

## Fighting back

**Level:** Intermediate upwards

**Timing:** 90 minutes plus

**Material needed:** One copy of the student worksheets and Vocabulary record per student; one copy of the interview per student (optional)

**Group size:** Any

### Overview

This lesson plan, for both pre-experience and in-work business students, is based around an article first published in *Business Spotlight* Issue 3/2012. In the article, the author talks to experts in the field of dealing with workplace bullying. The article provides information about why people may bully their colleagues, why other colleagues may stand by and let it happen, how the victims of bullying may act and talks about how companies may, unwittingly, encourage bullying.

The tasks in the student worksheets encourage the students to learn and use new business vocabulary and functional language and also to practise useful business skills, such as researching and summarizing information.

The teacher's notes provide suggestions for teaching and learning strategies as well as ideas on how to present the tasks in the classroom, any necessary answer keys and extension tasks (for in class or as homework).

### Scanning for information

This scanning task introduces the students to the topic of bullying and gives them a brief overview of the article.

**Key:**

*a. in the schoolyard, at work and on social networks; b. because they have no tone of voice; c. lost production and unethical behaviour, such as stealing or taking longer breaks*

### Key words

The students should complete the sentences and definitions with the key words from the article. The paragraph numbers are given to help them. As a follow-up task, the students are asked to find and circle the words in the article and to notice which words come before and after the key words. The purpose of this task

is to draw their attention to fixed phrases, such as *at the expense of*, and collocations, such as *behave unethically*.

**Key:**

*1. bullies; 2. subtle; 3. victims; 4. assertive; 5. bystanders; 6. anxious; 7. unethically; 8. expense; 9. indulge; 10. non-confrontational; 11. targets; 12. envy; 13. eradicate; 14. contain*

### Extra task

As an extra awareness-raising task, you may like to draw the students' attention to the first line of the article and the usage and spelling of the words: *you're*, *your* and *you*.

### Understanding the article

Students should read the statements and decide whether they are true or false. They should do this first just using their own knowledge and opinions, without looking at the article. They can then justify or correct their answers according to the information they can find in the article. They should correct and rewrite any statements that they believe to be false. This task requires them to read the article more intensely.

**Key:**

*1. F; 2. F; 3. T; 4. T; 5. T; 6. F; 7. T; 8. F; 9. F; 10. F*

### Missing information and vocabulary learning

The first part of this task requires the students to complete sections A and B with the missing sentences. Doing this will encourage them to read into and think about the information and what it represents, rather than just skimming over it.

The second part asks students to highlight words and expressions that they know but do not yet actively use. They should then write sentences using these new terms in order to move them from passive to active English.

**Key:**

*A: directing bad or obscene language at an employee; needlessly checking and rechecking someone's work; unfairly ignoring employees for promotions or refusing to provide them with training*

*B: call in an independent mediator; talk to colleagues or supervisors to ask for support; talk to a trade union representative*

## Fighting back

### Teaching and learning strategy: Vocabulary – passive to active

Many students will have fallen into the habit of highlighting or underlining words that they do not know. The problem with this is that they may not know them for a good reason, e.g. they may not be very useful words to know.

The second part of the 'Missing information and vocabulary learning' task requires the students to underline or highlight words that they understand but do not yet actively use when they speak or write English. These may be words that they have often heard but were never sure how to use, words that are similar to words in their own language or words that have been in the news a lot recently.

Asking them to notice these words or expressions and then put them into sentences of their own – with the aid of the teacher, other students or dictionaries – will encourage them to take the next step and move the words and expressions from passive to active English.

### Discussion

The discussion questions encourage the students to talk about what they have read and widen the topic to include their own opinions, experience and feelings.

### Web task

Divide the sites up amongst students and ask them to research and report back on what they have found out.

### Additional reading

For more advanced students, or those with a particular interest in the topic, there is an additional page which contains Margaret Davis' interview with an expert in the field of workplace bullying.

### Vocabulary record

Here, students should be encouraged to record all the new and useful vocabulary they have learned during the lesson, not only in the form presented in the article but also in related forms.

### Related topics on onestopenglish

For follow-up lessons on the same or related topics, go to the following lesson plans in the Business section on onestopenglish:

Business Spotlight: Emotional roller coaster  
<http://www.onestopenglish.com/business/business-spotlight/emotional-roller-coaster/550434.article>

Business Spotlight: All together now  
<http://www.onestopenglish.com/business/business-spotlight/all-together-now/>

You may also find topical and relevant *Guardian* news lessons here on onestopenglish:  
<http://www.onestopenglish.com/skills/news-lessons/>

## Fighting back

### 1 Scanning for information

Scan the article and identify ...

1. ... three places where bullying might take place.
2. ... why emails might be misunderstood.
3. ... how bullying costs companies money.

### 2 Key words

Write the key words from the article next to the definitions below. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

anxious    assertive    bullies    bystanders    subtle    unethically    victims

1. people who use their strength or power to frighten or hurt weaker people \_\_\_\_\_ (para 1)
2. not obvious, and therefore difficult to notice \_\_\_\_\_ (para 1)
3. people who have suffered as a result of the actions or negative attitudes of someone else \_\_\_\_\_ (para 2)
4. behaving in a confident way in which you are quick to express your opinions and feelings \_\_\_\_\_ (para 7)
5. people who are in a particular place by chance when something happens but who are not directly connected with it \_\_\_\_\_ (para 8)
6. worried because you think something bad might happen \_\_\_\_\_ (para 10)
7. in a morally wrong or unacceptable way \_\_\_\_\_ (para 11)

contain    envy    eradicate    expense    indulge    non-confrontational    targets

8. If one thing exists or happens at the \_\_\_\_\_ of another, the second thing suffers or is not done properly because of the first. (para 12)
9. to allow yourself to do something (bad) that you enjoy \_\_\_\_\_ (para 12)
10. behaving in a way that shows you do not want to have an argument or fight with someone \_\_\_\_\_ (para 12)
11. the people who are bullied or victimized \_\_\_\_\_ (para 12)
12. the unhappy feeling of wanting to be like someone else or have what they have \_\_\_\_\_ (para 12)
13. to get rid of something completely, especially something bad \_\_\_\_\_ (para 13)
14. control and prevent something from spreading \_\_\_\_\_ (para 13)

Now find and circle the key words in the article and notice which other words come before and after them. Together, do they form any useful expressions or word pairs?

## Fighting back

### Fighting back

by Margaret Davis

Haven't we all been bullied at some time or another? Margaret Davis explores different forms of workplace bullying, how you should act if you are bullied and what you can do to prevent it happening.



1 "You're fat!" "Your dress is ugly!" "You talk funny!"  
Schoolyard bullies are not subtle. Their tactics are direct, and they may add a slap, a push or a kick to make sure their message is clear. If only workplace bullies were so easy to recognize. They rarely do anything physical. Yet their actions can be deeply painful.

2 The term "bullying" refers to behaviour that makes it difficult for workers to do their jobs, or makes their working lives unpleasant or dangerous. In extreme cases, bullying can threaten people's mental or physical health and even lead to suicide. According to the Workplace Bullying Institute, a US organization, 72 per cent of bullies are bosses and 60 per cent are men. Women bullies tend to target other women: 71 per cent of their victims are also female.

3 Although up to 50 per cent of employees say they have been targeted by bullies during their careers, only 40 per cent say they have informed their employers – perhaps because the employers were the ones who actually did the bullying.

4 As more and more people use email and social networks, cyberbullying (or "e-bullying") is becoming increasingly common. Cyberbullying does not always happen at work, but it can still affect the workplace – for example, when colleagues or bosses make negative comments or publish private information about employees on Facebook or other social-networking sites. In the case of Facebook posts, Clive Lewis of Globis Mediation Group told the *Financial Times*: "Small disagreements that would once have been between two people ignite and catch the interest of the whole organization."

5 Andreas Liefoghe, head of organizational psychology at Birkbeck College in London, advises caution: "Email has no tone of voice. So, you might get a message that says 'Thanks very much' and interpret it as sarcastic

because you're in a bad mood. People need to try to keep the subjective stuff out of email. If you get an email from your co-worker or boss that makes you angry, I would always advise you to send it to yourself, then read it a bit later," Liegooghe adds. "Ask yourself how it comes across."

6 How can you decide whether your boss is a bully – or perhaps just undiplomatic? "We've all had bosses who are rough around the edges, and sometimes you just have to deal with it," says Tom Davenport, a senior consultant at human resources consultancy Towers Watson.

7 "But it's one thing to have an assertive boss, and it's another to have one that makes you feel sick – psychologically, physically and emotionally sick," Davenport told *USA Today*.

8 Especially in a difficult economic climate, employees may be afraid to report bullying for fear of losing their jobs. They may also worry that, by complaining, they will anger the bully and make the situation worse. Colleagues can be helpful, but they have their own concerns, warns consultant Catherine Mattice of Civility Partners in San Diego. "A lot of times, bystanders see bullying, but they won't stand up."

9 "They don't want to attract attention," Mattice told *USA Today*. "Anyone who is being bullied feels trapped, because where are they going to go? They feel stuck there until the economy gets better."

## Fighting back

**10** Meanwhile, bullying costs companies money, often in the form of lost production. Formerly decisive and efficient workers may become anxious and have trouble concentrating – symptoms for managers and colleagues to watch for, as they could be signs that an employee is the target of bullying.

**11** Robert Sutton, author and professor of management at Stanford University, says that bullied employees can also behave unethically. Because they feel mistreated, they may steal office supplies or look for other jobs on company time. “They’ll take longer breaks, and they’ll be less likely to help others,” Sutton says.

**12** Consultant Valerie Cade of Calgary, Alberta, says that many workplaces, consciously or unconsciously, encourage bullies by rewarding competition within teams or placing a high value on working late at the expense of family life. “In these environments, work bullies can indulge their worst behaviour – finding fault, setting unrealistic goals and even aggression – and get away with it,” Cade writes on her website, *Bully Free at Work*. Bullies often target people who are cooperative and non-confrontational, because they think these people will not fight back, Cade says. Such targets are frequently good at their jobs and popular with their

colleagues, qualities that bullies often envy. Don’t bother trying to work harder or be nicer to the bully to get him to change, Cade advises: “A target’s first duty is to realize the bullying behaviour for what it is. The bully has a low self-image, and this has nothing to do with the target.”

**13** Although many organizations are working to eliminate workplace bullying, sceptics believe it will never completely disappear. “Bullying is part of the human condition – and it’s endemic to primates living in groups,” says Andreas Liefoghe. “A lot of people want to eradicate it, but you can’t. You need to contain it and make it as unacceptable as possible.”



**MARGARET DAVIS** is a Canadian journalist and editor of the Careers and Global Business sections of *Business Spotlight*.

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**Note:** This is an abridged version of an article originally published in *Business Spotlight* 3/2012.

### 3 Understanding the article

Decide whether the following statements are true (T) or false (F) according to the information in the article. Correct any that are false.

1. School bullies are more subtle than office bullies.
2. 60% of bullies are bosses.
3. Women mostly bully other women.
4. Many employees don’t tell their employers that they are being bullied.
5. Social networks have opened up a whole new area of bullying.
6. If your boss is undiplomatic, then he / she is probably a bully too.
7. Colleagues often don’t come to the aid of a bullied co-worker.
8. Some employees are bullied because they steal office supplies.
9. Companies try to discourage bullying by rewarding competition.
10. People who are bullied often secretly envy the bully.

## Fighting back

### 4 Missing information and vocabulary learning

Decide which category the six sentence fragments belong to and write them into sections A or B.

- directing bad or obscene language at an employee
- call in an independent mediator
- talk to colleagues or supervisors to ask for support
- needlessly checking and rechecking someone's work
- unfairly ignoring employees for promotions or refusing to provide them with training
- talk to a trade union representative

#### A Forms of bullying

Workplace bullying takes many forms, some more direct than others. Here are some of them:

- frequent criticizing of an employee, especially in the presence of others
- taking tasks or responsibility away from an employee unnecessarily
- withholding information that is necessary for employees to do their jobs
- \_\_\_\_\_
- making physical or verbal threats
- \_\_\_\_\_
- overloading people with work so that they are sure to fail
- stealing someone else's ideas and presenting them as one's own
- telling lies or spreading rumours about someone else's work or private life
- \_\_\_\_\_
- sending threatening or inappropriate emails (note that people can also be offended by the content of attachments such as photographs, even when they are intended as a joke)

#### B What to do about bullying

Experts recommend a number of formal and informal methods of dealing with bullying. Here are some of them:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- Talk to the bully: perhaps you have misinterpreted his behaviour and intentions.
- Talk to your HR department to find out if your company has an anti-bullying policy.
- \_\_\_\_\_
- Keep a record of all incidents, with dates and times; be sure to keep copies of emails or other written correspondence from the bully.
- \_\_\_\_\_
- File a formal grievance with your employer: check with your HR department to find out the correct procedure. Before filing a formal grievance, try to solve the problem informally by talking to your employer. Your employer is more likely to pay attention to your case if you can show that the bully's actions are having a negative effect on the business. This is especially true if the bully is targeting other people as well as you. Talk to your colleagues to find out if they have also been targeted.
- Take your case to an employment tribunal or civil court. This is usually the last resort; before taking this route, make sure that you have tried all the informal solutions to the problem.

Read sections A and B again. Highlight words and expressions that you know but do not yet actively use. Then write sentences using these words.

## Fighting back

### 5 Discussion

Discuss these quotes from the article.

... bystanders see bullying, but they won't stand up.

Especially in a difficult economic climate, employees may be afraid to report bullying for fear of losing their jobs.

... many workplaces ... encourage bullies by rewarding competition within teams or placing a high value on working late at the expense of family life.

### 6 Web task

Research and report back to your class on what you have found on the websites below.

- The Workplace Bullying Institute provides expert advice, coaching, training and public education on bullying: [www.workplacebullying.org](http://www.workplacebullying.org)
- Civility Partners offers advice and information on workplace bullying: [www.noworkplacebullies.com](http://www.noworkplacebullies.com)
- Consultant Valerie Cade has a range of information, including a blog and videos, on her website, *Bully Free at Work*: [www.bullyfreetatwork.com](http://www.bullyfreetatwork.com)
- The International Association on Workplace Bullying and Harassment has about 130 members from more than 20 countries worldwide: [www.iawbh.org](http://www.iawbh.org)

## Fighting back

### 7 Additional reading

**“We have all experienced bullying at some point”** by Catherine Mattice



#### CATHERINE MATTICE

is a consultant and trainer who specializes in dealing with workplace bullying. She runs her own company, Civility Partners, in San Diego, California.

#### Is there a typical bully profile?

Yes. Bullies are generally self-centred, lack emotional intelligence and communication skills, are easily provoked by stress and are power-seeking. Many bullies simply lack the ability to communicate in a way that doesn't hurt others.

#### Are bullies insecure?

Yes. Bullies are threatened by those who are performing well or whom managers seem to like, and that's why they bully those individuals. Organizational factors such as change, downsizing, new managers or changes in leaders also seem to cause bullying.

#### Who gets bullied?

Everyone! Bullies use their power against anyone who will accept it. In other words, we have all experienced an initial bullying incident at some point. But some of us are immediately assertive and quickly stand up to the bully, making it clear that bullying behaviour will not be tolerated. As a result, we are not bullied any more. Others find that difficult to do.

#### Should you ignore or walk away from a bully, or should you confront him or her?

You should immediately confront the bully at that first incident, using the three steps of assertiveness and using assertive body language. The three steps of assertiveness are: first, validate the behaviour; second, state the problem with that behaviour, and third, state the solution. If the bully shouts, for example, you

should say: “I understand you are angry at me because you think I made a mistake [1], but the problem with your shouting at me is that it is unprofessional [2]. In the future, I expect you to treat me with more respect and to act in a way that is professional and civil [3].” Assertive body language includes constant eye contact, feet firmly on the ground, toes pointed forward, hands on hips or down to the side, instead of folded, leaning forward slightly, and shoulders back rather than hunched over. If you do these things initially, the bullying will more than likely end.

#### What if the bullying has gone on for longer?

Research has shown that, when people do try to confront the bully after it has been happening for a while, the bullying gets worse. For this reason, many experts say that you should not stand up to the bully. However, I believe you should, because if you decide to go to your managers, one of the first questions they will ask is whether you have tried to deal with this problem on your own. If you say no, you will be seen as weak. If you say yes, but that your confrontation didn't help and you are still having a problem, you will be seen as a strong person who did try to solve the problem on your own first.

If a target decides to talk to HR or other managers, the target should first document the behaviour. Every time bullying happens, write down as much detail as you can remember, including who showed bullying behaviour and who else was there and witnessed the bullying; what exactly was said by all people in the room; the date and time; where the incident took place and what policy the behaviour violated, or why the behaviour was unprofessional.

#### Do bosses ever get bullied by employees?

Yes. Studies have found that 70 per cent of bullying is superior-to-subordinate, and 30 per cent is subordinate-to-superior or peer-to-peer bullying. I became interested in bullying because of my own experiences at work. The bully was at my level in the company, and he bullied the president of the company quite often.

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