



What can the officers do?

Getting the climate right. Prevention is always better than cure. Harassment and bullying are unpleasant, disruptive types of behaviour. What can senior officers do to prevent this type of behaviour? Here are some suggestions:

- Be aware of potential problems. Modern management recognises that people from different cultures have different sensitivities, and those in senior positions should be aware of employees who are less able to speak up for themselves.
- People often find themselves being picked on because they stand out from the crowd. Do any crew members fit that profile – a lone woman, someone from a different racial group?
- Are there any particularly inexperienced individuals on board?
- Are there officers who have not worked with the particular racial groups on your ship before?

Early warning. Are those responsible for handling these situations clear about:

- What to look for? Partly this is a case of being conscious of the informal signs of a poisoned atmosphere, such as people appearing depressed or being reluctant to communicate.
In addition, what often happens when people are being bullied is that their work performance deteriorates.
- There is an obvious danger that this can be interpreted as a disciplinary problem, particularly if the bully is in a position to support that interpretation. It is very important for any investigation of poor performance to hear both sides of the story and identify the root causes.
- What to do? Those who are being bullied or harassed often feel isolated, powerless and reluctant to believe that reporting what is happening will do any good.
- They tend to identify the bully with the company, and think that making a complaint will make a bad situation worse.
- It is therefore very important that when senior staff members encounter evidence that harassment or bullying is taking place they are able to demonstrate that they know precisely what to do and are committed to taking action.



Systems.

- Unfair allocation of work is a very common symptom of harassment and bullying.
- People are given more than their fair share of unpleasant jobs, or trivial work beneath their professional competence, or are denied access to interesting work which will help them develop and advance their careers, or are simply given more work than they can cope with.
- Are there clear definitions of roles and responsibilities on your ship? Do you have clear work procedures and are they followed?
- Are there fair and transparent systems for allocating work?

Policy and procedures.

- Is the company's policy on harassment and bullying clear to you?
- Has it been communicated to everyone on board?
- Does everyone on board understand that they can report harassment and bullying, in confidence, and that their complaints will be investigated and action taken?
- Do you know who you should report incidents of bullying to?

Read more:

A Good Working Life at Sea

- Chapter 2 Communication and information
- Chapter 3 Conflict management and prevention