

# Seven ways women can stop being bullied at work



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Let's face it, ladies: women are sometimes bullied at work. Many women have had the unpleasant experience of having an employee, boss, or peer put them down, criticize them unfairly in meetings or sabotage their successes.

Men can be bullied at work, too, and sometimes women bully other women. But regardless of who starts it, we all intuitively know this: Women need to feel empowered to navigate conflict at work.

The best way to fight office bullying is to confront it immediately when it occurs:

» **Recognize what is happening and respond immediately.** If your instincts tell you are being sabotaged at work, listen to yourself. Women tend to think coworkers will be their friends. Sometimes that is true – and sometimes it is not.

» **Confront or challenge the bully.** Be smart and strategic, not reactive or vindictive. If you allow poor behavior to go unchecked, it gives the impression that it's all right with you. A bully seeks a victim, so as long as the bully knows he or she can intimidate you, harassment will continue. Once a bully believes you will go toe-to-toe with them, respect for you will rise.

» **Start with a look and one word.** A direct look, raised eyebrow and the "death stare" will serve you well. Sometimes off-color jokes or negative

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references can be stopped with one word, such as "Really?" along with an incredulous look. Monitoring smiling here is critical – especially for women. Smiling when delivering a riposte undercuts the message that you are displeased or insulted.

» **Try a little humor.** Was the comment made to you or about you demeaning, sexist, trivializing or just unprofessional?

Sometimes humor can defuse a situation and convert an office bully into a friend.

» **Create alliances at work.** While reality TV shows can be ridiculous, they point out the importance of alliances at work. Identify power players and be friendly with them.

These friends will back you up when you need them, just as you will for them.

» **Develop strong body language, communication skills.** Be clear with your boundaries and make certain you are focused on business. Take assertiveness courses if you need them so you don't act and sound like a potential target.

» **Attack bullies with skill, aplomb and a few new techniques.** Avoid going to the highest levels of response, which are to contact Human Resources or pursue litigation. Litigation takes an emotional and financial toll that your career may not survive. It may offer the prospect of good news financially, but your chances of winning are not necessarily good.