



**your work life**

# **HOW TO HANDLE HARASSMENT AND BULLYING IN THE WORKPLACE**

This guide provides you with information about the nature of harassment and bullying. It also offers you practical advice about the actions you can take if you believe you are being harassed or bullied by someone in your workplace or if you are accused of harassing or bullying someone in the workplace.

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## ***Disclaimer***

*This information sheet is provided for the guidance of readers. It does not constitute, and should not be relied on as legal or professional advice about its application in specific instances. The author accepts no responsibility for loss or damage suffered as a consequence of this information.*

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# HOW TO HANDLE HARASSMENT AND BULLYING IN THE WORKPLACE

## INTRODUCTION

Harassment and bullying appear to be on the rise in workplaces in Australia with more and more employees complaining of being belittled and abused by colleagues and managers, of being the targets of hurtful gossip and innuendo and of being refused their entitlements by their employers. The Australian Council of Trade Unions claims that a study conducted by University of NSW indicated that 74% of the respondents to a survey claimed to have been the subject of bullying in the workplace<sup>1</sup>. Sadly in some instances people have taken their own lives as a consequence of the treatment they have had to endure in their workplaces. Employers have a legal and ethical responsibility to prevent harassment and bullying and to deal with people who are shown to have harassed and bullied others in the workplace. This responsibility covers all staff members including managers and supervisors. Employees have a responsibility to treat each other with dignity and respect.

People are at risk if they become victims of harassment and bullying in the workplace. Their job performance can decline, their health can suffer and they can find themselves experiencing low morale and feelings of depression and anxiety. Employers who ignore their responsibility for the prevention of bullying and harassment can find themselves subject to penalties and the payment of compensation under Occupational Health and Safety and Anti-Discrimination laws. Workplace bullying is a criminal offence in Victoria.

From 1 January 2014 employees who are being bullied at work will be able to apply to the Fair Work Commission (FWC) for an order to stop the bullying. The Commission will have to address the matter within 14 days.

## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide provides further information about the nature of harassment and bullying and offers you practical advice about the actions you can take if:

- You believe you are being harassed or bullied by someone in your workplace; or
- You are accused of harassing or bullying someone in your workplace

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<sup>1</sup> ACTU submission to the House Standing Committee of Education and Employment Inquiry into Workplace Bullying, July 2012

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