How Can Your Union Help?

American workers believe that unions have a positive role to play in combating workplace bullying, and American unions are taking on the issue by negotiating contract language concerning intimidation in the workplace.

Some NEA affiliates have negotiated “mutual respect” clauses in their contracts, while others have negotiated language addressing “inappropriate forms of communication.” Still others have negotiated straightforward anti-bullying language. When it’s time for your affiliate to negotiate your next Collective Bargaining Agreement, consider language used by your union colleagues.

Sample Language

**Contract Language**

“Inappropriate forms of communication, including but not limited to bullying, demeaning, sarcastic or unprofessional comments with/to a staff member will not be tolerated. In addition, no administrator shall demean, bully, reprimand or otherwise speak about a personal or professional matter regarding a staff member to another staff member or in the presence of another staff member or in any public forum.”

—Winchester Education Association [MA]

**Policy Statement**

“We consider workplace bullying unacceptable and will not tolerate it under any circumstances. Workplace bullying is behavior that harms, intimidates, offends, degrades, or humiliates an employee, possibly in front of other employees, clients, or customers. Workplace bullying may cause the loss of trained and talented employees, reduce productivity and morale, and create legal risks.

We believe all employees should be able to work in an environment free of bullying. Managers and supervisors must ensure employees are not bullied.

We have grievance and investigation procedures to deal with workplace bullying. Any reports of workplace bullying will be treated seriously and investigated promptly, confidentially and impartially.

We encourage all employees to report workplace bullying. Managers and supervisors must ensure employees who make complaints, or witnesses, are not victimized.

Disciplinary action will be taken against anyone who bullies a co-employee, including managers and supervisors. Discipline may involve a warning, transfer, counseling, demotion, or dismissal, depending on the circumstances.”

—Adapted from Washington State Department of Labor & Industries
**What Is Workplace Bullying?**

Fifty-four million Americans who have been attacked by a workplace bully prove bullying doesn’t stop when childhood ends—but shifts from the classroom to the cubicle, from the bus to the boardroom. Workplace bullying is the repeated, health-harming mistreatment of a person that takes one or more forms:

- **Verbal abuse**
- **Offensive conduct/behaviors (including nonverbal)** that are threatening, humiliating, or intimidating
- **Work interference**—sabotage—that prevents work from getting done.
- **Subtle tactics of deceit, distortion, misrepresentation, and misdirection**

**Impact on Schools**

On the rise, workplace bullying is even more prevalent in school settings. Some studies show that more than a third of American workers have been affected by workplace bullying, either as targets, or as witnesses to abusive behavior against a co-worker. The number of school employees who report being the targets of bullies is nearly three times the national average.

**What Can YOU Do?**

The good news: bullying can be stopped! How you handle bullying will depend on your particular work environment and the nature of the bullying—but you can take action. If you, or a co-worker, are being bullied, the United Kingdom National Workplace Bullying Advice Line suggests taking the following steps:

1. **Regain Control**
   - Recognize what is happening to you as bullying—the bully has the problem, which he or she is projecting onto you.
   - Recognize that bullying is about control, and has nothing to do with your performance. Don’t be fooled into believing unfounded criticisms or allegations against you have any validity.
   - Don’t try to handle bullying by yourself. For instance, if you feel intimidated by an administrator, get help from your union representative.

2. **Plan for Action**
   - Find out everything you can about bullying before taking action. Read and digest the regularly updated information on bullyonline.org, and check out the resources listed in this brochure.

3. **Take Action**
   - Keep a log (journal, diary) of everything related to the bullying—it’s not each incident that counts, but the number, regularity, and especially the patterns that reveal bullying.
   - Get and keep everything in writing. Keep copies of all letters, memos, and emails.

Currently, there are no U.S. federal or state laws that offer protection against workplace bullying, but you can take action today by supporting the Healthy Workplace Bill in your state. For information, resources, and activities, go to healthyworkplacebill.org.

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**Sources:**

- Washington State Department of Labor & Industries
- Gary and Ruth Namie. The Bully at Work. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, Inc.