful in changing Jack's perception on life.

The ratings key for P which is Pleasure and A which is Achievement are explained below:

### P (Pleasure) Rating Scale:

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0	1	2	3	4	5
None					Very
At all					Much

### A (Achievement) Rating Scale:

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0	1	2	3	4	5
None					Very
At all					Much

In the diary below, Jack needs to write down the times of his daily activities and rate his activities during that period for pleasure and achievement. It is important to that Jack writes down his activities, the time and the rating as soon as he can as they occur rather than to leave it to memory. In people who are depressed, their short term memory and concentration are often poor so writing things down is a positive exercise in itself to assist with memory, to get things clear and to see what achievements and pleasure occur. Jack has agreed with her counsellor to keep writing in his diary for each day for maybe 3 or 4 days if he can. Jack's counsellor told him not to worry if he misses a day – maybe do an extra day at the end. Jack's diary is outlined below. It is important that Jack brings his diary with him to his next counselling session, so that he can discuss what he has written and identify positive things in his daily life. This his first attempt

shows that he has a strong sense of control and is starting to get a life – something he hasn't had for a long time.

<b>JACK'S ACTIVITY DIARY – Wednesday 15 October 2009 – whilst on sick leave for a few days</b>		
<b>TIME</b>	<b>ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>RATINGS</b>
6am	Gets out of bed Heads off to the gym Has a solid workout on weights and swims in heated pool for 20 laps	P=2 A=4
7am	Back home Turned television on Had breakfast Rides exercise bike for 20 minutes	P=0 A=2
10am	Had shower Got dressed to go to town	P=1 A=0
10.30am	Drives to hardware store and buys equipment for fixing back door	P=3 A=3
11.15am	Has hair cut and dyed at hairdressers	P=2 A=3
12.40pm	Went shopping for new clothes	P=2 A=3
3pm	Arrives home. Starts work on back door	P=4 A=4
4pm	Played some music Cleaned house	P=1 A=1



5.30pm	Phoned mate Plans to see football match on weekend	P=4 A=3
6.30pm	Cooks dinner. Healthy fish dinner with lots of vegetables Has meal in front of television	P=2 A=2
7pm -10.30pm	Goes onto internet to see what replies he has got in his dating service email box	P=4 A=4
11.30pm	Off to bed	P=2 A=2

## **Case Study Two – Tanya**

Tanya is an 18 year old girl who works part time in a shoe store to pay her way through university. The manager is Brad a 29 year old, fit looking man who is a real go-getter can-do sort of personality. Tanya is by contrast quite shy and very well mannered. Tanya asked Brad one day if she would be able to work a couple of extra shifts a week as she wanted to go on a holiday in summer. Brad looked at Tanya, put his hand over her breast and with a smirk on his face said 'Well what do I get if I give you the shifts? Tanya was shocked and very scared. She knew Brad always felt that Brad was a bit creepy, but now she was scared. Tanya shrugged his hand off her breast and told him to forget it and went back to her work for which Brad said under his breath but so she could hear '...teaser'. Tanya cried all that day and rang her mother and told her what had happened. Her mother was angry and said she would ring this '.....' and tell him off. Her mum also said that this was sexual assault, but Tanya said 'no, no, no don't say that mum just leave it it's not worth carrying on like that.' Tanya decided then and there however that she couldn't face going back to work alone with Brad again. Tanya rang Brad and told him that she was resigning and hoped never to have to see him again. Brad replied 'yeh, whatever and hung up'.

### **What can we make of Tanya's story?**

This is sexual assault and bullying by a person in a position of power over Tanya. Tanya could have reported this to the police but didn't – she felt that the chances of anyone believing her would be remote. In a small store the chances of gaining any resolution for something like this is next to impossible – it would be her word against his and without any evidence she felt that she could only be subjected to more humiliation and revenge. She wouldn't doubt Brad's capacity to be violent. Tanya probably took the only way out so that at least she knew she wouldn't be subjected to repeated abuse. Of course she lost her job and would now have to look again. She is feeling vulnerable though and feels she may not trust another male employer again. Tanya has had a terrible experience and unfortunately there are few protections for young vulnerable workers in such smaller workplaces in our communities, especially for females. In this case, Tanya opted for safety over an income. To avoid being cast as victim however, she will need to

reflect and take stock of this event and understand that she was not at fault, that her actions were practical but designed to help her get on with life again. She would also be more aware of warning signs of danger in the workplace, learned in this case by hard experience. Tanya has loving parents and two sisters who continue to support her emotionally and that is important in sustaining her resilience.

# Conclusion

This booklet has explored the complex issues that relate to workplace harassment and bullying. A number of larger quotations were used to identify the nature of bullying, about who does the bullying and the effects on the victim and the perpetrator. This is a major public health issue that needs much more research, particularly regarding how a victimised person can defend themselves without being ruined or destroyed as a human being in the process. Case examples were presented and outcomes of treatment care or experiences were explored in relation to evidence and what may work in practice.

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