Preventing Workplace Bullying
(adapted from Worksafe Victoria publication: Guidance Note on the Prevention of Bullying and Violence at Work, Feb 2003)

Prevention Measures
• Create awareness
• Develop a policy / statement
• Inform, instruct and train all staff
• Identify risk factors
• Control the risks
• Encourage reporting
• Responding to incidents / reports
• Monitor and evaluate

1 Identify risk factors

Workplace bullying is often subtle or hidden. Those with little direct experience of bullying may find it difficult to identify. Supervisors (as representatives of the employer) should not assume that the workplace is free of bullying simply because there are no immediately obvious signs. There are a number of risk factors that can increase the likelihood of bullying occurring in a workplace.

Bullying risk factors can be revealed through:
• Reports from equal opportunity contact officers
• Reports from Health & Safety Representatives
• Workplace Audits
• Organisational climate / employee opinion surveys (eg Your Voice 2006)
• Individuals reporting to supervisors in performance review discussions

Note: If an allegation of bullying is made, or an incident is observed, supervisors should act promptly to resolve the situation (see Responding to incidents / reports)

Indirect signs of bullying

In a workplace, bullying can sometimes be signalled indirectly. Because these signs may not always be connected with bullying, they need to be examined within the overall context of the work area / organisation.

Indirect signs of bullying may include:
• Employees leaving the organisation reporting dissatisfaction with working relationships (eg at Exit Interviews)
• High levels of absenteeism
• An increase in workplace grievance or complaints
• High levels of staff turnover
• Issues raised at staff meetings
• Deterioration of relationship between colleagues, customers or management
• Regularly damaged personal effects or work tools
• An employee experiencing a number of minor workplace injuries
• Employees becoming withdrawn and isolated

Other factors that can contribute to risk

Organisational change
Research has identified that significant organisational change, such as major internal restructuring or technological change, may inadvertently create an environment that increases the risk of bullying
Workforce characteristics
Supervisors should be aware that some employees can be more at risk of workplace bullying. These employees may represent a minority in the workplace due to factors such as: age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, disability, parental status, marital status, religion or political views. They may also be new employees, trainees, contractors or casuals.

Workplace relationships
Unsatisfactory workplace relationships and poor workplace communication, such as inadequate information flow or lack of consultation with employees, may create an environment in which workplace bullying is more likely to occur. Workplaces that tolerate teasing and practical jokes against employees, or tolerate initiation practices for new employees, are more likely to experience workplace bullying.

Work systems
Work system factors that may increase the risk of workplace bullying include:
- Lack of understanding of appropriate policies and procedures
- A high rate and intensity of work
- Staff shortages
- Lack of experience and skill in dealing with employee groups
- Poorly-defined jobs and high levels of uncertainty about job requirements

2 Control the risks
If risk factors have been identified, the supervisor should take action to eliminate or reduce the likelihood of bullying occurring in their area.

Preventative measures should target the source of risk, and may involve a Cost Centre-wide response as well as addressing symptoms in a specific area. Where multiple risk factors are identified, there is a greater likelihood that a section or Cost Centre-wide response is required. A combination of measures may need to be used. Action may include:
- Providing appropriate training, particularly to those with supervisory responsibility (eg managing conflict, workplace diversity)
- Consulting employees prior to and during organisational change
- Redesigning and clearly defining jobs
- Promoting the conflict management process / grievance procedure to encourage reporting
- Reducing excessive working hours
- Reviewing resources available
- Reviewing staffing levels
- Reaffirming behavioural expectations
- Introducing a ‘buddy’ system for new employees
- Workplace relationships monitoring

3 Encourage Reporting
Supervisors should encourage reporting because there are factors that can make employees reluctant to report bullying. Incidents may not always be reported because employees might
- fear retribution or ‘payback’ from the bully
- believe that on-one will act on the problem
- fear being labelled ‘weak’ or ‘whinging’
- think that reporting will affect their career prospects
- accept bullying as a normal part of work culture
Encouraging reporting can assist the supervisor to:
- develop an accurate picture of the nature and extent of bullying
- take action to address the issues being reported
- assess whether prevention measures are working
- nip emerging issues ‘in the bud’
- provide prompt assistance and support to employees

4 Responding to Incidents / reports
A supervisor may find out about bullying in a number of ways such as
- written reports
- verbal reports
- hearing verbal abuse or offensive language
- directly observing bullying type behaviour

Resolution process
Each situation that is reported or observed will usually be different. Therefore, to ensure a consistent approach, it is important to have an agreed procedure in workplace for dealing with reports. A supervisor can
- become familiar with the ‘No Bullying at Flinders’ statement
- seek assistance from the contacts named in the statement
- be familiar with the Staff Grievance Policy

Key principles to resolution

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<th>Key Principles</th>
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<tr>
<td>Treat all matters seriously</td>
<td>This encourages reporting and shows employees the Flinders’ commitment to its “No Bullying” policy</td>
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<td>Act promptly</td>
<td>Prompt intervention can assist in resolving reports as quickly and as fairly as possible</td>
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<td>Non-victimisation of person who reports</td>
<td>It is important to ensure that anyone who raises an issue of bullying is not victimised for coming forward</td>
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<td>Support for both parties</td>
<td>Once a report has been made, the person or persons involved should be reminded of the support systems available to them. The person or people against whom the allegations have been made should also be informed of opportunities for support.</td>
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<td>Communication of process</td>
<td>All parties need to be informed of the relevant policies, the available resolution processes within those policies, who can help along the way, what they can expect will happen during and at the end of the process.</td>
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<td>Confidentiality</td>
<td>Those involved need to be assured that confidentiality will be maintained. This is important to prevent the matter from escalating.</td>
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<td>Natural justice</td>
<td>Natural justice principles are designed to protect all parties involved.</td>
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Suggested approaches for successful resolution
These approaches can be used in combination or on their own, depending on the situation involved. They can also be used as a step by step approach to resolution.

The resolution approach taken by the supervisor should reflect the seriousness of the situation. It is important for the person who reported the situation to agree with the proposed approach or combination of approaches for resolution.
Direct approach

Assessing whether a direct approach will help resolve a report/incident of bullying is a positive first step.

Where serious allegations have been made, the direct approach is not appropriate. As an example, a report involving an escalation of bullying into violence or threats would not be suited to a direct approach.

The direct approach involves a clear and polite request for the behaviour to stop. This request can be made by the person affected, their supervisor or manager or another relevant person. (eg Head Equal Opportunity Unit, Personnel Consultant).

Anyone requested to act on behalf of the person affected should adopt a confidential, non-confrontational approach with a view to resolving the issue.

Examples of the direct approach:
- The person affected directly approaches the person responsible for the inappropriate behaviour to discuss the matter
- The person affected, with the support of a person they trust directly approaches the person responsible for the inappropriate behaviour to discuss the matter
- The person affected asks their supervisor (or another senior employee) to speak to the other person on their behalf
- A supervisor or manager directly observes bullying and intervenes, even though no report has been made.

If the direct approach succeeds and the offending behaviour stops, it may not be necessary to have a further step. In other circumstances, monitoring the situation for signs of recurrence may be appropriate.

Discussion involving an independent third party

The objective of this step in a process is to settle an issue with as little conflict and stress as possible.

The agreement of all parties to participate in this discussion is important for success and the independence of the third party needs to be recognised by all parties involved.

The discussion should focus on resolving the problem and agreeing on actions that will be undertaken to assist the resolution.

This action can be undertaken at two stages in the resolution process
- Where the direct approach has not resolved the issue
- Where an investigation has recommended discussion to assist resolution

There are some circumstances where it would not be appropriate to use this method. Such circumstances include situations involving allegations of occupational violence, or where there is a significant difference in power between the parties.

Investigations

Where the behaviour does not cease after a direct approach or discussion, an investigation to establish whether or not the report is substantiated should be undertaken. Where a serious allegation has been made, an investigation should be the first step taken.

Prompt and careful investigation can lead to quick resolution and will demonstrate to employees that bullying is taken seriously.
Investigations should be conducted by an impartial and appropriately skilled person. Investigations and their outcomes should always be documented.

The parties affected should be kept informed and provided with all necessary documentation.

**Actions to assist resolution**

Complaint resolution is a very important part of dealing with bullying in the workplace. Supervisors should make sure that the people affected by the behaviour are satisfied their concerns have been dealt with appropriately.

The options for resolving a complaint of bullying will vary on a case-by-case basis according to seriousness and other circumstances. Some options for resolution are outlined below. A number of these may be used in combination.

- Gain commitment to cease the inappropriate behaviour
- Require an apology
- Run an awareness update
- Clarify behavioural expectations
- Review the ‘No Bullying” statement with all employees and supervisors
- Provide mediation between the parties provided both parties agree to the mediation and the mediator
- Provide training (eg communication skills, diversity awareness, inter-personal skills)
- Offer counselling and support to both parties and the work team if necessary
- Move the perpetrator away from the affected person
- Discipline the perpetrator

5 **Monitor and evaluate**

After a situation has been resolved, a supervisor should also examine the work situation to identify and address any underlying risk factors that may have contributed to the bullying occurring.