



Dealing with Bullying at University

Information for HDR Candidates and Supervisors

Western Sydney University is committed to ensuring a safe and healthy environment, free from bullying, where all members of the University are treated inclusively and with respect.

The following information is provided to assist you in understanding the University's position in relation to bullying, what you should do if you experience bullying from any member of your supervision panel or witness instances of bullying, and how the University will respond to bullying.

What is bullying?

Bullying is repeated, unreasonable behaviour that creates a risk to health, safety and wellbeing, including psychological, emotional and physical health. The behaviour may occur face-to-face on campus, via phone or email, online, within residential colleges, and/or via interactions with third parties.

Bullying may be discriminatory, based on someone's race, gender, sexual orientation, disability or religious beliefs or it may have no apparent cause.

Bullying may occur between individuals or groups or between students and staff.

Bullying is not acceptable to anyone, anytime, anywhere.

Some examples of bullying may include:

- Verbal abuse, including shouting, aggressive or offensive language, name-calling and personal insults;
- Threatening physical behaviour including physical gestures and unwelcomed physical contact;
- Abusive and inappropriate emails, phone calls or posts on social network sites, either in nature or frequency;
- Distributing offensive photos, graphic material or messages;
- Non-constructive criticism about work or academic performance including derogatory, demeaning and insulting remarks;
- Excluding or isolating students from normal study interaction without justification; or
- Badmouthing or denigrating a person in conversation with others, online or under any other circumstance, with or without that person's knowledge.

Bullying is not:

- A single display of unacceptable behaviour, unless it is extreme in nature and a reasonable person would expect another to feel bullied by that instance;
- Reasonable instances of guidance, counselling or managing the study performance of HDR

candidates; or

- Applying student progress and misconduct procedures, academic integrity procedures or assessment due dates.

What is the impact of bullying?

Bullying can have a negative impact on mental and physical wellbeing. People who are being bullied may experience decreased self-esteem which can lead to reduced attendance at University or work and withdrawal from social activities. They may experience depression, stress related illnesses, substance abuse and display self-harming behaviours.

Have you witnessed someone being bullied?

You can help make Western Sydney University a learning environment that is free from bullying. If you have witnessed bullying, you can help by speaking up and taking steps to help someone who is being bullied. Do not be a silent bystander or encourage bullying behaviour in any way. Support the person who is being bullied to ask for help, direct them to resources about bullying and suggest that they contact the [Student Welfare Service](#) for further information.

If you're unsure about what you should do and would like to talk to an impartial person to think things through, you can contact the [Complaints Resolution Unit](#). All matters can be discussed confidentially.

Supervisor Bullying

Supervisors are key to providing an effective and supportive environment for you to undertake your research training. They provide experience, insight and guidance in the design, conduct and timely completion of your research project and support the publication and dissemination of your research findings. Supervisors play an important role in the development of both your research and the skills required for your future career.

This relationship is key to the successful completion of your research training and it is vital that you take responsibility for your part in the relationship. We strongly encourage completion of the [Supervisors - HDR Candidate Compact](#) in the early stages of your candidature. It is important that you continue to discuss your expectations openly and honestly throughout your candidature.

We strongly advise you to address any issues that arise with your supervisory panel and seek help early if any problems arise. However, if this is not possible and the relationship you have with your supervisor(s) is not constructive, please seek assistance from your School or Institute HDR Director. If you are not satisfied with the response from your School or Institute or would like independent advice, please contact the Graduate Research School: grs.hdr@westernsydney.edu.au

Are you experiencing bullying behaviour in the context of HDR supervision?

Some examples of this behaviour include:

- Anger or rage, abusive or aggressive behaviour towards HDR candidates;
- Name calling, insults, sarcasm or ridiculing;
- Threatening or blackmailing candidates;
- Raising of voices, shouting or yelling at candidates;

- Hazing or other rituals;
- Routinely being denigrated in person or behind your back; or
- Unfairly excluding candidates from participating in discussions or activities.

Inappropriate supervisory behaviour may include:

- Any non-accidental unwanted physical contact, including sexual harassment;
- Expectations or requirements of excessive or unreasonable work hours;
- Expectations to engage in work or activities not related to University (e.g. personal errands);
- Excessive swearing or inappropriate language;
- Distribution of inappropriate material; or
- Engaging in illegal or unethical behaviour.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is an abuse of power and is therefore a form of bullying. Sexual harassment is defined as any unwelcome behaviour of a sexual nature that makes a person feel offended, humiliated or intimidated, and which a reasonable person, considering the circumstances, would have anticipated the possibility that the person would be offended, humiliated or intimidated.

The intention of the behaviour is irrelevant. What matters is whether it was reasonable for the person to feel offended, humiliated or intimidated in the context of the incident. Saying it was a joke or not intended to offend is not an excuse.

Western Sydney University has zero tolerance for sexual harassment in our University community. We take reports seriously and support is available.

You can visit the [sexual harassment page](#) for more information, to make a report and to access support services.

Intersectionality

Western Sydney University recognises that people belonging to certain social categories may be more impacted by bullying and less likely to seek support. For example, people who are transgender or those with invisible disabilities, may be less likely to seek help and/or by more accustomed to bullying and have developed their own coping strategies. We pride ourselves on our inclusive and diverse culture, so if you have any concerns or need support you can reach out to [Student Support Services](#).

What should you do if you are bullied by your supervisor?

If you experience or witness bullying, you should do something about it.

Record the behaviours or incidents in writing:

- Make note of the date, time, place and witnesses that were present;
- Describe the behaviours that are upsetting you; and
- Describe any impact the bullying has had on you. For example, did you take any time off your studies or have you been to see a doctor or counsellor?

It is a good idea to email these notes to yourself so you will evidence of them being recorded close to the time that they occurred.

If you have concerns about your relationship with your supervisor, please consider seeking counsel either by contacting the free and confidential [counselling service](#) or your own external support. Your health and wellbeing is important to us and we aim to support all students and their progression.

We are keen to understand if and when there are issues that impede candidature progression. Having a conversation with an independent person (such as Student Services or the Graduate Research School) can be useful if there is any concern or doubt about the severity of an issue or difficult relationship.

Resolve the matter. If you can, speak to your supervisor(s) or the person directly.

- A supervisor may not be aware their behaviour is perceived as bullying or inappropriate. Make it clear that their behaviour is unwelcome and unacceptable and ask them to stop. This may resolve the matter.
- If the bullying is serious (i.e. it is having a significant impact on you personally or your studies), you cannot talk to your supervisor, and/or they have not responded to an earlier conversation you have had with them, you need to report the behaviours to the University. This should be your HDR Director and/or School Dean or Institute Director.
- If the bullying allegation is against another student, you should report it to the relevant Associate Dean, HDR or HDR Director and/or School Dean or Institute Director.
- If you are unsure of who you should be reporting the matter to, you can seek advice from the [Student Welfare Service](#). You can also contact the Graduate the Research School for advice: grs.hdr@westernsydney.edu.au
- You will need to provide information about each instance of bullying behaviour, which is why it's important to record details each time that bullying occurs.
- If you are bullied by any staff member, the matter will be dealt with under the [Bullying Prevention Policy](#).
- If you are bullied by a student or group of students, the matter will be dealt with under the [Student Misconduct Rule](#).
- For more information about how bullying is handled at Western Sydney University, please refer to the [Reporting Bullying Flowchart](#).

Ensure that you stay informed about the progress of your report. Ask the HDR Director and/or School Dean or Institute Director for regular updates.

Where can I get further support?

If you have been bullied and would like assistance reporting it, seek support. The [Student Welfare Service](#) can explain the type of information you should be recording and talk you through the process of getting help.

If you are experiencing bullying and would like to speak to a Counsellor, please contact counselling@westernsydney.edu.au.

If you have followed all of the steps above and you are not satisfied with the outcome, you can make a formal complaint to the [Complaints Management and Resolution Unit](#). They will ask you what you have done to try to resolve the situation before they can investigate the complaint. For more information, refer to the [Complaints Handling and Resolution Policy](#).

Helpful resources

[Reachout](#) – an online youth mental health service that provides detailed information about different types of bullying and links to external support services.

[Bullying Prevention Toolkit](#) – provides further information about bullying including policy and procedures for staff.

[Facebook Safety Centre](#) – provides tools to help you stay safe while using Facebook, including managing account and privacy settings and reporting abusive or offensive content.

Western Sydney is strongly committed to a safe and inclusive working and learning environment with a positive culture. The following policies are relevant to the principle the University implements to inform decisions and actions relating to bullying.

- [Bullying Prevention Policy](#)
- [Code of Conduct](#)
- [Discrimination, Harassment, Vilification and Victimisation Prevention Policy](#)
- [Motting and Hazing Prevention Policy](#)
- [Research Code of Practice](#)
- [Respect and Inclusion in Learning and Working Policy](#)
- [Sexual Harassment Prevention Policy](#)
- [Conflict of Interest Policy](#)