

BULLYING AND OTHER DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR: FOR EMPLOYEES

COURSE OUTLINE

- **When we hear the words "bullies" and "bullying", we naturally think of a "mean kid" on a playground, pushing the other kids around.**
 - Playground bullies grow up, even if their behavior doesn't.
- **Today, adults who bully and engage in other forms of disruptive behavior can be found causing trouble in many workplaces. Their actions can:**
 - Disturb us.
 - Interfere with our work.
 - Threaten us.
 - Even affect our health.
- **"Workplace bullying" and "disruptive behavior" are serious concerns, both for employees and the companies they work for.**
- **On a perfect workday, everyone would be cheerful and "whistling while they work".**
 - In reality, too many of us may be feeling fear, anger, frustration, humiliation and helplessness.
 - These feelings shouldn't be part of anyone's job description.
 - They can be common where bullying and other disruptive behavior is a problem.
- **More than 35% of the employees in the U.S. say that they have worked with a bully.**
 - That means almost 65 million people have had to cope with workplace bullying at some point in their lives.
- **A workplace bully makes repeated, disturbing attacks on a coworker, using words and actions to degrade, humiliate, undermine or intimidate them.**
- **We're not talking about somebody simply losing their cool on a bad day and barking at one of their associates.**
 - Workplace bullying is ongoing pattern of abusive behavior that continues over time.

- **We might think that bosses, managers or supervisors are the most likely to be bullies, because their positions give them power over others.**
 - In fact, employees are just as likely to be bullied by their peers.
 - Bosses and managers can even be bullied by someone below them in their organization.
- **Basically anyone in and around your organization, man or woman, employee or "outsider", could turn out to be a bully.**
 - This can include vendors, contractors, labor representatives, even clients and customers.
- **Why some people bully others is a complicated issue.**
 - Many psychologists think that for some reason bullies are actually afraid of their victims.
 - Some bullies seem to simply enjoy getting their own way and pushing their victims around.
 - What bullies do in the workplace is more important than why they do it.
- **It's pretty easy to identify a bully.**
 - They often shout and swear at their victims, verbally abusing them with unfounded blame or criticism.
- **A workplace bully in a supervisory position may:**
 - Overload their victims with work.
 - Deny them the resources they need to get their work done.
 - Set impossible deadlines.
 - Constantly monitor and micro-manage them.
- **Sometimes a bully will single out their target by treating them "differently" and working to exclude them from the rest of the group.**
- **Other times a bully may harass their victim by playing "practical jokes" on them.**
 - This type of abuse masquerades as "good natured" kidding, but it's no joke to the target.
- **A bully can also "pick on" the victim indirectly, by criticizing them or spreading rumors behind their back.**

- **Bullying in the workplace can include just as much physical intimidation and violence as the schoolyard variety.**
 - One study showed that almost 15% of employees had experienced physical attacks such as pushing, shoving and even fistfights on the job.
- **The damage that bullies do is not limited to the victim.**
 - The effects can be serious and far-reaching.
 - No one "benefits".
 - It adversely affects more people than you might think.
- **Studies show that if you're not the one doing the bullying, you've probably either been the victim of a bully or have witnessed someone else being victimized.**
 - Both victims and witnesses feel significantly more stress and anxiety on the job than their coworkers.
 - This can cause serious physical health effects such as high blood pressure, digestive trouble and ulcers.
- **For almost three quarters of bullying victims, these symptoms are severe enough to require treatment by a doctor.**
 - Nearly two thirds of bullying victims also seek out professional help for bullying-related conditions such as low self-esteem, depression and insomnia.
- **Some studies suggest that the effects on witnesses may be more severe than they are on the victims themselves.**
- **With so many employees struggling to cope with bullying in their workplace, you would expect it to affect their companies as well... and it does.**
 - Simply put, workplace bullying is bad for business.
- **Bullying poisons the atmosphere in the workplace and undermines the trust workers should feel in the company that employs them.**
- **The more energy people spend on coping with bullying, the less they have for their work.**
 - Effectiveness and efficiency decline.
- **Bullying also destroys the sense of "teamwork" that companies try so hard to develop.**

- **And as worker morale goes down, absenteeism goes up.**
 - Job turnover increases.
 - The company can get a reputation as being a bad place to work, as well.
- **As a result, the company may need to pay to recruit and train replacement employees.**
 - Workers compensation and even legal expenses can rise too.
- **The bottom line is workplace bullying decreases productivity and increases costs.**
 - That's not a recipe for success, and your company knows it.
- **Fortunately, there are ways to shut down workplace bullies.**
 - Whether you're the victim of a bully or witness to bullying on the job, you need to know that you are not helpless.
 - There are some practical steps you can take to bring the bullying to an end.
- **You should remember that there is never an excuse for bullying.**
 - It has nothing to do with your job performance.
 - You are not the cause of the problem.
- **You don't have to "take it"... you can take the initiative instead.**
- **One direct approach is to "grab the bully by the horns" by talking with them.**
 - Try to bring someone else along when you do, so you have an independent witness.
- **You should explain to the bully that:**
 - You've recognized a disturbing pattern in the way they act towards you.
 - You think it's unprofessional.
 - You want it to stop.
- **Be prepared for the bully to deny what they've been doing.**
 - That's the typical response when someone calls a bully on their behavior.
- **This may frustrate and anger you, but don't let your emotions get in the way.**
 - Keep your cool and stay professional as you state your case.
 - This is key to resolving the situation successfully.

- **If talking with the bully doesn't put an end to the problem, there are other things you can do.**
- **If a bully begins to bother you or someone you work with, you should look up your company's policies on workplace conduct immediately.**
 - The company most likely has policies that can protect you and your coworkers against abuse.
 - These can provide you with solid support for any complaint you have to make against a bully.
- **Documenting the situation is important, too, so write things down.**
 - Start keeping a "diary" or "log" of the bullying.
 - Make note of the dates, places and times that it happens.
 - Record what was said and done, and who else was present.
- **Don't do this while the bully is there, but be sure to get to it while your memory is still fresh.**
 - These notes will help to support what you say, so it won't just be your word against the bully's.
- **You should also put together a file of any:**
 - Harassing notes.
 - Printouts of bullying emails.
 - Copies of documents that contradict anything derogatory that the bully says about you.
- **Gathering this documentation and "evidence" will get you ready for the next step, which is reporting the bully to the appropriate person.**
 - The "appropriate person" could be your manager or supervisor, but if they happen to be the bully, you may need to go directly to your Human Resources Department.
- **Make your complaint in a professional manner.**
 - Your hurt may be personal, but you need to keep your emotions out of the resolution process.
 - Shutting down the bully can, and should, be strictly business.

- **What happens next will depend on the situation.**
 - Usually a manager or HR person will first speak to the bully informally about their behavior.
 - How much more intervention will be required depends on how cooperative the bully is.
- **In extreme cases, their actions could result in disciplinary action or even termination.**
 - Whatever happens, it's the bully's responsibility, not yours.
- **Your company's leadership knows that bullying is bad for everyone, and damaging to the organization.**
 - They're on your side.
- **While "bullying" is a serious enough issue on its own, it is actually part of a larger problem in today's workplace called "disruptive behavior".**
- **Disruptive behavior is anything that disturbs the normal activities of a workplace and interferes with you doing your job.**
- **You know disruptive behavior when you see it and hear it, because it usually involves someone:**
 - Yelling, swearing and otherwise verbally abusing others.
 - Waving their arms or shaking their fists.
 - Refusing reasonable requests, such as "please calm down" or "please be quiet".
- **You can also recognize disruptive behavior by how it makes you feel.**
- **While it's always "distracting", disruptive behavior can also make you feel uneasy, frightened, even threatened.**
 - As we said before, no one should be made to feel like this in any environment.
 - For this reason alone, disruptive behavior has no place in the workplace.
- **But there's an even more urgent reason why disruptive behavior needs to be addressed.**
 - If nothing is done to intervene and shut down disruptive behavior, it typically gets worse until it leads to physical violence.
- **If you ever feel physically threatened by disruptive behavior, or it crosses the line into violence, you should call your facility's Security Department or dial 911.**

- **But preventing disruptive behavior is a better option.**
 - To do that we need to focus on the people who are doing the "disrupting".
- **We can often get a feeling ahead of time about someone's potential for "acting out" by watching for warning signs in how they act from day to day.**
- **Signs of disruptive potential include when someone:**
 - Has poor relationships with customers, coworkers or supervisors.
 - Complains a lot, or seems to have difficulty in controlling their feelings, especially anger.
 - Blames others for their own life or work problems and verbally abuses coworkers.
- **Other "red flags" include:**
 - Challenging or resisting authority.
 - Overreacting to criticism of their behavior or job performance.
 - Getting into arguments easily.
- **When you observe these signs in someone, let a manager, supervisor or your HR department know about it.**
- **You should understand that this is not "ratting" on a coworker, and you're not trying to get them fired.**
 - You're taking practical action to help keep your workplace peaceful and safe.
 - You're also giving the person you're worried about a chance to get help with their issues, whatever they are, before they get into bigger trouble.
- **What happens next is similar to the follow-up that would be made to a complaint about workplace bullying.**
 - Management or HR will begin a process of intervention with the disruptive person.
- **The end result will depend on how cooperative that person is.**
 - Again, it's their responsibility, not yours.
- **There are occasions when a disruptive person is not a coworker.**
 - If they're a contractor, vendor or client, their disruptive behavior has the same impact as anyone else's.

- **If someone from outside the company is causing trouble, be respectful and professional toward them, but let your management know about your concerns, so they can address the issue with the disruptive person's employer.**

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- **A workplace bully uses words or actions to humiliate, degrade or intimidate another person.**
 - This can have serious physical and emotional effects on both the victim and people who witness the bullying.
- **Workplace bullying is also bad for business.**
- **You can help shut a bully down by documenting their behavior and bringing the issue to the attention of your manager or HR Department.**
- **Other types of disruptive behavior are not only disturbing, they can make you feel threatened and fearful, and may lead to physical violence if nothing is done about it.**
- **Watch for "warning signs" and let management or HR know if someone seems to be heading toward being disruptive.**
- **As an employee, you have the right to be free from bullying and other disruptive behavior on the job.**
 - When you know how to address them, you can help to make your workplace a safer, healthier and more enjoyable place for you and your coworkers!