

# **Tips for Women in the Workplace**

## **- Female Bullying -**

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#### **Tip 1: Just what is female bullying? Know what to look for.**

It would be nice if relationships between women could take a decidedly different tone than that of high school or even college cliques once you made it into the workplace. Far too often women in the workplace continue to experience the same hurtful behaviors they encountered at much earlier stages of life. Consider the results of a study examining office behaviors conducted by the Workplace Bullying Institute. Researchers found that female bullies target other women more than 70 percent of the time. The target of the abuse is left feeling upset, threatened, humiliated or vulnerable. Bullying compromises work environment safety and also puts at risk the overall productivity and effectiveness of the organization.

There are many views about why female bullying occurs. A woman who feels good about herself generally feels no need to hurt another woman. Along with lower self-esteem, a woman who bullies most often struggles with feelings of competition, anger, jealousy or envy and clearly misdirects and mishandles these feelings by undermining her target's image, reputation, relationship with others or opportunities for advancement. The consequences are serious, and left unaddressed can lead to long-term psychological pain and consequences. The unfortunate reality is that women end up engaged in derailing each others' careers rather than in helping build them. You can watch for:

- \* Verbal abuse or physical threats or aggressiveness (includes behaviors intended to dominate, manipulate, intimidate, or coerce a woman into making remarks or behaving against her will
- \* Words / gossip intended to undermine the victim's self-esteem, question her perceptions, sense of self, sense of judgment or make her feel she is invisible

- \* Words / gossip intended to question the victim's authority, credibility, image or reputation
- \* Undue pressure that withdraws attention or emotional connection and removes opportunities for participating in friendships and social/work groups; limits access to particular roles, assignments, meetings, committees, positions or activities; important information for promotions or advancement being withheld; or access blocked to supervisors or mentors
- \* Being lied to, ostracized, socially excluded, demeaned or devalued
- \* A woman who takes credit for others work, blames others for errors or tries to make others disrespect you
- \* Women who encourage, support, observe or tolerate bullying behavior are responsible through their passive acceptance of damaging behavior

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#### **Tip 2: Know what the effects are. Signs of stress from bullying.**

Having a basic idea about what bullying looks like is only the first step. It's also good to know the signs that someone experiences from being bullied. Included in this list are also related signs of stress. The list itself is drawn largely from work completed by the Michigan Technological University, Affirmative Action Office. Know these signs:

- \* You feel more withdrawn, quieter than usual, start doubting yourself or have lost some of your confidence
- \* You experience increased anxiety, panic attacks, "walking on eggshells", "waiting for the shoe to drop" or worry about your future
- \* You choose your words carefully, are afraid to speak up or refuse to speak when in the bully's presence
- \* You make every effort to avoid contact with the bully and stay clear or far away from her
- \* You notice changes in your sleep and eating patterns
- \* You feel strained, drained and dread going to work
- \* You have difficulty concentrating and make more errors on your work
- \* You notice more body aches and pains such as headaches, stomach aches or back pain
- \* You notice mood changes that may range from feeling depressed to anger or irritability
- \* You engage in self-destructive (alcohol/drugs) or impulsive behavior (gambling)
- \* You notice changes at the workplace that may include: low morale, staff turnover, increased absenteeism, and decreased work productivity

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#### **Tip 3: Know why you and your co-workers tolerate it.**

Gary and Ruth Namie (2003), well-known researchers in the field of workplace bullies, make a number of interesting observations about dynamics found where workplace bullying occurs. Despite a focus on reducing sexual harassment in the workplace, they suggest that bullying is three times more prevalent than sexual harassment and that seventy-one percent of bullies are employed in higher positions than their targets.

A target's ability to address her experience of bullying is complicated by the fact that most bullying is invisible and occurs in the absence of witnesses. In fact, on average, a target endures bullying for almost two years before filing any type of complaint. The odds are stacked against her; a target has a seventy percent chance of losing her job whereas only thirteen percent of bullies are ever punished or terminated.

Even when co-workers witness bullying, they tend not to support the victim. Instead they align themselves with the bully. They follow a strong, perhaps coercive leader and their silence offers tacit approval of bullying behavior. A co-worker may: feel embarrassed or intimidated by the situation and too stressed to handle it, feel the situation will either never change or it will get more severe, fear retaliation or that she will be the next target, or that she will lose her job if she speaks out. The target and her co-workers have several options despite these challenges.

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#### **Tip 4: Know what you can do.**

Start with the knowledge that you are entitled to be treated with dignity and respect. No one has the right to treat you in a manner that compromises your physical, mental or emotional integrity.

Consider the variety of options you have available to handle and stop the bullying.

1. Know that you are not alone.

Immerse yourself in literature, books, articles, groups that deal with workplace bullying.

2. Know that the bullying is not about you. It is about the bully's own behavior.

Take time to separate what is unreasonable and untrue from who you truly are.

3. Talk with trusted others in your social network or a trusted professional.

Do not go it alone. Seek emotional support from friends, family and trusted co-workers.

Get clarity on the negative views you have internalized and seek support and reassurance from others for the person you are and the good you do.

4. Take really good care of your physical, mental and emotional well-being.

Do the basics – get good sleep, exercise, nutrition, affection and keep up a positive attitude.

Know you are resilient and maintain the view that you will learn from this experience.

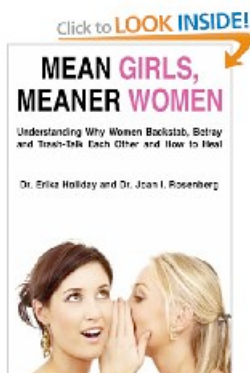
Connect or reconnect with your faith or spiritual practice.

5. Change your focus and let other things besides work define you or your identity.

Set clearer boundaries at work. Re-emphasize family, friends and your own interests.

Use other aspects of your life outside of work to define your identity.

6. Stay aware. Once you realize you are being bullied, document the situations and events.  
Document events big and small. Document events back to the point where it all started.
7. Confront the bully.  
Be firm and assertive about being treated with dignity demanding a stop to the bullying.  
Bring a witness with you.  
If your request is ignored, note the matter will be moved to a higher level.
8. Follow the chain of command. Talk to the bully's supervisor. Know what you want.  
Bring documentation. Bring a witness. Document this meeting. Keep a record of everything.
9. Be persistent and continue to follow work policy/procedure. Document, document, document.  
The situation could move to a written formal grievance or grievance hearing.
10. Pursue legal recourse outside the policies and procedures of your place of employment.  
Know what you want. Make sure you have adequate financial resources, time and a strong, supportive social network.
11. Initiate a "no-tolerance" workplace bullying / workplace violence policy for your place of employment.
11. Be assertive. Find and keep your sense of humor. Stay strong.  
Stay focused on your own integrity. You deserve to be treated well.



To learn more see [Mean Girls, Meaner Women](#) online

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