

# Bullying: A fact sheet for medical students

## Overview

Bullying is an ongoing issue in healthcare settings that affects not only the targeted individuals but also the overall work environment and patient care quality. As future healthcare professionals, medical students must be equipped to recognize, address, and prevent bullying to foster a safe and supportive workplace.

## Definition of bullying

Bullying in the workplace is defined as repeated and unreasonable behaviour directed towards a person or a group that creates a risk to health and safety. It includes actions intended to intimidate, degrade, humiliate, or undermine an individual or group.

## Types of bullying behaviour

Bullying can manifest in various forms, including:



- **Verbal abuse:** Insults, belittling comments, yelling, or offensive jokes.
- **Physical aggression:** Threats or physical violence.
- **Exclusion:** Purposefully isolating an individual from professional discussions or social interactions.
- **Manipulation of work:** Unreasonable demands, withholding necessary information, or setting impossible deadlines.
- **Cyberbullying:** Use of digital platforms to spread rumours, shame, or exclude an individual.

## Bullying in healthcare: Key facts



- **Prevalence:** Studies indicate that up to 50% of healthcare workers experience bullying at some point in their careers.
- **Vulnerable groups:** Medical students, junior doctors, and nursing staff are at higher risk due to hierarchical structures and power imbalances.
- **Perpetrators:** Bullying can be perpetrated by colleagues, supervisors, or even patients and their families.
- **Gender dynamics:** Women and minority groups are disproportionately affected by bullying in healthcare settings.

## Impact of bullying on medical students and healthcare professionals



- **Psychological effects:** Anxiety, depression, burnout, and decreased self-esteem.
- **Physical effects:** Sleep disturbances, headaches, gastrointestinal problems, and more.
- **Professional impact:** Decreased job satisfaction, increased absenteeism, higher turnover rates, and impaired clinical decision-making.
- **Patient safety:** Bullying disrupts team communication and cohesion, potentially compromising patient care and safety.



Seek support:  
Medical School  
Student Support



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# Bullying:

## A fact sheet for medical students cont'd.

### Signs that you might be experiencing bullying



- Feeling anxious or distressed when interacting with specific individuals.
- Experiencing sudden changes in mood or self-esteem after certain professional encounters.
- Receiving consistent negative feedback that is not constructive.
- Feeling isolated or excluded from team activities.
- Experiencing or witnessing repeated belittling or demeaning comments.

### What to do if you experience or witness bullying



- 1. Document the behaviour:** Keep detailed records of incidents, including dates, times, and descriptions of what occurred.
- 2. Seek support:** Speak to medical student support or your student coordinator at your clinical site.
- 3. Report:** Meet with MSST to discuss options for formal and informal reporting
- 4. Take care of yourself:** Seek counselling or psychological support to manage stress and maintain mental health. [Support options for Medical School students - Medical School - University of Queensland \(uq.edu.au\)](https://www.uq.edu.au/medical-school/support-options-for-medical-school-students)

### Prevention and building a positive culture



- **Awareness and training:** Attend training programs on workplace bullying, bystander intervention, and conflict resolution.
- **Lead by example:** Cultivate empathy, respect, and professionalism in all interactions.
- **Promote open communication:** Foster an environment where feedback is constructive, and everyone feels comfortable speaking up.

### Resources for medical students



- [Support for students experiencing discrimination, harassment or bullying behaviours - Medical School - University of Queensland \(uq.edu.au\)](https://www.uq.edu.au/medical-school/support-options-for-medical-school-students)
- [Support options for Medical School students - Medical School - University of Queensland \(uq.edu.au\)](https://www.uq.edu.au/medical-school/support-options-for-medical-school-students)



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