



Work In
Confidence

The Definitive Guide to Workplace Bullying

(2025 EDITION)

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Workplace bullying is not just an HR issue — it's a business risk. Despite years of awareness campaigns and legislation, thousands of employees still experience behaviours that leave them feeling humiliated, isolated, and unsafe at work.

This updated 2025 guide explores what bullying really looks like today, how it damages both individuals and organisations, and what every employer can do to stop it. Drawing on the latest research from ACAS, CIPD and the NHS, it offers clear insights, practical steps, and renewed urgency to act — because silence always costs more than speaking up.



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INTRODUCTION

Bullying and harassment remain among the most damaging workplace behaviours. Despite rising awareness, around one in ten UK employees still experience bullying or harassment each year (CIPD 2024).

For organisations, the impact extends beyond individuals – it undermines engagement, retention, performance and trust. For employees, it can erode confidence and wellbeing, sometimes with long-term health consequences.

The foundation of a healthy workplace is psychological safety: where people can raise issues, challenge behaviour and speak up without fear.

This guide will help you:

- Recognise and address workplace bullying.
- Understand the human and financial costs.
- Build a culture of respect and accountability.
- Support every employee to have a voice.

Action for Employers:

- Treat bullying as both a wellbeing and performance risk.
- Make psychological safety a clear leadership objective.
- Share simple routes to raise concerns early.



WHAT IS WORKPLACE BULLYING?

There is no single legal definition of workplace bullying in UK law, but ACAS defines it as:

“Any unwanted behaviour that makes someone feel intimidated, degraded, humiliated or offended.”

Bullying may be:

- Verbal or non-verbal, psychological or physical.
- A pattern of behaviour, not just a single event.
- Upward, downward or peer-to-peer.
- Intentional or unintentional.

Examples include:

- *Persistent criticism or unfair blame.*
- *Excluding someone from communication or decision-making.*
- *Spreading rumours or gossip.*
- *Unreasonable workload or deadlines.*
- *Demeaning language, sarcasm or ridicule.*
- *Removing responsibility or recognition without cause.*

Action for Employers:

- Define bullying clearly in policy and training.
- Encourage bystander intervention and allyship.
- Provide early-resolution options before issues escalate.



What Is Unacceptable Behaviour?

Some conduct may appear trivial alone but becomes harmful when repeated or targeted.



Examples:

- Shouting or aggressive tone.
- Persistent “banter” that humiliates.
- Deliberate exclusion from meetings.
- Withholding information or support.
- Setting employees up to fail.

**OCCASIONAL
CONFLICT IS NORMAL;
PATTERNS OF
DISRESPECT ARE NOT.**

Action for Employers:

- Clarify boundaries between firm management and bullying.
- Create safe routes to raise concerns early.
- Promote open, constructive feedback.

**HELPFUL
TIPS**

The “Accidental” Bully

The “accidental bully” may not intend harm but still damages morale and trust.

Typical traits:

- Abrupt or dismissive communication.
- Public criticism disguised as humour.
- Micromanagement or interrupting others.
- Ignoring feedback or alternative views.



Action for Employers:

- Offer communication and empathy coaching.
- Use 360° feedback to spot early issues.
- Reinforce respect and self-awareness in leadership training.

**HELPFUL
TIPS**

Bullying – Sadly a Growing Business

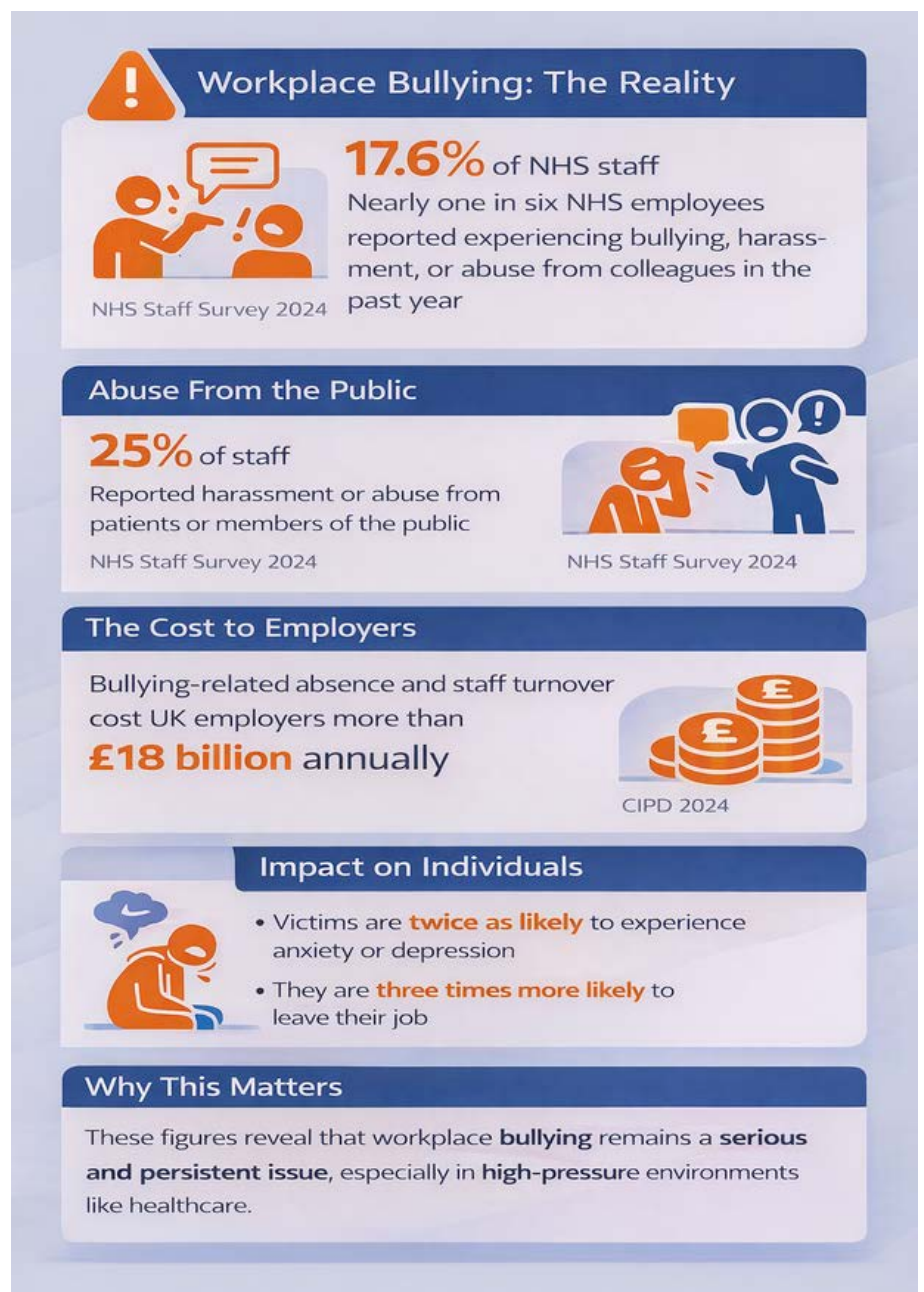
The CIPD Good Work Index (2024) found 9% of UK employees experienced bullying or harassment in the previous year – higher in public sector, healthcare and education roles.

Where poor culture is tolerated, bullying becomes normalised.

Action for Employers:

- Model values consistently at senior level.
- Integrate culture and wellbeing measures into business KPIs.
- Celebrate examples of inclusive behaviour.

The Shocking Facts



Cost and Effects of Bullying

Bullying harms people and performance: reduced concentration and productivity; increased stress-related absence; higher staff turnover and recruitment costs; and damage to reputation and brand.

ACAS (2021) estimated poor conflict management, including bullying, costs the UK economy **~£28 billion annually**.

HELPFUL TIPS

ACTION FOR EMPLOYERS:

- Quantify internal costs using HR data.
- Treat culture improvement as a business priority.
- Link wellbeing outcomes to performance metrics.

THE COST OF BULLYING ON YOU – THE EMPLOYER

Even modest levels of bullying create substantial financial impact. The table below illustrates **indicative, conservative** costs for an organisation of **1,000** employees.

Cost Area	Approximate Cost
Lost productivity (5%)	£1,300,000
Turnover & replacement	£250,000
Sickness absence	£400,000
Legal / tribunal	£100,000
Total estimated cost	≈ £2,000,000

These figures align with ACAS and CIPD economic modelling (Lewis et al., 2015; Saundry & Currie, 2021) and more recent prevalence data (CIPD 2024; NHS 2024). Combined, they suggest bullying and related conflict still cost UK employers tens of billions of pounds each year through absenteeism, turnover and lost productivity.

Action for Employers:

- Benchmark internal costs annually and review hotspots.
- Act early on emerging issues using Speak Up data.
- Report findings openly to maintain accountability.

Understanding Barriers to Speaking Out

Employees often stay silent because of:

- Fear of retaliation or being labelled a trouble-maker.
- Lack of faith that reporting will change anything.
- Peer pressure or misplaced loyalty.
- Limited trust in HR or leadership.

Psychological safety is key.

When people feel safe to raise concerns, issues surface early and can be addressed constructively.



Action for Employers:

- *Provide multiple, confidential reporting channels – including anonymous options.*
- *Train managers to handle disclosures with empathy.*
- *Recognise and thank those who raise issues in good faith.*

**HELPFUL
TIPS**

The Law

Bullying itself isn't a defined offence, but related behaviour can breach several laws:

- **Equality Act 2010:** harassment linked to a protected characteristic is unlawful.
- **Health and Safety at Work Act 1974:** requires a safe working environment.
- **Employment Rights Act 1996:** covers constructive dismissal.
- **Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act) Act 2023:** positive duty (from Oct 2024) for employers to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment.

Action for Employers:

- *Review and update all relevant policies.*
- *Ensure investigations are timely, fair and documented.*
- *Provide refresher training on legal responsibilities.*



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Employer's Guide – Taking Action

A proactive approach is the only way to prevent bullying and protect your people.

- **Policy:** clear anti-bullying policy with staff input.
- **Training:** equip managers to spot signs and intervene promptly.
- **Communication:** reinforce standards of respect and inclusion at all levels.
- **Reporting:** multiple confidential routes, including anonymous channels.
- **Follow-up:** investigate quickly and fairly; act on findings transparently.
- **Measure:** regularly assess whether culture is improving.

HELPFUL TIPS

Action for Employers:

- *Include culture goals in leadership reviews.*
- *Share real examples of positive change.*
- *Align Speak Up data with wellbeing metrics.*





HELPFUL TIPS

Conclusion

- *Bullying is both a cultural and commercial risk. The strongest organisations act early, listen often and make respect non-negotiable.*
- *By building trust and encouraging employees to speak up safely, you can protect wellbeing, retain talent and strengthen performance.*

Action for Employers:

- *Review your Speak Up and whistleblowing processes today.*
- *Talk to WorkInConfidence about how anonymous dialogue tools can help maintain openness, integrity and trust.*

About Us

At WorkInConfidence, our mission is to empower organisations to build healthier, safer, more engaged and productive workplaces. Our platform gives every employee a voice within an environment of psychological safety.

 Employee Voice	 Psychological Safety	 Leadership Insights
Creating trusted channels for authentic communication	Building environments where everyone feels safe to speak up	Providing actionable data for informed decision making leading to improved culture and organisational performance.

WorkInConfidence is used across over 100 organisations (c. 200k staff) in the private, public and not for profit sectors. We have a decade of experience delivering a highly secure, easy to use system. WorkInConfidence is registered with the ICO for data protection purposes and is IASME and Cyber Essentials Plus certified.

One Comprehensive Solution Via One Unified Online Platform

 Anonymous Two-Way Speak Up	 Open Case Logging	 Case Management
Removing fear and worry for the nervous or reticent to Speak Up about bullying and harassment, DEI, wellness or ideation.	People who are comfortable with being identified can log cases openly.	All cases (whether received via the platform or directly) can be easily stored, shared, and tracked.
 Clear Central Reporting & Actionable Insights	 Employee Forums	 Surveys
Spot patterns, emerging risks, and identify opportunities for improvement. Provide clear reporting to the Senior Leadership Team, regulators, or the Board.	Enable open discussions to learn and improve.	Gather feedback through pulse, mini or long surveys. Discover and learn from employee viewpoints.

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