

Bullying

It is not a nice feeling when someone is being abusive and you cannot reach out to anyone for help because you are too afraid or too worried about what it might do to your reputation, your career, your personal life. You start to question yourself. You start to make excuses for the bully by blaming yourself. "It must have been something I did wrong." "Maybe I should say sorry." "I can't report this, it doesn't seem significant enough and people will just think I'm complaining for no reason." In an industry as small as ELT, where a lot of people know each other, it's even worse for the victim. They feel that if they say something or make a formal complaint, people will think badly of them.

These are examples of what someone who is bullied thinks. But what is bullying?

It's a number of things. It's different things in different situations, but it is usually about exerting power over somebody else. Inappropriate behaviour by adult bullies may include: berating people, stealing credit, excluding others, making snide remarks, threatening others, unfair criticism, withholding information.

Bullying can take place in the workplace, online, or in any social situation.

Bullying seems to be a common occurrence, and we often accept it as normal. We make excuses for the bully. "It's just humour." "This was meant to be funny." "Oh he/she can sometimes be a pain in the arse but it's nothing. He/she doesn't really mean it". "He/she's not as bad as..... ." So when does humour turn into bullying? It is never funny to make people laugh at the expense of one person, it is never funny to invite people to comment and ridicule someone on something they have said, it is never funny to belittle the problems of others, and it is never funny to use your position to hide behind every time you attack someone. By making excuses for the bully, you are allowing the abuse to continue. You are actually condoning their behaviour and encouraging them to offend over and over again.

When a bully lashes out at someone, they completely destroy that person's confidence and self-worth. Bullying has many serious effects on the person being bullied, from mental health problems such as depression, stress, anxiety, changes in sleep and eating patterns to suicidal thoughts. The person feels isolated and humiliated, often not able to talk about what they are going through. Social inclusion, belonging to a group, is a fundamental human need and bullies aim to ostracise their victims so that they can have more power and control.

We all like to think that we would jump to defend the person being bullied but this is often just not the case. Research shows that when we witness bullying, we do very little to help. There are many reasons for this, but the biggest reason is fear. We're afraid that we will become the next target, afraid to be the only one from

the bystanders to act, fear of not being able to cope with it, fear of losing our reputation and our job and income.

Schools, teachers associations and other places of work in the UK usually have an anti-bullying policy and their own mission, vision and values statements with phrases such as “respect all” and “we do not tolerate abusive behaviour towards any of our staff” proudly displayed in frames around the building. Unfortunately, in most cases these are hollow words. The victim often has the added trauma and stress of having to complete forms, attend meetings, face the abuser and provide evidence that the abuse has been happening, which is very difficult if the abuse only has happened verbally or the bullying has taken place online and the offender deletes their comments. So in most cases they will simply not report it.

We need to have a tougher stance on bullying and ensure that we do not tolerate or encourage it. We need to be aware of how detrimental bullying can be – especially to vulnerable people, such as people with disabilities or minorities groups.

If there is a bullying policy, then we need to actually use it when cases are reported. Above all, we need to make it easier for the victim to come forward and be able to say something without feeling guilt or fear. It takes a lot of courage to be able to do this.

There are several different types of adult bullies, and it helps to know how they operate.

1. **Narcissistic Adult Bully:** This type of adult bully is self-centred and does not share empathy with others. Additionally, there is little anxiety about consequences. He or she seems to feel good about him or herself, but in reality has a brittle narcissism that requires putting others down.
2. **Impulsive Adult Bully:** Adult bullies in this category are more spontaneous and plan their bullying out less. Even if consequences are likely, this adult bully has a hard time restraining his or her behaviour. In some cases, this type of bullying may be unintentional, resulting in periods of stress, or when the bully is actually upset or concerned about something unconnected with the victim.
3. **Physical Bully:** While adult bullying rarely turns to physical confrontation, there are, nonetheless, bullies that use physicality. In some cases, the adult bully may not actually physically harm the victim, but may use the threat of harm, or physical domination through looming. Additionally, a physical bully may damage or steal a victim’s property, rather than physically confronting the victim.
4. **Verbal Adult Bully:** Words can be quite damaging. Adult bullies who use this type of tactic may start rumours about the victim, or use sarcastic or demeaning language to dominate or humiliate another person. This subtle type of bullying also has the advantage – to the bully – of being difficult to document. However, the emotional and psychological impacts of verbal bullying can be felt quite keenly and can result in reduced job performance and even depression.

5. **Secondary Adult Bully:** This is someone who does not initiate the bullying, but joins in so that he or she does not actually become a victim down the road. Secondary bullies may feel bad about what they are doing, but are more concerned about protecting themselves.

Source: <http://www.bullyingstatistics.org/content/adult-bullying.html>

If you're being bullied, there are a lot of things you can do. The first thing to remember is that bullies are human. They act in the way they do because they lack attention and nurturing. They are insecure and want to feel powerful. It's often better to try and work it out yourself and the more empowered you are the more you can help yourself. Bullies want a reaction from you by scaring you and if you show them that their actions haven't affected you, you are taking that power away. So don't get angry or upset.

- Stay calm, say nothing and walk away.
- Be assertive, not aggressive. Fighting back can make things worse.
- Focus on something else.
- Tell them to stop.
- If the bullying is online, block and report the person.
- Get off the internet and avoid checking (even though you may want to).
- Don't respond to online bullies. Take a screen shot so that you can share it with others for evidence and support and delete accounts where you are bullied.
- Speak up. Tell someone you trust. It will make you feel less alone.

Make sure that you seek help to deal with the physical and mental fallout. Find ways to reduce stress as this will help you think more clearly.

IPSEN SIG are going to be running a series of articles on this topic and there will be a special edition newsletter on bullying. We will also be focusing on this at our PCE day in Brighton 2017, which will be followed up with a webinar. If you would like to contribute to any of these, please contact us.