

**Thursday, 23 April 2015**

## **People Must Seek Help for Workplace Bullying, Say Counsellors**

The Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP) is urging people who are suffering from bullying in the workplace to seek help.

The association is the largest professional organisation in the sector and represents almost 4,000 counsellors / psychotherapists across Ireland.

The IACP made the call as it emerged that there had been a sharp rise in workplace bullying in some professions, most notably in nursing and midwifery.

Shane Kelly, spokesman for the IACP, said: "Bullying is usually seen as acts or verbal comments that could mentally hurt or isolate a person in the workplace. It can involve inappropriate physical contact as well.

"Bullying can often involve repeated incidents or a pattern of behaviour that is intended to intimidate, offend, degrade, undermine or humiliate a particular person or group of people," he added.

"It can be direct but in many cases it is indirect and subtle. It can be openly aggressive but also passive aggressive.

"For those on the receiving end of bullying, it can have very serious and damaging effects, eroding self-confidence, make individuals feel physically sick on a daily basis and even cause depression over time."

The IACP advised anyone who was being subjected to such behaviour – especially if it was happening on a repeated basis - to contact a friend, relative, their GP or a counsellor / psychotherapist.

"Bullying is usually considered to be a pattern of behaviour where one or more incidents in this pattern will help show that bullying is taking place," Mr Kelly explained.

The organisation also stressed that bullying in the workplace took many other forms. These included making jokes that were offensive by spoken word or e-mail; socially excluding or isolating someone; making false statements or starting false rumours and gossip about a colleague and impeding a colleague's work.

This last form of bullying could include treatment such as the unexplained removal of responsibilities and changing work guidelines without explanation, which would serve to undermine a person.

In some instances, the IACP said, people who had been subjected to bullying had been set impossible deadlines, had information withheld or were deliberately told the wrong information to ensure that they would fail.

"It is no coincidence that workplace bullying has been described as the assertion of power through aggression," said Mr Kelly.

However, he also pointed out that people suffering from workplace bullying could take some practical steps to address the problem.

Tell the person that his or her behaviour is not acceptable and ask them to stop. If it persists, keep a factual journal or diary of daily events," Mr Kelly said, adding that it was important to keep a record of the date, time and what happened as well as the names of witnesses and the outcome of the event.

"Remember, it is not just the character of the incidents, but the number, frequency, and especially the pattern that can reveal the bullying or harassment," Mr Kelly added.

For that reason, the IACP said it was of vital importance to keep copies of any letters, memos, e-mails, texts, from the bully. The organisation also strongly advised reporting this harassment to a supervisor or line manager, but equally advised against retaliating.

“You may end up looking like the perpetrator and will cause confusion for those responsible for evaluating and responding to the situation,” Mr Kelly said. “It is also advisable that you seek support from a friend, GP or counsellor / psychotherapist but do not suffer in silence,” he added.

ENDS

For more information, contact Richard Brophy, OHC on 086 385 3260 / email: [rbrophy@ohcpr.ie](mailto:rbrophy@ohcpr.ie)

About the IACP:

Established in 1981, the IACP identifies, develops and maintains professional standards of excellence in counselling and psychotherapy through education, training and accreditation. In promoting best practice and the professional development of its members, IACP holds at its core the protection of the public. Representing both the interests of clients and practitioners, IACP provides a telephone referral helpline, an information service; and an online counsellor / psychotherapist / supervisor directory. IACP is a registered Charity (CHY 6615).