



The Adult Bully

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Many people can relate stories of being bullied when young or even throughout school. Unfortunately bullying doesn't always stop when we grow up. A boss, a partner, a family member, or even a friend (!) can be a bully. Dealing with a bully is anything but easy. Bullies usually operate from a position of power and surround themselves with allies. Standing up to a bully can mean being fired or being abused. Even appealing to an authority figure may not help.

The bully usually is found in powerful roles or they have created their own form of power. They are narcissistic and have a need for control. They want you to conform to what they want and will not respect different views and opinions. Because of their powerful roles few people are willing to challenge them. They are also difficult to challenge because they make sure they don't operate on their own. They create a network around them that supports them and backs them up whenever anyone tries to stand up to them. Typically if you try to confront an adult bully, they will play innocent or the victim. And if you confront them with evidence they will twist the evidence so it looks to others like you are the "bad guy". Bullies are masterful at manipulating the truth and constructing stories to make themselves look good. Which they then communicate with great cunning to others to show everyone what a wonderful person they are and what an awful person you – the victim of the bully – is.



Here are some guidelines that may help you handle the adult bully in your life:

1. *Recognise bullying for what it is. Acknowledge to yourself that you are dealing with a bully. Don't try and minimize it or pretend it's something else. It is only when you can face the situation head on for what it is that you can deal with it effectively. Recognising that someone is a bully also helps you to handle yourself. You can stop asking yourself over and over again, "What did I do to cause this, and how do I stop this?", and recognise this person is a bully and its not about you, it's about them.*
2. *If there is a system then recognise the system they are part of. Bullying is often part of a system that rewards bullying, be it an autocratic situation at work, or a belief in male dominance. Your boss may be best friends with the bully. The organisation you work for may believe that bullies get the best results. If you know what the factors are that allow the bullying to continue, it helps you find constructive ways to address it. Understanding the dynamics of the situation will help you to not get taken by surprise.*
3. *If at all possible, get away from the bully. Get out of the situation. Nothing you do or say is going to change them because it is not about you. It is about them. You can stand on your head, be their slave, give them all your money, and do whatever you think is necessary to placate them, but it won't stop. If its does, it will be for a short time, before the bully starts again. If you can, get out. And then get on with your life somewhere else. You may not be able to exit the situation immediately, but you may be able to start making plans to exit, which you need to do. For example, start finding another job. The longer you stay in a situation with a bully the more they will undermine you and you will lose self-esteem and confidence. Consequently, it will become even harder to leave because you will start to believe you are not good enough to go anywhere else.*
4. *Bullies are unlikely to take responsibility for their behaviour. Everything is everyone else's fault. "You are making them behave like that." They love to tell you that you are the one who is going crazy, who is a problem, who is wrong. Don't expect a bully to own up or take responsibility. They won't. And for that reason, don't expect the bully to change. They are not likely to.*
5. *If you leave a situation, particularly a domestic situation, consider if there will be violence and if so get someone to stay with you and report your concerns to the police and anyone else you can. Make sure you have the numbers of hotlines and other agencies that are anti-abuse on hand. Also make sure you are in safe places at all times or with someone. Bullies don't like crowds. Few people will bully you when you are with a whole bunch of people. They target people on their own.*
6. *Document what happens. One of the huge benefits of technology is that with emails, cell phones with cameras and video, and CCTV cameras all over the place, you can document what happens. You can record and collect evidence. When it comes to dealing with a bully you need hard evidence. The bully is usually such a manipulator that they will twist and turn stories, so you need something more than "he said", "she said". Photos, videos, screen shots, and other evidence are powerful in dealing with a bully. Also, with your evidence write down the times, locations, other witnesses, and anything said or done that you feel is relevant to the situation. The more detailed factual evidence you have the harder it is for the bully to convince people you are imagining or exaggerating their bad behaviour.*
7. *Don't go it alone. Find others to support you. It could be friends. It could be family. It could be colleagues. It could be organisations. Being bullied is a traumatic experience and you need people with you on this. You also need people to talk to about your experience in order to deal with the consequences and aftereffects of being bullied.*

Unfortunately bullying is not rare. It happens to many people. The consequences can be devastating: Loss of self-esteem and confidence, anxiety, depression, stress, physical illness, poor work performance, damaged personal relationships. So talk to someone and get help to deal with the situation.