



# FACULTY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

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## *Bullies Among Us: Putting a Stop to Unhealthy Work Relationships*

Bullying by school-age children and college students stirs up plenty of media coverage and public dialogue. Adult-on-adult bullying in the workplace may get less attention, yet it can create uncomfortable and unhealthy conditions.

“Bullying is a lifetime tactic that some people use to get what they want in life—power, control, money, sex or pleasure,” says Ben Leichtling, Ph.D., author of *How to Stop Bullies in Their Tracks*.

Adult bullies at work are usually continuing behavioral styles that worked throughout school, Leichtling explains. “These behaviors were never stopped, so they continue at work and in relationships.”

In his work as a consultant and coach, Leichtling focuses on stopping bullies behaviorally rather than trying to rehabilitate them. He describes five types of bullying behavior:

### **Overt, physical bullying**

This type of bullying usually gets the most publicity off campus, but is obviously the easiest to recog-



nize and, therefore, the easiest to get evidence for.

### **Stealthy, covert mental and emotional bullying**

Think “Mean Girls,” although men do this just as much as women do. Stealth bullies’ techniques are sneaky, manipulative, controlling and back-stabbing. With a smile or an innuendo, they steal ideas, block promotions, spread rumors and form cliques.

This type of bullying is usually harder to recognize because it flies below most people’s “bullying radar.” Because it’s harder to get evidence for, it’s also more difficult to stop than overt bullying.

### **“Professional victims”**

These bullies use their hypersensitivity and hurt feelings to control their environment. They win when everyone else is walking on eggshells to avoid another blow-

up or a withdrawal into surly, petulant silence. To the professional victim bully, it’s never their fault; it’s always your fault. Your job is to do everything they want in order to please them and they’re never satisfied.

### **Internet or cyberbullying**

This type of bullying is less used by professionals on campus than in the teen and young adult world of social networking. It’s usually not difficult to locate the “assassin” and get evidence.

### **Self-bullying**

This refers to internal voices that put you down relentlessly and predict failure in love, sports and careers. Those little voices may be saying “You’re fat, you’re dumb, you’re ugly, no one will ever be your friend or love you, you’re a loser, you’ll never get tenure, or you’ll never succeed.”

This type of bullying is the most difficult to overcome because we carry it inside us. Also, this type of

### **“Huh?”**

*This one word can stop a bully in his or her tracks, says Mark Goulston, M.D. “It works because it signals that you are not engaging with the content of what was just said.”*



## Bullies Among Us: What You Can Do

*Continued from page 1*

bullying is reinforced and used as a weapon by other bullies, especially the stealthy, nasty, mean predators.

“A bully gets what he or she wants by scaring other people,” says Mark Goulston, M.D., author of *Just Listen: Discover the Secret to Getting Through to Absolutely Anyone*.

Goulston suggests specific responses to a bully’s verbal attack. “The one word ‘huh?’ can stop a bully in his tracks,” he says. “Use a mild, neutral tone of voice. Do this when the bully says something utterly ridiculous but acts as if he is being perfectly reasonable. This response conveys that what the bully is saying doesn’t make sense. It works because it signals that you are not engaging with

the content of what he said.”

Another response is to ask the bully “Do you really believe what you just said?” in a calm, straightforward and non-confrontational tone, Goulston recommends.

“This question works because bullies often resort to hyperbole to throw others off balance,” he notes. “They are prone to using the words ‘always’ and ‘never’ to drive home their points. However, don’t expect the bully to admit that he is wrong. He is more likely to walk away in a huff—which is fine, because then you won’t have to waste more energy dealing with him.”

Goulston offers a third response to use when confronted with a bully’s demands. “Say ‘I can see how

this is good for you. Tell me how it’s good for me.’ If the bully stalls or changes the subject, you can say, ‘Since it’s not clear how this is good for me, I’m going to have to say no.’”

Real bullies are dedicated predators who must be stopped by strong, firm, tactically clever action, adds Leichtling. “In order to respond successfully, you need strength, courage and perseverance. Without these qualities, your actions will be half-hearted, inconsistent and ineffective.”

### Resources:

- *How to Stop Bullies in Their Tracks*, (2007); and *Bullies Below The Radar*, (2006); both by Ben Leichtling, Ph.D., Leichtling and Associates, LLC, published by Uncommon Sense Press.
- *Just Listen: Discover the Secret to Getting Through to Absolutely Anyone*, by Mark Goulston, M.D., AMACOM, 2009.
- [www.workplacebullying.org](http://www.workplacebullying.org)
- [www.overcomebullying.org](http://www.overcomebullying.org)

**“If the circumstances permit, it is best to confront a bully in the presence of others.”**

*-Nishendu Vasavada, M.D.  
Clinical Medical Director  
University Behavioral Health  
Denton, Texas*



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## Healing Old Wounds: Letting Go of the Past

Taking stock of past grievances, disagreements and disappointments and then moving on takes courage. The act of forgiveness can be both freeing and healthy.

“You are the primary beneficiary when you forgive someone, and the benefit ripples outward to touch others,” says Kristin E. Robertson, president of Brio Leadership and author of *A Forgiveness Journal: Letting Go of the Past*. (Brio Leadership Press, 2007).

“Many people believe that holding in their anger makes them strong, and so they hold onto feelings from past,” she

notes. “Actually, living in a state of unforgiveness is bad for the physical body. Much like anger, it negatively affects the cardiovascular and immune systems.”

“Not forgiving is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die,” Robertson says. “What people may not realize is how great it feels when you let go and forgive—it’s a sense of peace, happiness and lightness.”

The first step is to acknowledge your feelings by journaling, says Robertson. “Write ‘I am mad at you because...’ and fill in all the rea-

sons until you run out. If the wound is very deep, find a trusted friend or professional to help you through this step.”

“After you have let out those emotions, try to change your view of the situation,” Robertson suggests. “Imagine yourself on your deathbed. From that perspective, what would you think about this situation? It may not be that important.”

Wishing the other person well or praying for them can also be helpful, says Robertson. “Do this every day for 30 days, and you will turn around your thought process.”