

Workplace Bullying Prevention



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Workplace bullying prevention

An introduction to using this resource

Creating a mentally healthy workplace is about creating a safe, supportive and strong workplace culture where bullying cannot thrive.



Each year, one in five employees in New Zealand workplaces report they have experienced bullying. It not only affects individuals but also the productivity of organisations.

In order to prevent bullying, it's essential workplaces have a clear understanding of what it is and the impact that it can have on individuals and the morale of teams.

Leaders, managers and teams can use this resource to understand what helps to create positive work environments that prevent bullying. It provides you with an array of tools to help create positive workplace environments and cultures where mana-enhancing, open communication is the norm so bullying cannot thrive.

There are also exercises for teams to reflect on the values of their organisation, creating shared understandings and setting clear expectations of acceptable behaviours.

This resource can be used alone or alongside other tools in the

Working Well suite of resources



Fact sheets

About workplace bullying

The business case for bullying prevention

Creating environments that do not allow bullying to flourish

How to be an Upstander

Getting help and advice

References

Worksheets

Team discussion – values and behaviours

Team discussion – the triple filter test

Refer to bibliography for further reading and key sources of information informing this resource.

Fact sheet

About workplace bullying

What is bullying?

WorkSafe NZ defines workplace bullying as repeated and unreasonable behaviour directed towards a worker or a group of workers that can lead to physical or psychological harm. The behaviour is persistent (occurs more than once) and can involve a range of actions over time¹. People targeted often feel they are unable to protect themselves due to real or perceived power imbalances.

People who are bullied are more likely to experience mental health problems such as depression and anxiety. They are also more vulnerable to experiencing suicidal thoughts.

Bullying generally has four key elements²:



a) The target person is exposed to unwanted negative acts



b) The negative acts are repeated regularly



c) They occur over a prolonged period of time



d) Targets often feel they are unable to protect themselves due to power imbalances

Is bullying common?

One in five workers in New Zealand report they have been bullied in the workplace each year.³

Who gets bullied?

People who are the targets of bullying are often highly competent and may be seen as the threat to the person who bullies them. They are often non-confrontational and may have a desire to help and develop others. They may also have a good understanding of the workgroup and tend to be ethical and honest⁴.

Studies suggest people who bully others are more likely to choose targets who have a different ethnicity, religion, gender identity or sexual orientation, or because they have a disability.^{5,6}

1 WorkSafe NZ. What is workplace bullying? Retrieved from Worksafe: <https://worksafe.govt.nz/topic-and-industry/bullying-prevention-toolbox/bullying-at-work-advice-for-workers/>

2 Nielsen, M. B., Matthiesen, S. B., & Einarsen, S. (2010). The impact of methodological moderators on prevalence rates of workplace bullying. A meta-analysis. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 83(4), 955-979.

3 O'Driscoll, M. P., Cooper-Thomas, H. D., Bentley, T., Catley, B. E., Gardner, D. H., & Trenberth, L. (2011). Workplace bullying in New Zealand: A survey of employee perceptions and attitudes. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, 49(4), 390-408.

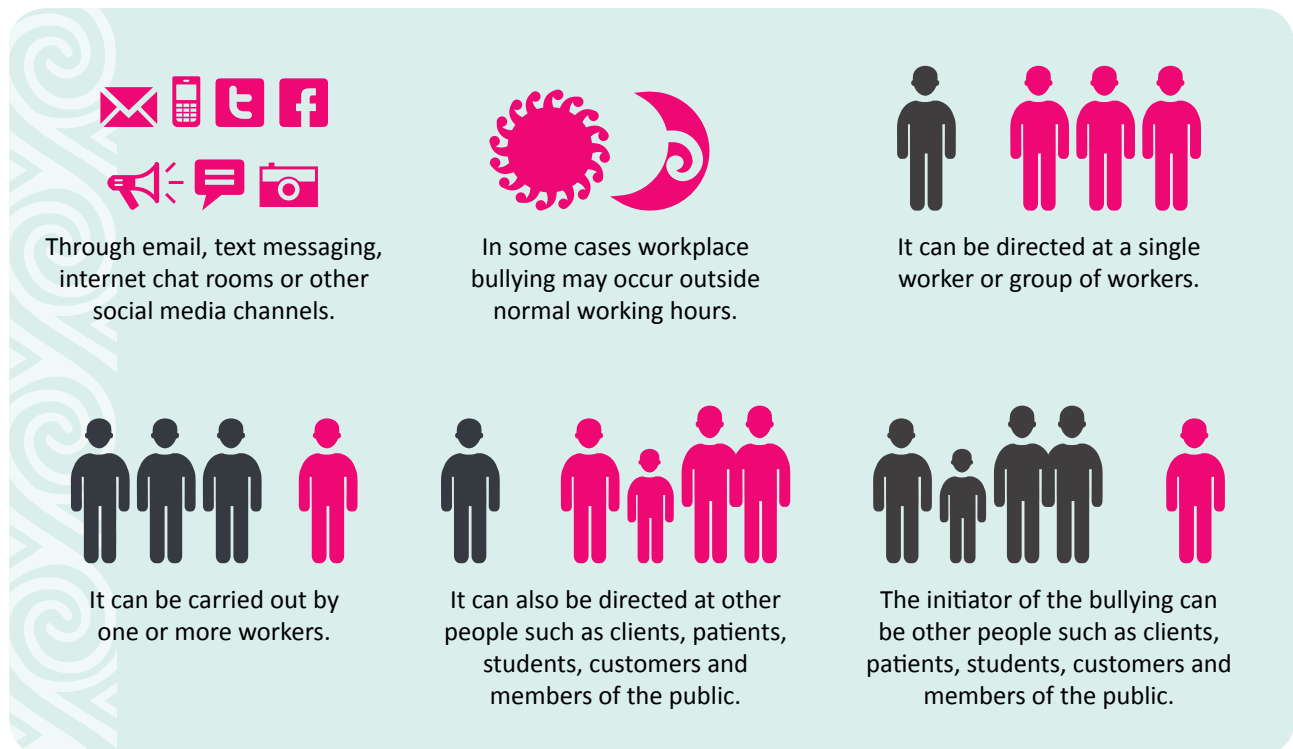
4 Darby, F, Scott-Howman, A. (2016) Workplace Bullying Thomson Reuters New Zealand Ltd, Wellington. 226pp

5 Gardner, D., Bentley, T. A., Catley, B. E., Cooper-Thomas, H., O'Driscoll, M. P., & Trenberth, L. (2013). Ethnicity, workplace bullying, social support and psychological strain in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

6 Westpac. (2015). Westpac survey: Kiwi workplace acceptance of Rainbow Community surface deep. Retrieved from Westpac: <https://www.westpac.co.nz/rednews/business/westpac-survey-kiwis-only-surface-deep-acceptance-of-rainbow-community/>

What does it look like?

Workplace bullying can be carried out in a variety of ways:



Through email, text messaging, internet chat rooms or other social media channels.

In some cases workplace bullying may occur outside normal working hours.

It can be directed at a single worker or group of workers.

It can be carried out by one or more workers.

It can also be directed at other people such as clients, patients, students, customers and members of the public.

The initiator of the bullying can be other people such as clients, patients, students, customers and members of the public.

Examples of bullying behaviour include:



Personal attacks (direct): eg, belittling remarks, undermining integrity, lies being told, sense of judgement questioned, opinions marginalised, attacking a person's beliefs, attitude, lifestyle or appearance, gender references, verbal abuse or physical attacks.



Task-related attacks (indirect): eg, giving unachievable tasks, impossible deadlines, unmanageable workloads, constant criticism of work, unreasonable or inappropriate monitoring or denial of opportunity.

Bullying is not

- One-off or occasional instances of forgetfulness, rudeness or tactlessness
- Setting high performance standards
- Constructive feedback and legitimate advice or peer review
- A manager requiring reasonable verbal or written work instructions to be carried out
- Warning or disciplining workers in line with the organisation or code of conduct
- A single incident of unreasonable behaviour
- Reasonable management actions delivered in a reasonable way
- Differences in opinion or personality clashes that do not escalate into bullying, harassment or violence.⁷

⁷ WorkSafe NZ (2017) Preventing and Responding to Bullying at Work

Different workplaces may also have norms that are part of their culture such as friendly banter or rites of passage when joining the organisation. These practices may be acceptable when they are designed to strengthen and include, and can assist new workers to become part of the group. However, if left unchecked over a period of time, these practices can become targeted or exclusionary and could be considered bullying⁸. Organisations then need to step in to ensure all workers are safe and supported.

Factors that increase likelihood of bullying⁹

FACTOR	FOR EXAMPLE
Work relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Poor communication – Low levels of support or co-worker hostility – Criticism and other negative interactions – Interpersonal conflict – Negative worker–management relationships – Workers excluded from work activities.
Worker composition (eg certain groups of workers are more at risk of being exposed to bullying)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Casual workers – Young workers/new workers/apprentices/trainees – Injured workers and workers on return-to-work plans – Piece workers – Workers in a minority group because of ethnicity, religion, disability, gender or sexual preferences.
Negative leadership styles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – ‘Ruling with an iron fist’ where workers are not involved in decision making – Where little or no guidance is provided to workers – Where responsibilities are inappropriately and informally delegated to subordinates – Where there is inadequate supervision.
Systems of work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Lack of resources – Lack of training – Poorly designed rostering and unreasonable performance measures or timeframes – Lack of support systems – High job demands – Limited job control – Role conflict and ambiguity – An acceptance of unreasonable behaviours or lack of behavioural standards – Unreasonable expectations of clients or customers.
Organisational change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Significant technological change – Restructures, downsizing, outsourcing and/or job insecurity.

8 Darby, F, Scott-Howman, A. (2016) *Workplace Bullying* Thomson Reuters New Zealand Ltd, Wellington. 226pp

9 WorkSafe NZ (2017) Preventing and Responding to Bullying at Work

Fact sheet

The business case for bullying prevention

Bullying is common

Bullying is a serious issue for New Zealand workplaces – one in five employees report they experience bullying each year. Bullying affects individuals and the productivity of organisations.

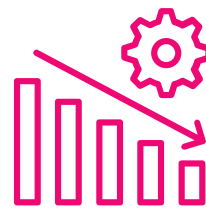
Employees who have experienced bullying report:



Higher levels of psychological strain



Lower wellbeing¹



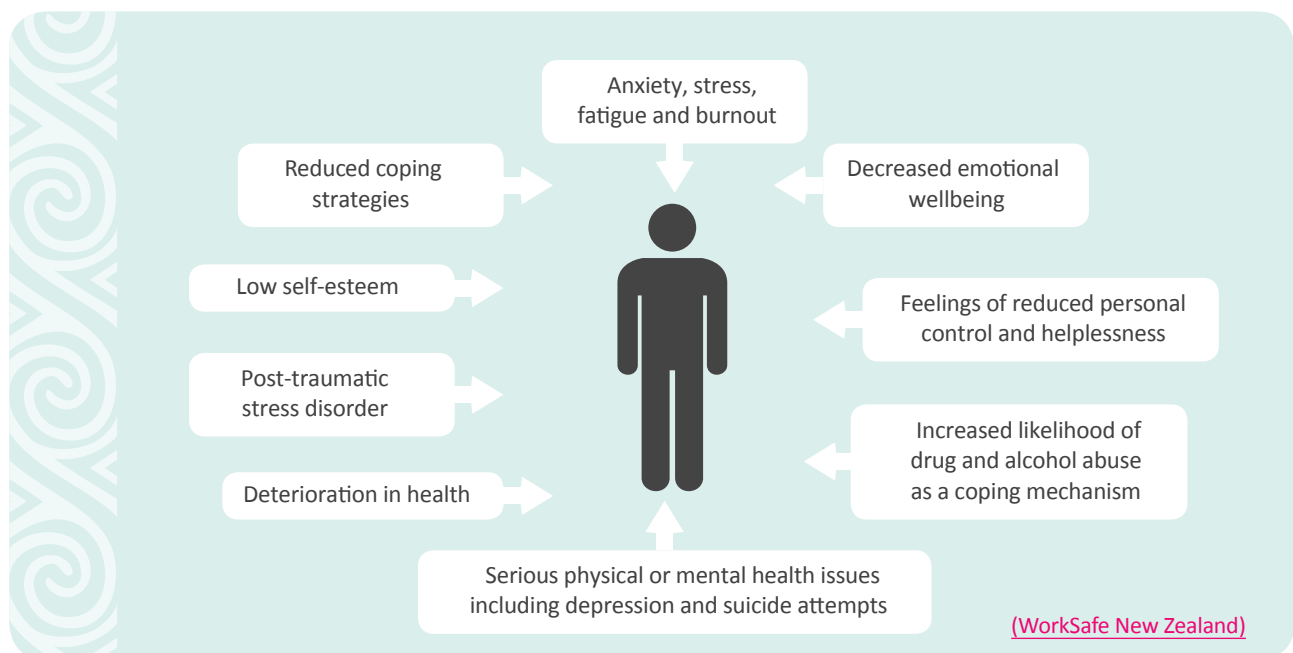
Lower commitment to their organisation



Lower job performance

Bullying harms workers

Lower levels of wellbeing and higher levels of psychological strain affect individual workers in many ways. They can have an ongoing impact on the whole organisation.



1 O'Driscoll, M. P., Cooper-Thomas, H. D., Bentley, T., Catley, B. E., Gardner, D. H., & Trenberth, L. (2011). Workplace bullying in New Zealand: A survey of employee perceptions and attitudes. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, 49(4), 390-408.

People who observe bullying or are bystanders to bullying can be impacted and this can contribute to a hostile work environment. This means the impact of bullying is wider than just those who are targeted². It's important for organisations to ensure they create working environments that are psychologically safe and supportive for all staff.

The Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 (HSWA)

Bullying is a risk to the mental wellbeing of all workers. Organisations have a legal responsibility under HSWA to manage risks to mental health and wellbeing as they would with any other health and safety risk ([Wellplace.nz](https://www.wellplace.nz/)).

Managing bullying as a workplace risk should be a standard part of every organisation's approach to effective management of health and safety ([WorkSafe New Zealand](https://www.worksafe.govt.nz/)).

Workplaces that prioritise mental health have better engagement, reduced absenteeism and higher productivity, while people have improved wellbeing, greater morale and higher job satisfaction ([Five Ways to Wellbeing at Work Toolkit](#)).



Fact sheet

Creating environments that do not allow bullying to flourish

The most effective way to prevent bullying is to establish positive work environments and develop workplace cultures that do not allow bullying to flourish. Workers should have a shared understanding about expected behaviours and people should be able to easily identify behaviours that are not appropriate or acceptable.

Workplaces that prevent bullying have:



Strong and well-communicated policies and processes regarding bullying



Leadership commitment to preventing bullying and intervening where it occurs



Positive communication



Practices that affirm diversity

Policies and processes regarding bullying

Organisations must have a clear policy regarding bullying in the workplace. Policies should include but not be limited to:

- A definition of bullying
- Clearly explained organisational commitments to bullying prevention
- Clear expectations around communication and role clarity
- Clear processes for reporting and managing a complaint about bullying

In addition to a stand-alone bullying policy it is also useful to review other organisational policies and documents to ensure they reflect that bullying is not acceptable. This could include ensuring the organisation has stated values or including a commitment to a bullying-free workplace in the organisation's code of conduct.

If your organisation does not have a current policy, WorkSafe NZ has an example template [here](#).



Leadership commitment to preventing bullying

Te tohu o te rangatira, he manaaki. The sign of a chief is to support, protect, look out for – generosity and care for others. (Whitinui, Glover, & Hikuroa, 2013)

Leaders and managers play a vital role in establishing the culture in a workplace. To prevent bullying, leaders must be able to clearly communicate and model the expectations of the organisation and these expectations must be set out by the organisational policy.

All leaders and managers should be able to access training so they have clear understandings of the factors that may increase the likelihood of bullying and the confidence to create environments and teams that are bullying-free. Leaders also need to be equipped and supported so they can have conversations regarding expected behaviour and know how to manage complaints that may arise.

Positive communication that is mana-enhancing

Encouraging open and respectful communication and social interaction between workers is an important way to prevent workplace bullying.

The [Working Well – Positive Communication at Work](#) is a resource designed to build a culture of positive communication together, based on having clear intentions, asking more – telling less, valuing relationships and making it safe to speak up. Using the tools in this resource will assist managers and their teams to create open communication that is respectful and mana-enhancing.

In addition to this, other things to prevent bullying include:

1. Discuss expected behaviours and what bullying is with teams on a regular basis

It can take some time for people to realise they are being bullied as the behaviour usually happens over a period of time and can sometimes be hard to identify. Sometimes people will have a feeling something is not quite right but might dismiss it or not feel confident enough to ask for support. Talking about expected behaviours and being clear about what bullying is will help people to be more aware of any unacceptable behaviour they may be experiencing or observing.

2. Have a range of channels for people to speak up

It is important people feel safe to raise issues regarding bullying. People should be able to raise issues around bullying with their direct manager, but sometimes the manager may be part of the problem. It's essential for every worker to have more than one person they know they can talk with about any issues they are experiencing. Smaller organisations may find this challenging but it is important to consider. Alternative people could include a health and safety representative, another manager, a close colleague or even an external EAP counsellor.

3. Participate in [Pink Shirt Day](#) to help your workplace **Kōrero Mai, Kōrero Atu, Mauri Tū, Mauri Ora – Speak Up, Stand Together, Stop Bullying**

Pink Shirt Day, [a national anti-bullying campaign](#), is a great opportunity to have discussions around bullying and to affirm diversity. Use the day to educate your people about bullying and highlight your organisation's policies and processes so they know what your workplace is doing to prevent and address bullying.



Affirming diversity

Studies suggest people who bully others are more likely to choose targets who have a different ethnicity, religion, gender identity or sexual orientation, or because they have a disability.^{1,2}


Organisations must have clear policies and commitments to affirming the identities of all workers and acknowledge the richness that people with different experiences bring to organisations.

Where possible diversity training for people leaders and all staff can make a huge difference to increasing safety and preventing bullying in the workplace. Other ideas can include running staff networking days or holding events that provide opportunities for people to talk about their identity, culture, beliefs, who they are, and to learn more about each other.

Here are some useful resources to help you to develop policies and procedures that works towards more diverse and inclusive workplaces:

- [Rainbow Rights](#)
- [Inclusive \(policies, systems and procedures\)](#)
- [Diversity Works NZ](#)
- [Inclusive \(safe inclusive environments – for schools but relevant for workplaces\)](#)
- [Treaty workshops and other resources](#)
- [Te Reo lessons in the workplace](#)
- [Te Reo resources for the workplace](#)
- [Sign up for a Māori word of the day or week](#)

You can also get in touch with [RainbowYOUTH](#) or [InsideOUT](#) for more guidance.



“Inclusive workplaces respect difference and value the diverse qualities people bring to their work. Real diversity is about embracing the whole person and building successful teams that recognise difference as a source of innovation, creativity, and new connections.” (Diversity Works, 2019)

1 Gardner, D., Bentley, T. A., Catley, B. E., Cooper-Thomas, H., O’Driscoll, M. P., & Trenberth, L. (2013). Ethnicity, workplace bullying, social support and psychological strain in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

2 Westpac. (2015). Westpac survey: Kiwi workplace acceptance of Rainbow Community surface deep. Retrieved from Westpac: <https://www.westpac.co.nz/rednews/business/westpac-survey-kiwis-only-surfacedeep-acceptance-of-rainbow-community/>

Fact sheet

How to be an Upstander

An Upstander is someone who notices bullying behaviour and uses words and/or actions to help someone who is being bullied. This is different from being a bystander – someone who notices bullying behaviour but does not or cannot help.

Upstanders can be an important part of the solution to stopping bullying. We all have a choice as to whether we can tautoko/support the person being bullied or stand by and watch.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to being an Upstander. Being an Upstander can be tough. Sometimes it's not easy to work out how to help safely.

These Five Steps can help you be an Upstander and take safe and effective action. Every bullying situation is different, so think about which option will work best for you:

1. Tautoko/support the person experiencing bullying

- Tautoko the person being bullied, even if you just stand beside them and let them know you've got their back
- Let the person doing the bullying know you've noticed the behaviour and that it's not acceptable
- Encourage them to ask for help, go with them to get help or provide them with information about where to go for help
- Show them our '[Getting Help and Advice](#)' fact sheet
- Let them know they're not alone and you're there for them

2. Don't support the behaviour

- Make it clear to your colleagues that you won't be involved in the behaviour
- Don't encourage bullying behaviour by harassing, teasing or spreading gossip about others, verbally or on social networking sites
- Don't acknowledge, reply or forward messages or photos that could be hurtful or embarrassing to a colleague

3. Call it!

- If you feel safe, step in and call the person out on their bullying behaviour
- Be direct, calm and confident, and let the person know their behaviour isn't okay
- Use your words to show aroha and kindness to those involved
- Don't stand by and watch. It can be hard in the moment but it can make a huge difference

4. Leave and act

- If you don't feel safe to step in and stop the bullying while it's happening, it's best to walk away and think about what you *can* do to help
- Later you might let the person experiencing the bullying know that you saw and ask what might help, or have a quiet word with the person doing the bullying behaviour

5. Get tautoko/support or help

- Support the person who is experiencing the bullying to ask for help
- You could offer to go with them to HR or a manager, or provide them with information about where to go for help
- If your organisation has a policy related to bullying, it will help you know what to do next and who to talk to
- There are people who care and want to help

Clear policies and practices, known and shared values and expected behaviours, plus leaders who role model these values/behaviours, will help people feel confident to be an Upstander.

If Upstanders are confident to take safe and effective action to support the person experiencing bullying, there is a greater possibility that bullying can stop and the target of the bullying behaviour can recover.



This fact sheet has been developed based on content from the [Australian Human Rights Commission](#), [ReachOUT](#) and [Worklogic](#).

Worksheet

Team discussion – values and behaviours

Organisational values set the scene for the way people are expected to behave while at work. Taking some time to talk about what those values are and what the expected behaviours look like is a great way to create shared understandings. This will also help people to recognise when those behaviours are not happening and call them out.

The below exercise will help your people to understand your organisation's values and how they are expected to behave at work. The purpose of this exercise is to create a formal document that each person can sign, stating they understand the organisation's values and agree to behave in accordance with those values.

If your organisation doesn't have formal values, take some time to discuss with your people what these should be before starting this exercise.

Instructions:

1. Break the team in to small groups (3-5 people) and give them the worksheet below.
2. Ask each group to list the organisational values in the left column and then write the behaviours that we are looking for in the right column. Write each value on a separate piece of paper.
3. Ask someone from each group to report back what the group came up with for each value.
4. As each behaviour is discussed, ask the wider group if they agree as they will need to sign the final document agreeing to the behaviours. If they all agree, record this agreed behaviour on the piece of paper.
5. At the end of the exercise, record what was agreed under each value and prepare a document that each team member can sign at the next team meeting.
6. Regularly review and ensure the values are incorporated in their orientation process.



Organisational value	What does this look like in our team?
<i>(e.g. Respect)</i>	<i>(e.g. We aim to always speak to people in a civil manner, we take time to understand people's backgrounds, we care about people's feelings when we interact with them.)</i>

Worksheet

Team discussion – The triple filter test

Is it true? Is it good or kind? Is it useful?

The triple filter test, often attributed to the Ancient Greek philosopher Socrates, is still relevant and used today. It can be used as a filter to stop rumours from circulating within the workplace and as a reflective tool for any interactions people are having.

Before you talk about someone else (whether about their work, their behaviour or something else), ask yourself the following three questions:

Is it true?

How do I know this?
Is the source reliable?
Did I witness it?

Is it good or kind?

Does it reflect well on the person I'm talking about or to? Would I want it to be said about me? Will it make the person feel good?

Is it useful?

Is talking about this person to someone else going to be useful in anyway? Do they really need to know? Will it bring about positive change?

If you can't answer yes to these questions you may want to reconsider what you are going to say or say nothing at all.

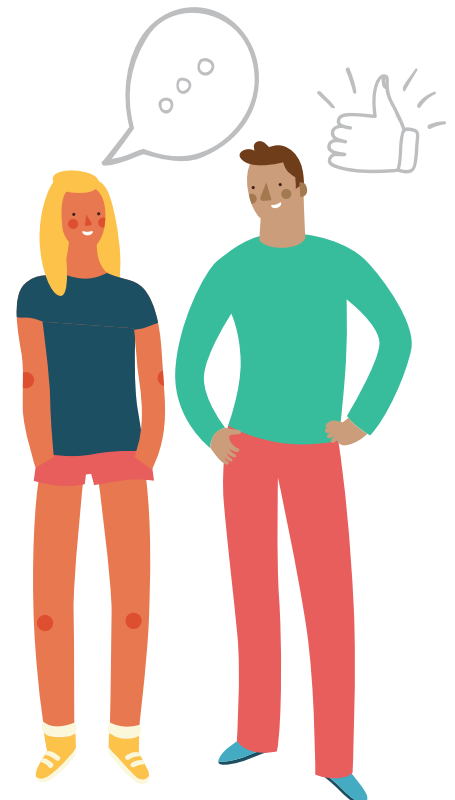
It is important to acknowledge no one is perfect and we all make mistakes when it comes to the interactions that we have. We can all take some time to think about the things we say or have said and make amends or apologise if necessary.

Personal reflection

This can be done in a team meeting or individually.

Instructions

- Ask the team to think about an interaction they had recently. This may be a time when they relayed information about someone else or when they have had a conversation that didn't go well. Let them know they don't have to tell the group what it was.
- Ask them to complete the worksheet below on their own regarding this situation.
- Ask if any of the group would like to share how they may approach the situation in the future (optional).



Personal reflection on previous interaction

In that situation I'm thinking of...

Was what I said true?

If yes write down the reason

Was what I said good or kind?

If yes write down the reason

Was what I said useful?

If yes write down the reason

What could I have done differently?

What would I do next time?

What can I do now to make that situation better?

Fact sheet

Getting help and advice

For individuals

If you are experiencing bullying, you can get help and advice here:

Your Employee Assistance Programme for counselling and support:

Your workplace union for workplace support:

WorkSafe NZ

[worksafe.govt.nz/adviceforworkers](https://www.worksafe.govt.nz/adviceforworkers)

Advice about bullying at work

Employment Relations Authority – 0800 20 90 20

For general queries on employment relations

Citizen's Advice Bureau – 0800 367 222

For information and advice

Human Rights Commission

[howtolaw.co](https://www.howtolaw.co)

0800 496 877

Their purpose is to promote and protect the human rights of all people in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Head to their website for advice or to [make a complaint](#) about discrimination.

Find support around sexuality or gender identity

OUTLine NZ

[outline.org.nz](https://www.outline.org.nz)

0800 688 5463 (0800 OUTLINE)

For lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people. Free phone counselling is available Monday to Friday, 9am–9pm, and weekends/holidays 6pm–9pm

RainbowYOUTH

info@ry.org.nz

Facebook: [rainbowyouth](#), Twitter: [@RainbowYOUTH](#), Instagram: [rainbowyouth](#)

Offers support for young queer and gender diverse people up to the ages of 28

InsideOUT

hello@insideout.org.nz

Facebook: [insideoutkoaro](#), Twitter: [@insideoutkoaro](#), Instagram: [insideoutkoaro](#)

Offers speakers, consulting and staff training on rainbow diversity and inclusion in workplaces and schools

For workplaces

WorkSafe NZ

[worksafe.govt.nz/topic-and-industry/bullying-prevention-toolbox/](https://www.worksafe.govt.nz/topic-and-industry/bullying-prevention-toolbox/)

A suite of resources to support businesses

Diversity Works NZ

diversityworks.nz

Support, advise and inspire New Zealand organisations to be better-by-diversity

Mental Health Foundation resources

Working Well

mentalhealth.org.nz/workingwell

Resources for organisations so they can create a culture that prioritises the mental health and wellbeing of their employees.

Open Minds

mentalhealth.org.nz/open-minds

Online training materials and information to equip managers with the tools and confidence to talk about mental health.

Pink Shirt Day

pinkshirtday.org.nz

A national bullying prevention campaign to celebrate diversity and prevent bullying, with a workplace focus.

Fact sheet

Reference list

Darby, F, Scott-Howman, A. (2016) Workplace Bullying Thomson Reuters New Zealand Ltd, Wellington. 226pp

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