



Tips to Address Bullying and Harassment in the Workplace

Every dental hygienist is entitled to work in a healthy and respectful environment, free from bullying and harassment. Thirty-five percent of respondents to CDHA's 2018 Healthy and Respectful Workplace Survey reported they had experienced bullying and/or harassment within the last year at their place of employment. CDHA is committed to supporting and empowering all dental hygienists in their efforts to address these issues and improve their work environment.

What are bullying and harassment?

Bullying and harassment take many different forms. Some examples may be overt, such as undue criticism, incivility, verbal humiliation or teasing that degrades a particular group or individual. Others may be more subtle. We call it "microbullying" when an individual dismisses your words or actions by rolling their eyes, crossing their arms, smirking or sighing while you're speaking.

How does it make you feel?

Whether an isolated incident or occurring repeatedly, bullying or harassment can leave you feeling anxious, stressed, and even physically ill. You may feel disrespected, powerless or insecure, making it difficult to focus and function effectively. These feelings can detract from your work experience and, in turn, the experience of your clients.

When mistreatment is so severe that it makes you feel physically, sexually or emotionally unsafe, remove yourself from the situation immediately and report the abuse.

What can you do if you're feeling bullied or harassed?

- Reach out to a colleague (your office manager, a health and safety committee or union representative, or someone in the human resources department) or to anyone you trust for support.
- Address the incident at the earliest opportunity. Don't let the situation fester.
- In your interactions with the person whose behaviour was hurtful:
 - ◇ Control your emotions, tone of voice, and reaction. Respond in a professional manner.
 - ◇ Ask what their understanding of the incident is. They may not view the encounter in the way that you do.
 - ◇ Explain how the incident made you feel: embarrassed, dismissed, humiliated, angry?
- After the first incident, **ask** the person to work with you on a solution to avoid the incident happening again, and agree to that solution.

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- After the second incident, **insist** that the person comply with the agreed-upon solution. Ask why they aren't complying.
- After the third incident, **demand** that they comply with the agreed-upon solution.
- If the bullying or harassment has been happening for a long time, ask if the person would be open to discussing your working relationship and to working towards a healthier way to collaborate and communicate.

When should you involve your employer?

- If the situation does not improve or if it worsens
- If the interactions begin to affect your mental health or enjoyment of your work
- If mediation between the two parties is required to reach a solution

What else should you consider?

- Ask yourself why the other person is acting this way? Put yourself in their shoes.
- Reflect on your role in the conflict and your response. Did you respond in a way that further inflamed the situation?
- Remember that you can't control other people's decisions, reactions, and behaviours.
- Recognize that people have varying degrees of emotional intelligence.
- If you choose to stay in the work environment, own that choice and don't hold others responsible. Let go of anger or bitterness so it doesn't affect your working relationships.
- Stay positive. If the bullying is isolated, the behaviour can be more easily corrected.
- Don't be a bystander. If you see others at work being bullied or harassed, offer assistance.
- Seek additional support from CDHA's [Homewood Health Member and Family Assistance Program](#).

Are you the bully?

- Reflect on how you interact with your coworkers. Do you wait for them to make a mistake and then criticize, or do you provide proactive guidance?
- Listen to your tone when speaking to colleagues. Are you curt or sarcastic? Sometimes it's not what we say, it's how we say it.
- How often do you say, "I'm just joking"? Is it really a joke or could it be perceived as mean spirited?

Addressing bullying and harassment can be a positive experience with positive outcomes. It can improve your work environment and working relationships. Remember to treat and speak to others as you would want to be treated... with empathy, kindness, generosity, and respect.

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Recommended Resources

- [Video Series: Conversations to Build Collaborative Workplaces](#)
- [Tips for Conversations to Build Collaborative Workplaces](#)
- [CDHA's 2018 Healthy and Respectful Workplace Survey](#)

Visit www.cdha.ca/healthyworkplace to access these resources and more.