



- Yelling at you
- Stalking
- Unrealistic work demands
- Public reprimands
- Accusing you of errors or misconduct that cannot be documented
- Making you the butt of jokes
- Threatening you with harm, directly or indirectly
- Constant criticism
- Withholding information that you need to do your work
- Encouraging others to behave in the same way

Note that bullying behavior does not have to cause physical harm. We are not talking about the infamous schoolyard bully who knocks someone down to take their lunch money. The member who came to church every Sunday (“repeated” behavior) with duct tape on his mouth (“inappropriate” behavior) was engaged in bullying.

One of the marks of bullying is the effect the bully has on his or her victims. They often report mental and physical reactions such as:

- Panic attacks
- Sleep disruption
- Anxiety
- Headaches
- Digestive or heart problems
- High blood pressure
- Reduced concentration and decision-making ability
- Loss of self-esteem and self-confidence
- Depression
- Poor relationships with family and friends

## ***What Is Not Bullying?***

A single incident of unreasonable behavior is *not* bullying, although any incident should be documented since it may be the first in a repeated or escalating pattern.

Also, reasonable behavior that is designed to clarify work responsibilities or to evaluate performance is not bullying. For example, an annual evaluation by your congregation’s board is not bullying, even if it causes you all the physical symptoms listed above. A board may choose to set realistic and achievable new performance goals for you, create appropriate deadlines for the performance of functions necessary to your job, change your job description to conform to the church’s stated goals, or take disciplinary action, including termination, when appropriate and justified, without having engaged in bullying. If, however, the board were to engage in a pattern of setting new and unachievable goals every month, this could be construed as bullying because it is repeated and unreasonable.

## What Are Your Options?

First, every congregation should have a bullying policy that includes the following:

- A clear definition of bullying and a list of examples (for the enlightenment of members who are reluctant to think the worst of fellow members)
- A statement that bullying behavior *by* any member or staff person *toward* any member or staff person is unacceptable and will not be tolerated under any circumstances
- Encouragement to report any instance of bullying and clear direction about to whom it should be reported
- A promise to treat all such reports seriously and investigate them promptly and impartially
- A promise to protect any staff person who reports bullying from being retaliated against by another staff person or a member
- A clear statement that, if someone is physically threatened, a no-contact order will be pursued
- A clear statement that any member who engages in documented bullying behavior may be removed from the rolls of the church and any staff person who engages in documented bullying behavior may be terminated

Bullying is not usually about you. It's about someone else's need for dominance and control. Stand up to the bully, be clear about the offensive behavior and insist that it stop, document your experiences, report them to your board, report them to your judicatory, and insist that all appropriate policies be followed. And if the culture of the congregation is such that it simply can't bring itself to confront the bullying behavior, then leave.