



PARTNERING FOR PREVENTION

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Bullying

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What is bullying?

Harassment and bullying are forms of abuse. Abuse is 'a violation of an individual's human and civil rights by any other person or persons'. (*Promoting a Safe Church*)

Harassment is commonly defined in legislation and policies dealing with work place safety. Harassment can be on grounds of race, disability, gender, sexual orientation, or religious belief.

In some parts of the world bullying is similarly legally defined, but in most of Europe and North America there are no legal definitions of bullying. 'Bullying is repeated and persistent negative acts towards one or more individual(s) which involve a perceived power imbalance and create a hostile environment.' (Salin, 2003, p1214)

The Church is required by God to foster relationships of the utmost integrity, truthfulness and trustworthiness. Bullying undermines values expressed in Scripture, being contrary to the servanthood of the Son of Man which Jesus contrasts with the Gentile rulers who 'lord it over' others (Mark 10.41-45). Some churches have policies dealing with bullying.

In *Dignity at Work*, the policy of the Church of England, bullying is not defined.

In *Faithfulness in Service*, the code of conduct of the Anglican Church of Australia, bullying is defined as 'repeated behaviour directed to a person or persons which a reasonable person, having regard to all the circumstances, would expect to victimise, humiliate, undermine or threaten the person or persons, and which creates a risk to their health and safety.'

Bullying may manifest itself in a variety of different ways. Both the Church of England and the Anglican Church of Australia have a list of behaviours that constitute bullying. Bullying can be verbal, physical, emotional or psychological.

It is important to distinguish bullying from other behaviours, such as respectfully disagreeing with or criticising someone's beliefs or opinions; setting reasonable performance goals, standards or deadlines; giving reasonable directives, feedback or assessments of performance or behaviour; and taking legitimate disciplinary action.

Who are the targets of bullying?

Any person can be the target of bullying. It is not commonly understood that Church leaders can be the target of bullying from other Church leaders, both lay and ordained, and from Church members.

Church members can also be the target of bullying from Church leaders and other Church members.

What are common responses of those who bully when the subject of a complaint?

Those who engage in bullying commonly adopt a threefold strategy of defence when confronted with a complaint: denial; counterattack against the complainant; 'poor me', thereby gaining sympathy and potentially avoiding the penalty of their behaviour, in effect presenting themselves as the 'victim' and the target as the one bullying.

It is important to remember that those who bully are likely to return to type, having probably made a great effort during an investigation to placate the applicable authority.

What is the environment in which bullying occurs?

While bullying can occur in any environment, it is more likely to flourish in contexts which have one or more of the following characteristics: overbearing or inadequate leadership; poor management; a high level of competition; lack of support and governance structures; poor handling of conflict; rigid structures; low level of participation or consultation; excessive demands on time; unclear role description and processes; and inadequate grievance procedures. Bullying is also more likely to occur during periods of uncertainty and restructuring.

What are the effects of bullying?

A person who is bullied may suffer emotionally, psychologically, physically, socially and spiritually. It is not well understood that the impact of bullying can be life long and affect the person, their relationships and their capacity for ministry.

Effects of bullying on the person and their relationships can include: feelings of shame, humiliation, rejection, powerlessness, insecurity, anger and resentment; sadness, tearfulness, depression, anxiety; fatigue, disturbed sleep, changed appetite and ill health; substance abuse, gambling and use of pornography; becoming more withdrawn or aggressive; burn out; suicidal thinking and action; loss of self-esteem and self-confidence; marital and family problems; and breakdown in community and collegial relationships.

Effects of bullying on ministry can include: loss of coping skills; disillusionment; inability to concentrate; loss of motivation; decreased productivity and competence; bad decision-making and poor judgement; loss of faith or crisis of vocation; difficulty trusting others; diminished employability; and premature desire to cease employment.

Bullying also leads to reputational damage for the wider church, and the individual congregation as well as for individuals.

What strategies can be developed to reduce bullying in the church?

It is important that the church has a policy that deals with complaints of bullying. Unless such complaints are taken seriously and thoroughly investigated, bullying will remain unchecked.

The Church of England has developed *Dignity at Work*. It includes a model diocesan policy with an identified person to whom complaints can be made.

In the Anglican Church of Australia the Diocese of Sydney has developed *Grievance policy and procedure for dealing with allegations of unacceptable behaviour by clergy and church workers in parishes*, which includes bullying. It provides for a non-legal approach with complaints dealt with by a process of discussion, cooperation and conciliation consistent with biblical principles.

Resources

Arbuckle, Gerald (2004) *Confronting the Demon: A Gospel response to adult bullying*. Liturgical Press

The Archbishops' Council (2006) *Promoting a Safe Church*. London: Church House Publishing

The Archbishops' Council (2008) *Dignity at Work* can be found online at

<http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1167938/dignity%20at%20work%20booklet.pdf>

Diocese of Sydney (2010) *Grievance policy and procedure for dealing with allegations of unacceptable behaviour by clergy and church workers in parishes* can be found online at

<http://www.sds.asn.au/assets/Documents/SynodPolicy/GrievancePolicyProcedure.25Oct10.pdf>

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Hadikin, Ruth, Muriel O'Driscoll (2000) *The Bullying Culture: Cause, effect, harm reduction*. BFM, Butterworth-Heineann

Litchfield, Kate (2006) *Tend my Flock: Sustaining Good Pastoral Care*. Norwich: Canterbury Press

Pepler, Debra, Wendy Craig (2008) *Understanding and Addressing Bullying*. Bloomington, IN: Authorhouse.

Salin, Denise (2003) Ways of explaining workplace bullying: A review of enabling, motivating and precipitating structures and processes in the work environment. *Human Relations*, 56, 10, 1213-1232

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