Policy guidelines on bullying at work

POLICY GUIDELINES

ON

BULLYING AT WORK

- Bullying is a form of harassment or intimidation which can affect the health and well-being of individuals or groups of staff.

- It can create an environment in the workplace which damages morale and hinders the proper performance of the employee.

- Bullying will not be tolerated in our Board's work environment.

Principles : The Eastern Health Board recognises the right of everyone to be treated with dignity and respect at work and is committed to ensuring that all staff members are free to do their work without harassment or bullying. Managers have a particular responsibility to ensure that the proper environment exists in the workplace in this regard.

Description : Bullying can take a number of forms but essentially it occurs when a person treats another, on a regular and persistent basis in an aggressive, intimidating or derogatory manner, which is perceived by the recipient as offensive, demeaning and/or threatening. The bully deliberately (or sometimes unintentionally) misuses the power of their position, knowledge or personality to domineer or humiliate others.

Some Manifestations of Bullying are:

Shouting and uncontrolled anger.
Aggressive behaviour/attitude.
Verbal abuse and humiliation, in front of others or in private.
Persistent criticism or sarcasm.
Intimidation, whether physical, psychological or emotional.

Less Obvious are:

Deliberately ignoring or isolating someone.
Playing malicious tricks.
Setting impossible deadlines.
Changing instructions without consultation.
Continually refusing reasonable requests without good reason.
Undermining authority by bypassing or overruling without consultation.
Unreasonably querying work.

The above are examples, not an exhaustive list, and must be interpreted in the light of the description of bullying given above - when done on a regular and persistent basis to intimidate or undermine they can be construed as bullying.

Legitimate criticism by a line manager of a staff member's behaviour or performance is not bullying as long as it is conducted with fairness, courtesy and respect.

Some bullying takes the form of sexual harassment and specific procedures in relation to this are set out in the Eastern Health Board leaflet "Sexual Harassment - Policy Guidelines".

Recognition of Effects:

Individual: Individuals can be subject to fear, confusion, anxiety, and demoralisation and suffer the resulting stress symptoms, particularly in relation to dealings with the bully:-

Feeling sick, sweating or shaking; disturbed sleep; headaches, migraines; palpitations; loss of energy; stomach/bowel problems; worry, anxiety, depression; loss of confidence and self-esteem; feeling isolated; dreading coming to work; mood swings; strain in personal/family life.

General Signs in a Workplace: Increased sickness/absenteeism; higher staff turnover; increased industrial relations problems; low morale; reduced efficiency; noticeable improvement in atmosphere when the bully is not at work.

The above can of course result from other causes, but when a pattern of such effects is noted, bullying should be considered as a possible cause.

What to do

If you feel you are being bullied

Your can approach the matter through informal or formal procedures.

Informal:-

- You can talk to friends, family or colleagues for advice. It is important to get support for yourself.
- You can check with colleagues to see if anyone else is receiving similar treatment.
- You can talk to your Union Representative.

- You can talk the situation over in confidence with the Staff Counsellor (Tel: 6790555 or 6790700 ext. 2147) to get support and look at options.

- If possible, you should make clear to the bully that their behaviour is unwelcome and ask them to stop. The intimidating nature of bullying means that this approach may not be possible except in the very early stages of the problem.

- You can approach your supervisor/manager informally for assistance. If this is not appropriate (e.g. if the supervisor/manager is the bully) you can approach a more senior manager informally. If this is not possible you can contact the Personnel Department.

- You should keep a written record for future reference, quoting dates, times, places and any witnesses to the bullying. This can be useful even in clarifying to yourself what is happening.

Formal:

- If the problem persists (or at your discretion in any case) you can make a formal complaint to your supervisor/manager. If this is not appropriate the complaint may be made to a more senior manager or the Personnel Officer. Your Union Representative can assist you in this procedure. The complaint will then be processed in accordance with existing grievance procedures.

Prevention : All staff members have a responsibility to ensure that the workplace is free from harassment and bullying. Managers and supervisors have a particular responsibility in this matter. Programme Managers/Functional Officers and professional and administrative line managers including departmental supervisors generally should be alert to the possibility of such behaviour. They should make themselves familiar with these guidelines and ensure that the staff whom they supervise are in no doubt about the official policy in this regard.

As bullying can at times be unintentional, staff members should examine their own treatment of other staff members in the light of these guidelines.

Managers and supervisors should seek, through their own behaviour, attitude and example, to ensure that staff members can carry out their work in a climate of respect.