



# Employee Toolkit to Address Bullying





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# 1.0 Purpose

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This toolkit is designed to assist Alberta Health Services (AHS) employees with bullying in the workplace. The toolkit provides general guidelines on how to address and report bullying in the workplace and is part of a larger strategy to prevent and address Violence in the Workplace and to create a Psychologically Safe work environment.

## 1.1 Definitions

Bullying is a form of harassment and workplace violence. **Workplace Violence** is defined as any act in which a person is abused, threatened, intimidated or assaulted in his or her employment.

*AHS defines bullying as the activity of **repeated**, aggressive or disrespectful behaviour intended to hurt another person physically or mentally. Bullying is characterized by an individual or individuals behaving in a certain way to gain power over another person.*

Bullying can include verbal harassment or threat, physical assault, physical harm or coercion and may be directed repeatedly towards particular victims. Sometimes the bullying behaviour can also become discrimination when it is on the basis of prohibited grounds such as race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, gender expression or gender identity, physical disability, mental disability, age, ancestry, place of origin, marital status, source of income, family status or sexual orientation. Bullying includes acts or verbal comments that could hurt an individual's feelings or cause the person to become isolated in the workplace. Sometimes bullying involves negative physical contact as well. Although bullying is a form of aggression, the actions can be either obvious or subtle. Bullying can result in psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually damaging effects and can have devastating long-term consequences on its recipients. If bullying is done by a group, it is called mobbing.<sup>1</sup>

AHS defines workplace bullying as psychological in nature. It is a deliberate **repeated** pattern of disrespectful behaviour intended to intimidate, offend, degrade or humiliate a particular person or group. It is often in a situation where there is a power imbalance.

Three features of bullying behaviour are:

1. It is deliberate;
2. It is disrespectful; and
3. It is repeated.

## 1.2 Facts about bullying in the workplace

### 1.2.1 Did you know?

- 1 in 6 people have been bullied in their lifetime.
- Less than 15% of people being bullied go to their managers or ask for help.
- 80% of staff who are bullied will find a new job.

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<sup>1</sup> Mobbing: Emotional Abuse in the American Workplace by Noa Davenport, Ruth D. Schwartz and Gail Pursell Elliott.



## 1.2.2 Common bullying behaviours

- Berating a person in front of others or in private.
- Constantly criticizing or belittling a person.
- Cyber bullying – personal harassment occurring through electronic communication e.g. email, text messaging, internet sites.
- Excessive and unreasonable monitoring of someone’s work.
- Excluding a person from on the job socializing.
- Failing to support a person because of a dislike for the person.
- Giving a person “the silent treatment”.
- Intimidating, threatening or coercive actions such as threatening or implying unwarranted discipline or job loss.
- Making fun of another person’s appearance, demeanor or another trait.
- Making unfavorable comments about someone in the context of a joke.
- Manipulating or intimidating another person.
- Name calling.
- Repeating information shared by a person out of context so that it reflects badly on her or him.
- Running a smear campaign or otherwise trying to get others to turn against a person.
- Sabotage or setting someone up to fail such as deliberately excluding someone from communication they need to be involved in, withholding information or resources needed to perform work, unreasonable work assignments.
- Sharing information that is intended to be kept private.
- Spreading rumors.
- Tampering with a person’s personal belongings or work equipment<sup>2</sup>.
- Teasing someone about her or his lack of skill or knowledge.
- Using humiliation and put-downs, usually regarding a person’s skills and abilities.
- Using body language (such as eye rolling or head tossing) to convey an unfavorable opinion of someone.

## 1.2.3 Potential causes of bullying

- Differences in personality, work ethic or power.
- Hierarchical abuse and preserving the status quo. For example, clique formation - subgroups are formed, which can serve as a power base for individuals to gain control and resist change.

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<sup>2</sup> Canadian Centre for Occupational Health & Safety website, “OHS Answers: Bullying in the Workplace. Found Sept 1, 2013. <http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/bullying.html>



### 1.2.4 What bullying is not<sup>3</sup>

It is important to differentiate between bullying and a person's legitimate authority at work. All employers have the right to direct and control how work is done, and managers have a responsibility to monitor workflow and give feedback on performance.

There is a difference between someone communicating a message that you may not agree with or like and bullying behaviour. A person who is displaying bullying behaviours actions are deliberately meant to hurt someone. This may need an intervention from management supported by Human Resources.

If an employee has performance problems, these should be identified and dealt with in a constructive, confidential and objective way that does not involve personal insults or derogatory remarks. In situations where an employee is dissatisfied with management practices, the problem should be raised in a manner that remains professional and objective.

### 1.2.5 Impact of bullying

There are many potential negative effects of bullying on both the victim and organization.<sup>4</sup>

#### Negative effects on the victim

- Increased stress
- Increased absences
- Lower level of job satisfaction
- Increased physical illness
- Increased mental illness
- Potential suicidal ideation

#### Negative effects on the organization

- High turnover and intention to leave the organization
- Higher rates of absenteeism
- Higher rates of injuries and illness
- Higher level of patient dissatisfaction
- Decreased productivity
- Decreased organizational engagement
- Decreased quality of patient care

### 1.2.6 Signs and symptoms of bullying in the workplace

A workplace that has bullying may experience:

- Poor morale.
- Increased absences and absenteeism.
- Increased stress, tension and conflict between staff in a unit.
- Reported fear of a co-worker by other employees.
- Increased turnover of employees.

<sup>3</sup> Government of Western Australia, Department of Commerce. Code of practice. Violence, aggression and bullying at work. 2010. Commission for Occupational Safety and Health.

[http://www.commerce.wa.gov.au/worksafe/PDF/Codes\\_of\\_Practice/Code\\_violence.pdf](http://www.commerce.wa.gov.au/worksafe/PDF/Codes_of_Practice/Code_violence.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Ontario Safety Association for Community & Healthcare. 2008. Workplace Bullying. Fast Fact. Found July 2, 2013. [www.osach.ca](http://www.osach.ca)



## 2.0 Bullying in Alberta Health Services

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### 2.1 What is AHS doing about bullying?

AHS is developing and implementing policies, procedures and supports to address violence in the workplace with the goal of creating a psychologically safe work environment.

*AHS defines bullying as the activity of **repeated**, aggressive or disrespectful behaviour intended to hurt another person physically or mentally. Bullying is characterized by an individual or individuals behaving in a certain way to gain power over another person.*

The Workplace Violence Prevention strategy (*in progress*), and the AHS Psychological Safety Strategy (*in progress*) support a bully free work environment. Policies, procedures and supports are being developed in accordance with an Accreditation Canada Required Organizational Practice and fall into three key components:

#### 1) Education and Communication

- Annual Continuing Education (ACE): Respect in the Workplace Module available at [MyLearningLink](#).
- EFAP resources:
  - [Bullying in the Workplace Seminar](#)
  - On the [WorkHealthLife](#) website look up the following article: Bullying in the Workplace, A Little Respect Goes a Long Way, Building better relationships at work, Building great business relationships.
- Team building courses offered by [Learning and Leadership Development](#).
- Understand the [Expectations and Responsibilities](#) of AHS workers, patients and families when it comes to the providing a respectful workplace as part of Accreditation Canada's Required Operational Practice (ROP) on Workplace Violence Prevention ([patient brochure](#)).
- Facilitate a short discussion on [Workplace Violence Prevention](#) which provides actions leaders can take and questions to prompt discussion.
- Print and Distribute (or attach to an email):
  - Violence Awareness ([staff](#) and [patient](#))
  - [Respect Poster](#)
  - Go to: <http://insite.albertahealthservices.ca/9084.asp> for more information.

#### 2) Respectful Workplace

- [AHS Values](#) promote a safe and respectful workplace.
- [Respectful Workplace Resource Guide](#).

#### 3) Risk Assessment and Management Strategies

- [AHS Workplace Violence: Prevention and Response Policy](#) (formerly Workplace Abuse and Harassment)
- [Safe Disclosure / Whistleblower Policy](#): to provide guidance for the safe disclosure of any improper activity occurring within AHS.
- Canadian Standards Association Standard "Z1003 – Psychological Health & Safety in the Workplace" which will guide the development of the AHS Psychological Safety and Mental Health Strategy.

AHS addresses each situation on a case by case basis and when needed conducts investigations for further information and clarification. Please contact your manager or appropriate supervisor, [Advisor](#), [HR Business Partnerships](#), Union Representative(if applicable) or the [Safe Disclosure Line](#) to discuss specific situations and for additional informational resources. See page ten for ways to report bullying within AHS.

## 2.2 Are you being bullied?

Do you think you're being bullied by someone at work? If you're not sure, consider each of the questions in the self-test below, then circle the appropriate number to indicate how often the described behavior happens.<sup>5</sup>

Does the person you're having trouble with:	Never	Not Often	Often	Almost Always
1. Ignore you, not say hello when you greet them, not return phone calls or emails?	0	0	1	2
2. Dismiss what you're saying or "put you down" while alone or in the presence of others?	0	1	2	3
3. Sabotage you or make you look foolish such as by "forgetting" to tell you about important meetings or, if the person is your boss, set you up to fail by placing impossible demands on you?	0	2	3	4
4. Spread rumors, lies and half-truths about you?	0	2	3	4
5. Frequently act impatient with you, treating you like you're incompetent?	0	1	2	3
6. Blame and criticize you?	0	1	2	3
7. Try to intimidate you by interrupting, contradicting and glaring at you and giving you the silent treatment?	0	1	2	3
8. Tease, ridicule, insult or play tricks on you, especially in front of others?	0	2	3	4
9. Always insist on getting their own way and never apologize?	0	1	2	3
10. Yell, point their finger, swear, insult or threaten you or call you names?	0	2	3	4
<b>Sub Total:</b>				
<b>TOTAL</b>				

Add up the numbers to get your total score. There is a possible total score of 33. The higher the

<sup>5</sup> Bullying in the Workplace: A handbook for the workplace. <http://www.bullyfreetatwork.com>



score the more pronounced the bullying behavior.

### 2.3 Are you bullying others?

Have you been told that you are displaying bullying behaviour? Take the quiz below to see if you display bullying behaviours?

	Yes	No
Do you withhold information that could impact another’s performance?		
Do you ask a co-worker to do work below their level?		
Do you ignore a co-worker?		
Do you give co-worker tasks with unrealistic deadline?		
Do you excessively monitor a co-workers behavior?		
Do you humiliate or ridicule a co-worker?		
Do you spread gossip or rumours about a co-worker?		
Do you intentionally ignore or exclude a co-worker?		
Do you criticize a co-worker?		
Do you play practical jokes on a co-worker?		
Do you tease or use excessive sarcasm with a co-worker?		
Do you raise your voice with a co-worker?		
Do you use intimidating behaviours such as finger-pointing, invasion of personal space, shoving or blocking someone’s way?		

If you answer yes, to any of the behaviours listed below you may be displaying bullying behaviour towards someone. Take a minute to consider why you are displaying bullying behaviours and make a conscious effort to stop. Ask yourself...

- Do you mean to upset or hurt others?
- Do you know when you are bullying?
- Is something making you upset?
- Do you feel excluded at work?
- Is someone bullying you?
- Does someone make you feel angry or frustrated?

Seek out assistance from people you trust or access [EFAP](#) and talk about it.





## 2.4 What to do if there is bullying at work<sup>6</sup>

Here is what you can do if you or someone you know is being bullied at work.

- Learn more about bullying – information is power. Check out some of the resources listed in Appendix B.
- Don't ignore the behaviour. Remember you're not alone.
- Get help/support. Tell others you trust, a friend, relative, your union, Human Resources, your manager or appropriate supervisor or someone who is understanding and supportive. Contact your physician, a counselor or EFAP.
- Document every incident. Start a journal and enter events after they occur or each night. Include the date (and time if relevant), who was present, what happened and specific comments that were said. It is important to document the facts and remove any subjective information.
- Address the situation with the person displaying bullying behaviour if you feel comfortable and safe. Let them know that their behavior is unwelcome and not acceptable. Stay calm, be polite and direct.

## 2.5 How to address bullying

Addressing the person displaying bullying behaviour can be difficult. You can train yourself to identify and address bullying behaviours. Here are a few phrases that you can use if you are being bullied (depending on the situation):

- When you (*insert behavior*) it makes me feel (*insert feeling*).
- I don't like it when you put me down in front of my peers.
- It's demeaning when I am told that I am...
- I don't like it when you point your finger at me.
- I want to have a good working relationship with you.
- I don't like shouting. Please lower your voice.

If you don't feel comfortable addressing the bullying behavior you can use the following responses to excuse yourself and walk away.

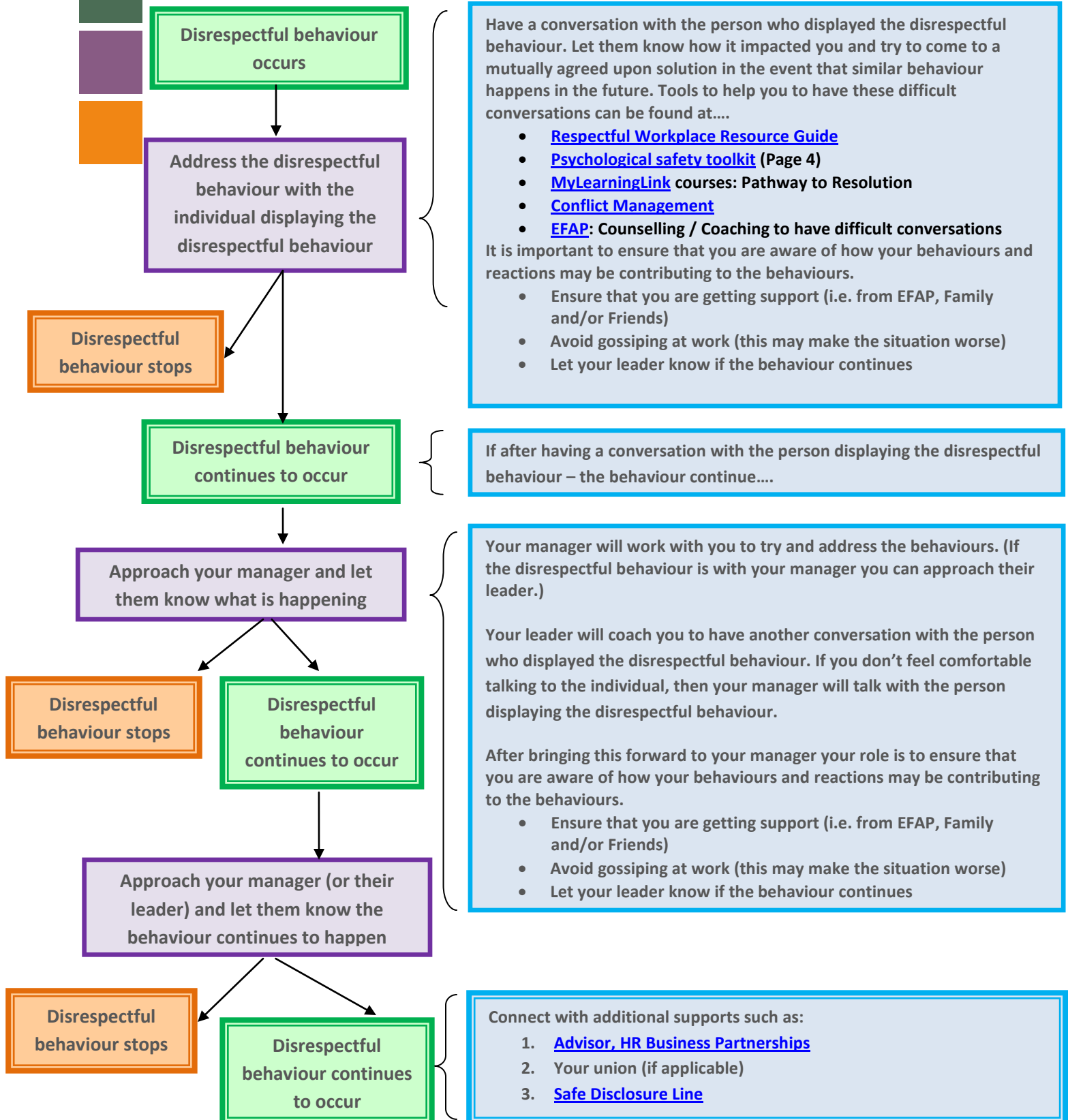
- Excuse me, I have a meeting to go to.
- I have something I have to attend to. I'll get back to you later.
- Pardon me, I was just heading out. Can we talk tomorrow?
- Let's talk later. I have something that can't wait.
- I don't agree, but I'm sure we can talk about this another time.

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<sup>6</sup> Bullying in the Workplace: A handbook for the workplace. <http://www.bullyfreeatwork.com>

## 2.6 How can you report bullying in AHS?

There are a number of ways AHS employee can report bullying. When a bullying incident occurs AHS employees are encouraged to take the following steps:





## 2.6.1 What will happen if you report bullying to your manager or appropriate supervisor

If you report to your manager they will have a conversation with you and the person displaying the bullying behaviours. They may also reach out to their Advisor, HR Business Partnerships for support. After you report it is important that you let your manager know if the behaviour continues to occur.

### What to do after you report?

- Take care of yourself by:
  - seeking supports from your friends or family
  - accessing [EFAP](#)
- Avoid gossiping
- Let your manager know if the behaviour continues

## 2.7 Bullying Resources for Employees

### Preventing bullying through awareness

- Talk to your manager about bullying using the Worker Safety Moment on [Bullying in the Workplace](#). Use and promote educational resources on [bullying](#) located on Insite. Useful resources include:
  - [Bullying in the Workplace](#): A handbook for the Workplace. Practical suggestions for managers and staff to help reduce incidents of workplace bullying.
  - [Workplace Bullying Fast Facts](#)
- Call EFAP at 1-877-273-3134 or visit their [WorkHealthLife](#) webpage for more information.

### Education and Resources

- There are several courses offered by AHS to help staff and managers deal with difficult behaviours; some suggestions include:
  - Respectful Workplace Toolkit
  - Art of Accountability
  - Conflict Resolution
- Complete the Annual Continuing Education (ACE): Respect in the Workplace Module available at [MyLearningLink](#)
- See [MyLearningLink](#) for additional educational opportunities.

### AHS Awareness Campaign

AHS has a Bullying Awareness Week that coincides with [National Bullying Awareness Week](#)

- Preventing Bullying through Team Awareness.



## Appendix A: Tips to address bullies<sup>7</sup>

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1. **Recognize it** – Be aware of the signs of bullying.
2. **Don't personalize it** – Realize you may not be the only one who is being bullied by this person at work.
3. **Establish boundaries** – You need to be aware of your own boundaries so you know when a line is crossed and can choose to take appropriate response.
4. **Be courageous** – Don't let people who are displaying bullying behaviours intimidate you. Their behaviour is wrong and you need to muster up your own courage and conviction to deal with this effectively. Sometimes reflecting this courage with professionalism and restraint can deter the person who is displaying bullying behaviour, if they think you won't 'buy in' to their tactic.
5. **Let the person displaying bullying behaviour know their behaviour is unacceptable** – Have a direct conversation with the person who is displaying bullying behaviour and let them know their behaviour is unacceptable. Never stoop to their level – do not 'bully back'!
6. **Document everything** – Write down all bullying incidents. As much as possible keep a written record of communications, events, emails etc. Take notes after the incident include time, date, what happened and witness. When its time to escalate the situation you will need to show the history. Note: It is important to report incidents in a timely manner.
7. **Remind the person who is displaying bullying behaviour about the workplace policies** – Remind the person who is displaying bullying behaviour of the [AHS Workplace Violence: Prevention and Response Policy](#) (formerly workplace abuse and harassment).
8. **Stand up to the person who is displaying bullying behaviour**– Sometimes a person who is displaying bullying behaviour will back down when someone stands up to him or her. Assertively, professionally and directly, tell the person to stop the bullying behaviour.
9. **Escalate when necessary** – If the bullying continues, report the bullying behaviour to the appropriate organization official (your manager, Human Resources or Workplace Health & Safety).
10. **Seek support or get counselling** – Seek out counselling through [EFAP](#) if you are having on-going anxiety or mental health issues as a result of the incident. If you notice others being bullied by this individual reach out to support each other and stand in unison.

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<sup>7</sup> 12 tips to deal with a bully at work. The Globe and Mail. Found Sept 2, 2013. <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/careers/12-tips-to-deal-with-a-bully-at-work/article4920861/>



## Appendix B: Bullying Links

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Anger Management Resource (for bullies)

<http://www.angermanagementresource.com/>

Bully Free at Work

<http://www.bullyfreetatwork.com>

Canada Safety Council – Bullying in the Workplace

<http://www.safety-council.org/info/OSH/bullies.html>

No Bully For Me

<http://www.nobullyforme.org/>

Psychological Harassment Information Association

<http://www.psychologicalharassment.com/>



***RIGHTS AND DISCLAIMER***

The content of this resource is offered for information purposes only. This resource is not intended to offer legal, medical or other professional advice and should not be relied on for those purposes.

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