



STEWARDS CORNER

Monthly Newsletter for Union Stewards

Are You OK? Education to Combat Workplace Bullying and Support Mental Health

Workplace bullying and harassment aren't just isolated incidents—they are widespread issues that can seriously impact workers' mental health, job performance, and overall well-being. Stress, anxiety, and depression can result from an unhealthy work environment, leading to problems like increased absenteeism, high turnover, and decreased productivity. As union members, we have a responsibility to demand safe workplaces where every worker is treated with dignity and respect.

Are You OK? Mental Health, Bullying, and Harassment in the Workplace is a course designed to help union members identify, intervene, and support coworkers who may be experiencing bullying or harassment. It also highlights our union's role in pushing for policies and legislation that protect workers from toxic workplace behaviors.

All too often, workplace bullying goes unnoticed or unchallenged. Victims may feel powerless to speak up, and bystanders may not know how to intervene effectively. *Are You OK?* provides participants with practical tools to recognize the warning signs of bullying and harassment, how to step in safely, and redirect harmful behavior—all while ensuring that those affected receive the support they need. Here are some of the key takeaways:

1. Bullying and Harassment Have Real Mental Health Consequences

Workplace bullying isn't just about occasional rudeness or tough feedback—it's about consistent, targeted mistreatment that can harm an individual's emotional well-being. Some of the most common forms include:

- Verbal abuse, humiliation, or public shaming
- Exclusion from meetings or important communication
- Unreasonable workloads or impossible deadlines
- Spreading false rumors or gossip
- Physical intimidation or threats

Research shows that workers who experience workplace bullying are more likely to suffer from stress, depression, and anxiety, leading to burnout, lower job satisfaction, and even physical health issues. This is why early intervention is crucial.

2. Identifying Bullying and Harassment at Work

Many workers who are bullied don't report it because they either fear retaliation or don't recognize the behavior as bullying. As union members, we can help by paying attention to the signs:

- A coworker appears withdrawn or anxious at work

- They suddenly start avoiding meetings or interactions
- They express feeling targeted, excluded, or micromanaged
- They experience a sudden drop in performance due to stress

If we notice these signs, we have an opportunity to step in and support them.

3. The Power of “Are You OK?” A Simple but Effective Intervention Tool

One of the core lessons from the training is how to use the phrase “*Are you OK?*” as a non-confrontational way to intervene when we see bullying or harassment happening. This approach works in two ways:

- Supporting the victim: “*Are you OK? I noticed that interaction seemed tense—do you want to talk?*”
- Redirecting the perpetrator: “*Are you OK? That didn't sound like you. Maybe we should take a step back.*”

This phrase opens the door to conversation without escalating the situation. It provides support to the target while signaling to the perpetrator that their behavior has been noticed.

4. The Union's Role in Addressing Workplace Harassment

Unions play a critical role in preventing and addressing workplace harassment and mental health concerns. Here's how we can make a difference:

- Advocating for clear anti-bullying policies in collective bargaining agreements
- Ensuring safe, anonymous reporting mechanisms for workplace harassment
- Holding management accountable for providing a safe and healthy workplace
- Pushing for employer-provided mental health resources like Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)
- Providing education and training on mental health awareness and intervention strategies and resources.

By acting at the union level, we can ensure that harassment is addressed and not ignored.

Are You OK? is more than just an educational session: it's a call to action for union members to create safe, healthy workplaces. Whether it's checking in on a coworker, intervening in a tough situation, or advocating for better policies, we all have a role to

play in ending workplace bullying and supporting mental health.

If you're interested in learning more about *Are You Ok?* reach out to [Randie Pearson \(rpearson@usw.org\)](mailto:rpearson@usw.org) in the Women of Steel department or [Pam Cantolina \(pcantolina@usw.org\)](mailto:pcantolina@usw.org) in Education and Membership Development. Together, we can make sure that every worker feels safe, valued, and supported on

the job. No one should have to face workplace bullying alone. The first step is simple: Ask, “**Are you OK?**”

Representing Immigrant Workers

The Facts

Immigrants have been a part of the USW since its very beginning. Philip Murray, the first president of the USWA, immigrated to the U.S. from Scotland in 1902 when he was 16. Working alongside his dad in the coal mines of southwestern Pennsylvania, they pooled their money to pay for their nine family members to immigrate to the United States the following year.

Today, one in five workers in the U.S. is an immigrant. Like any other worker, they pay local, state and federal taxes; they contribute a percentage of their earnings to Social Security, Medicare, and other programs. Immigrants serve in the armed forces, and are entrusted with this nation's security.

Today, one in four children in the U.S. has a parent who is an immigrant. And like any other parent, they want to provide safe and loving homes for their children.

Immigrants often labor in low-paying and dangerous workplaces and are especially vulnerable to employers' abuses, so the labor movement is the best place for them to strive for basic protections, economic security and dignity.

Frequently Asked Questions

If you have questions about representing immigrant workers, the best place is to go to your Local Union leadership or Staff Representative. In many instances, the answers will depend on specific facts, and immigration law is complex. Still, here are some frequently asked questions that are good to keep in mind:

What is the union's role in representing immigrant workers?

The union's duty of fair representation applies to all workers regardless of immigration status. If an employer violates the collective-bargaining agreement, stewards and other union representatives must represent the affected worker in the grievance and arbitration procedure.

When the union signs up new members, should it check their immigration status?

No, the union should not inquire into a worker's immigration status. **Employers are entirely responsible for verifying a worker's employment eligibility.** In simple terms, there is no need or legal requirement for the union to verify or ask about a worker's immigration status.

What can the union do to support its immigrant members generally?

In short, the union can bargain a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) or collective bargaining agreement (CBA) provision addressing workplace documentation, raids, and other issues that may affect our immigrant members.

The union can also demand to bargain over any attempt to verify workplace documentation, introduce E-verify, or other immigration-related topics. Please contact your local union leadership or Staff Representative to explore this topic further.

How can the union support immigrant workers who are detained or arrested by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)?

Unions can support these workers in several ways.

Unions can provide immigration-related assistance to workers by referring them to outside legal aid or community organizations that specialize in these matters (contact your USW Staff Representative for information).

If a worker is detained or arrested by ICE, the union can lobby elected officials, organize a public campaign in support of the worker and support the worker's family. **Unions CANNOT and MUST NOT interfere or obstruct ICE raids in any way. If a raid occurs at your workplace, contact your USW Staff Representative immediately.**

If a worker asks for assistance with an immigration-related issue, what can I do?

The union can refer the worker to a reputable immigration attorney and check the CBA for negotiated protections. More generally, local union leaders can help create an environment that is welcoming and inclusive of all people.

The language that we use to discuss this topic is important: no human is “*illegal*.” For example, supporters typically say “*unauthorized*” or “*undocumented immigrant*” when discussing this matter.

An Injury to One is an Injury to All