

- A** When does joking or teasing become bullying?
- B** In pairs, think of as many sources of conflict at work as you can.
examples: *poor time-keeping, interrupting people in meetings*
- C** Read the article on the opposite page quickly and see how many of your answers to Exercise B are mentioned.
- D** Read the article again and answer these questions.
- 1 What should managers do when teasing starts to become hurtful?
 - 2 Why should managers note examples of inappropriate behaviour or language?
 - 3 Why should managers get involved as soon as conflict develops?
 - 4 What happens if managers ignore conflict and poor behaviour?
 - 5 What are the advantages of return-to-work interviews?
- E** Find words in the article that mean the opposite of these words.
- 1 appropriate 2 acceptable 3 polite 4 formal
- F** Discuss these questions.
- 1 Have you ever been involved in any of the examples of conflict listed in the article?
How did/would you feel?
 - 2 What behaviour at work do/would you find inappropriate or unacceptable?
 - 3 How would you deal with these problems?

Intervening quickly in cases of conflict

Managers should be sensitive to when teasing starts to become hurtful. They should be prepared to step in and have a quiet word with the team members involved. The manager should inform those involved that, while plenty of communication is encouraged, it's important that there is respect for other people and that certain standards of behaviour are expected at work. The manager should have noted examples of the types of behaviour or language that have been used that are inappropriate at work, so that those involved will understand what is unacceptable.

It's much easier to have this conversation as soon as a manager starts to have concerns about behaviour or early signs of conflict – to prevent habits from being formed and to ensure that the manager is taken seriously. It's much more difficult to be respected if a manager appears to accept certain behaviour by letting a situation continue for weeks or months.

Dealing with conflict directly

Taking action to manage conflict can appear quite worrying to some managers, but it's an essential part of their role and responsibilities. If managers ignore unacceptable behaviour, problems will get worse until the disciplinary process has to be used or a formal complaint is made, by which time it will be much harder to achieve a successful resolution.

Some potential sources of conflict at work are obvious, such as:

- too much personal use of the Internet or e-mail;
- poor attendance and time-keeping;
- any form of bullying behaviour;
- any form of discrimination (e.g. sexism);
- unacceptable language;
- theft;
- drink or drug problems.



However, frequently it is the less obvious behaviour that over time, if not confronted, will lead to workplace disputes. Examples of less obvious types of dispute include:

- taking credit for other people's work or ideas;
- interrupting people in meetings;
- not inviting team members to social evenings or events;
- not covering for people when they are sick;
- not taking messages for people;
- using someone else's contacts without permission;
- not including people in group e-mails;
- ignoring people or being impolite;
- poor personal hygiene.

Managers should not ignore problems that are developing in their teams. It's vital that line managers have regular, informal, one-to-one conversations with the people they manage, so that these kinds of issues can be discussed naturally where possible.

However, managers must also be prepared to begin informal discussions if they think a problem is starting to develop. Conflict at work can lead to absences, so return-to-work interviews are also a good opportunity for managers to ask questions about any conflict issues that might be worrying employees.