

Echo Interpreting (“Echo”) is committed to providing a positive working environment* free from intimidation, ridicule, and harassment. Every employee has a responsibility to maintain a working environment free from negative and bullying behaviour.

Bullying is not acceptable in any workplace*. It can impact people’s health and their ability to perform and enjoy their job.

Echo Interpreting will investigate all complaints of bullying and will take remedial action where necessary.

What is Workplace Bullying?

Workplace bullying is the repeated less favorable treatment of a person by another or others in the workplace. Bullying is persistent unwelcome behaviour, mostly using unwarranted or invalid criticism, fault finding, exclusion or isolation.

Instances of workplace bullying have the deliberate intent of causing physical and psychological distress to others and can include behaviour that intimidates, offends, degrades, or humiliates a worker, possibly in front of co-workers, clients, or customers.

Bullying in the workplace can take place between:

- a worker and a manager (or supervisor),
- co-workers, including trainees,
- a worker and another person in the workplace, e.g., a client or a student.

It might include one of or several the following behaviours:

- manipulation,
- intimidation,
- belittling remarks,
- unreasonable persistent criticism, which is not part of a managing performance process,
- loud and aggressive attacks or more subtle intimidation such as constant criticism of a trivial nature,
- verbal and physical abuse, for example, shouting and throwing objects,
- isolation from colleagues,
- refusing to delegate or the withholding of information employees need to perform their job,
- removing responsibility and/or imposing menial tasks.

Bullying does not include:

- occasional differences of opinion, and non-aggressive conflicts and problems in working relations,
- workplace counselling, managing under performance and other action in accordance with ECHO policy and procedures.

Behaviour will only be defined as bullying if a “reasonable person” observing the situation would consider it to be bullying. The reasonable person is defined as an objective third party.

Types of Bullying

Unwitting bullying (also including reactive or isolated instances of bullying). This type of bullying is where stressful circumstances, stemming either from the workplace or from personal issues results in a deterioration of office behaviour. In reaction, an employee may become short-tempered and irritable. When an employee under pressure reacts adversely, he or she will often recognise the inappropriateness of the behaviour. The employee should apologise and learn from experience so that any adverse behaviour is avoided in the future. In some cases, the irritable employee may need to be counselled to understand that their behaviour is not acceptable.

If an employee continues to exhibit inappropriate behaviour over a period of time in response to stress, this type of behaviour may fall under the general bullying category. Serial bullying is the most serious type of workplace bullying. Serial bullying behaviour is identified when an individual targets several employees in succession.

Relevant Legislation

Echo Interpreting has a legal obligation to ensure that its workplaces are free of any harassing, discriminatory or bullying behaviour. Echo's legal obligation extends to providing a workplace that promotes the health and wellbeing of all employees.

The policy complies with and is supported by the following legislation:

- Victorian Equal Opportunity Act 1995
- Sex Discrimination Act 1975
- Occupational Health and Safety Act 1985

Effect of Bullying on an Individual

The effects on the person experiencing bullying can include:

- severe psychological distress, sleep disturbances and general feelings of anxiety,
- physical symptoms such as stomach-aches, headaches, and general ill-health,
- incapacity to work, reduced output and performance,
- loss of self-confidence, self-esteem, and sometimes even suicidal behaviour.

Effects of Bullying on the Organisation

The effects of bullying on the organisation can include:

- lower workplace productivity and efficiency,
- high staff turnover with resultant increase in recruitment and induction costs, as well as down time as replacement workers are trained in their new jobs,
- increased absenteeism and sick leave,
- the direct cost of dealing with complaints of bullying such as the cost of counselling effected workers, costs associated with legal action etc.,

Responsibilities of Managers and Supervisors

Managers are responsible for ensuring that all employees understand that bullying is not tolerated in the workplace and for taking early corrective action to deal with behaviour which may be offensive or intimidating.

The prevention of all inappropriate behaviours including bullying require managers and supervisors to:

- be aware of, identify and prevent bullying in the workplace,
- eliminate inappropriate behaviour regardless of whether a complaint is received about that behaviour,
- encourage all staff to behave in accordance with the principles of equal opportunity and anti-discrimination,
- provide leadership and role modelling in relation to appropriate and professional behaviour in the workplace,
- respond promptly, sensitively, and confidentially to all situations where inappropriate behaviour is exhibited or alleged to have occurred.

Employee and Co-Worker Responsibilities

The prevention of bullying requires employees to be responsible for the following actions:

- be aware of and identify bullying behaviour and where appropriate utilise ECHO's and/or external mechanisms to stop any further instances of bullying behaviour,
- behave in accordance with the principles of equal opportunity and anti-discrimination,

if bullying behaviour is witnessed or experienced and the employee feels able, speak with the alleged bully to object to the bullying behaviour, offer to act as a witness if the person being bullied decides to report the incident, keep a record or diary of incidents noting what happened, when and the names of witnesses.

Confidentiality

An accusation of bullying can be potentially defamatory, especially if confidentiality is not observed and a person's reputation is unfairly damaged. Discussions, information, and records related to complaints will remain factual and confidential.

All documentation and details of bullying enquiries and grievances will be kept securely by the Manager.

Victimisation

Victimisation as a result of reporting workplace bullying is regarded as a serious breach of conduct and will automatically result in a formal investigation, which if proven, may result in disciplinary action being taken against the perpetrator, which may include dismissal.

Breach of Policy:

If you do not comply with this policy, you may face disciplinary action. This disciplinary action may involve a verbal or written warning or, in serious cases, termination of your employment at Echo Interpreting.

* The words "Working environment" and "Workplace" are used when referring to any location that an interpreter attends whilst under the employment of Echo Interpreting