

Manager fact sheet:

Recognising and responding to bullying or harmful workplace behaviour



Bullying and inappropriate behaviour can cause significant harm to individuals, teams and workplace culture. Managers play an important role in taking concerns seriously, responding promptly, documenting issues appropriately and following organisational processes so matters are managed safely and fairly.

Bullying may include repeated unreasonable behaviour that creates a risk to health and safety. Inappropriate behaviour may also include disrespectful, intimidating, excluding, aggressive or harmful conduct.

What you may notice

Concerns about bullying or inappropriate behaviour may be raised directly by an employee, observed by a manager, or identified through changes in team behaviour or performance.

You may notice:

- an employee becoming withdrawn, distressed or reluctant to attend work
- increased conflict, tension or complaints within the team
- changes in performance, confidence or participation
- employees avoiding certain people, meetings or work areas
- repeated disrespectful comments, exclusion or undermining behaviour
- an increase in absenteeism, turnover or disengagement
- concerns being raised informally before a formal complaint is made.

Not every concern will be straightforward. Some situations may involve different perspectives, unclear information or broader team dynamics. A careful, fair and timely response is important.

How managers can respond

Managers and Team Leaders are not expected to manage complex workplace behaviour concerns alone. The [The Manager Assistance Program](#) (MAP) through PeopleSense by Altius provides confidential guidance from a qualified psychologist. MAP can help managers prepare for difficult conversations, consider how to respond safely and appropriately, work with existing organisational protocols, manage the impact on individuals and teams, and identify practical next steps in line with organisational processes.



Reaching out early makes a real difference.
Contact **PeopleSense** to book a confidential
appointment with a qualified psychologist.

How managers can respond

1. Take concerns seriously

If an employee raises concerns about bullying or inappropriate behaviour, listen carefully and avoid dismissing or minimising their experience. Thank them for raising the issue and explain that you will follow the appropriate process. MAP can help you prepare for this initial response, including how to listen, what to say and how to avoid making assumptions before the matter has been properly considered.

2. Respond promptly and safely

Do not wait for issues to escalate before taking action. Consider whether any immediate steps are needed to support the employee, reduce risk or prevent further harm. This may include temporary changes to work arrangements, additional check-ins or referral to internal processes. MAP can help you think through immediate support options while maintaining appropriate boundaries and procedural fairness.

3. Document what has been raised

Keep clear, factual records of concerns, observations, dates, conversations and any actions taken. Avoid personal opinions or assumptions in your notes. MAP can help you consider what information may be useful to document from a wellbeing and management perspective, while your organisation's HR or people team can advise on formal record keeping requirements.

4. Follow organisational processes

Bullying and inappropriate behaviour concerns should be managed in line with your organisation's policies and procedures. This may involve speaking with HR, escalating the matter, initiating a formal process or seeking additional advice. MAP can help you prepare for the management aspects of this process, including how to communicate with the employee, manage your own response and support the team while the matter is being handled.

5. Maintain confidentiality and fairness

Only share information with those who need to be involved. Avoid discussing concerns broadly across the team or making conclusions before the matter has been reviewed. MAP can help you navigate difficult conversations while maintaining confidentiality, neutrality and respect for everyone involved.

6. Support the impacted employee

Employees who experience or report harmful behaviour may feel distressed, anxious, unsafe or uncertain about what will happen next. Check in respectfully, provide information about available supports and encourage them to access confidential EAP support if needed. MAP can help you plan appropriate check-ins and understand how to support the employee without stepping outside your role as a manager.

7. Address team impacts

Bullying or inappropriate behaviour can affect more than the individuals directly involved. It may reduce trust, increase tension and impact psychological safety across the team. MAP can help you consider how to rebuild respectful communication, reinforce behavioural expectations and support a healthier team environment after concerns have been raised.

8. Look after yourself as a manager

Managing bullying or inappropriate behaviour concerns can be stressful, particularly when the situation is complex or emotionally charged. MAP can provide a confidential space to talk through your approach, prepare for conversations and manage the personal impact of supporting others through difficult workplace issues.

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