

Workplace Bullying....



It's inappropriate behavior and does not promote a safe and respectful learning environment, and...

...it's happening in our schools, and it's a PROHIBITED ACT!

Nevada Revised Statute (NRS) 388.132 (4)(b) states that it is the intended goal of the Legislature to ensure that: "All administrators, principals, teachers and other personnel of the school districts and public schools in this state demonstrate appropriate behavior on the premises of any public school by treating other persons, including, without limitation, pupils, with civility and respect and by refusing to tolerate bullying, cyber-bullying, harassment or intimidation." The Legislature further indicates that "any form of bullying, cyber-bullying, harassment or intimidation in public schools seriously interferes with the ability of teachers to teach in the classroom and the ability of pupils to learn." NRS 388.132(2).

NRS 388.135 states that: A member of the board of trustees of a school district, any employee of the board of trustees, including, without limitation, an administrator, principal, teacher, or other staff member, or any pupil shall not engage in bullying, cyber-bullying, harassment or intimidation on the premises of any public school, at an activity sponsored by a public school or on any school bus.

The Nevada statutes cited above previously only referenced harassment and intimidation. Bullying and cyber-bullying were added to these statutes effective July 1, 2010, clearly recognizing that bullying is different from harassment or intimidation and is equally unacceptable conduct by an administrator, teacher, or staff member.

Indeed, by including bullying and cyber-bullying in NRS 388.135, a public school district could discipline an administrator, principal, teacher, or other staff member who engages in such conduct.

We are all familiar with accounts of bullying involving students. There are tragic stories of students being bullied to the point of taking their own lives. But bullying can and does happen among adults, and it can have a devastating effect on employee morale, work productivity, and even the health and well being of employees.

What is workplace bullying?

There is no single definition of bullying. NRS 388.122 defines "bullying" to mean:

A willful act which is written, verbal or physical, or a course of conduct on the part of one or more persons which is not authorized by law and which exposes a person one time or repeatedly and over time to one or more negative actions which is highly offensive to a reasonable person and:

1. *Is intended to cause or actually causes the person to suffer harm or serious emotional distress;*
2. *Places the person in reasonable fear of harm or serious emotional distress; or*
3. *Creates an environment which is hostile to a pupil by interfering with the education of the pupil.*

"Cyber-Bullying" is defined as "bullying through the use of electronic communication. The term includes the use of electronic communication to transmit or distribute a sexual image of a minor. NRS 388.123. As used in this section, "sexual image" means any visual depiction, including, without limitation, any photograph or video, of a minor simulating or engaging in sexual conduct or of a minor as the subject of a sexual portrayal." NRS 200.737.

Researchers studying the phenomenon of workplace bullying cite certain common characteristics. Catherine Mattice and Karen Garman define it as "systematic aggressive communication, manipulation of work, and acts aimed at humiliating or degrading one or more individuals that create an unhealthy and unprofessional power imbalance between bully and target..."¹ Gary and Ruth Namie define workplace bullying as "repeated, health-harming mistreatment, verbal abuse, or conduct which is threatening, humiliating, intimidating, or sabotage that interferes with work or some combination of the three."²

Who are the targets of workplace bullying?

According the Workplace Bullying Institute WBI-Zogby survey of 2007³:

- 37% of workers have been bullied
- 72% of workplace bullies are bosses
- 57% of targets are women
- 62% of employers ignore the problem
- 40% of bullied individuals never tell their employer

The survey also cites that bullying is 4 times more prevalent than illegal discriminatory harassment. In only one out of 5 (20%) of bullying cases does discriminatory conduct play a role.

What are the effects and results of it?

Workplace bullying can have serious health effects for the targets of bullying. The WBI-Zogby survey also shows that 45% of targets suffer stress-related health problems. Pamela Lutgen-Sandvik wrote that the "harm to workers runs the gamut of human misery including anxiety, depression, burnout, frustration, and helplessness."⁴ She also wrote that the negative effects of bullying can be so severe that post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and suicide are not uncommon.

There can also be financial implications for employers who do not address workplace bullying in terms of increased use of sick leave, and large turnover of employees in workplaces where bullying occurs. A survey conducted by Christine Person, Ph.D.⁵, noted that after a bullying incident:

- 28% lost work time avoiding the instigator
- 53% lost work time worrying about the incident or future incidents
- 37% believed their commitment to the organization declined
- 22% decreased their effort at work
- 10% decreased the amount of time spent at work
- 46% contemplated changing jobs to avoid the instigator
- 12% actually changed jobs to avoid the instigator

"When the target is a teacher, a great injustice occurs because the bully robs the students of what they want, need and deserve..." Matt Spencer

What are the implications in our schools?

When school employees are the victims of workplace bullying, there is an added cost that affects the students themselves. Matt Spencer, Ed D, the Director of Classified Personnel in Desert Sands Unified School District, La Quinta, California, wrote in a March 25, 2010, essay posted on the website of the Workplace Bullying Institute, "The workplace bully in America's schools is a taker...a robber...a thief. The bully steals the dignity, self-esteem, confidence, joy, happiness and quality of life of the targeted victim. But when the target is a teacher, a great injustice occurs because the bully robs the students of what they want, need and deserve...a teacher who loves them, cares for them...who comes to work every day and gives all that he/she has so that these wonderful, deserving children receive an outstanding education...the foundation of becoming whatever they want and dream to be! A great tragedy occurs every day in America's schools as thousands of children are robbed by the workplace bully of the right to be nurtured and taught by such honorable, caring, outstanding educators."



What are the solutions?

With the Nevada Legislature telling districts they must not tolerate workplace bullying, school districts should be amending their policies to reflect the new language in NRS 388.

The Washington State Department of Labor and Industries has looked into things employees can do when they become the target of a bully. They recommend the following:

Regain control by:

- recognizing that you are being bullied.
- realizing that you are NOT the source of the problem.
- recognizing that bullying is about control, and therefore has nothing to do with your performance.

Take action by:

- keeping a diary detailing the nature of bullying (e.g., dates, times, places, what was said or done, and who was present).
- obtaining copies of harassing/bullying paper trails; hold on to copies of documents that contradict the bully's accusations against you (e.g., time sheets, audit reports, etc.).⁶



Important CAUTION!

With the recognition of bullying and cyber-bullying as conduct that is not to be engaged in by administrators, principals, teachers, or other staff members in public schools, if you engage in bullying or cyber-bullying you could be subject to employment discipline.

References

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3. WBI-Zogby 2007 Survey, Workplace Bullying Survey, www.workplacebullying.org/research/WBI-Zogby2007Survey
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