

## The Toxic Boss and Bullying in the Workplace:

### The psychological effects and how to deal with them

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## Plan

1. The psychological effects of the toxic workplace
2. What to do about the effects
3. Negotiating your relationship with a toxic boss
4. Some Dos and Don'ts

## Psychological effects of the toxic workplace

Physical	Tired even when sleeping enough, Difficulty sleeping, Butterflies, Chest pains, Nausea, Can't shake off coughs and colds, Change in appetite
Emotional	Sad, Anxious, Irritability, Anger
Cognitive	Difficulty making decisions, Absent minded, Difficulty concentrating, Less efficient than usual
Behavioural	Avoid being around people, Drinking or smoking more than usual, avoid work
Motivational	Everyday things feel like an effort, Little enthusiasm for work, Difficult to see the point in anything
Thinking	Negative thoughts (I'm not appreciated, there's no point to this, I'm not good enough)

## Psychological effects of the toxic workplace



→ Stress

## What is stress?

- Stress can be a good thing
- *Too much* stress leads to difficulties
- It's not simply getting rid of stress, it's about making sure we have the resources to manage triggers so we are not overwhelmed
- Need the balance between enough stress to get us going, but not enough to floor us
- Achieve this by making sure our resources balance the triggers

## What is stress?



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## What to do about the psychological effects



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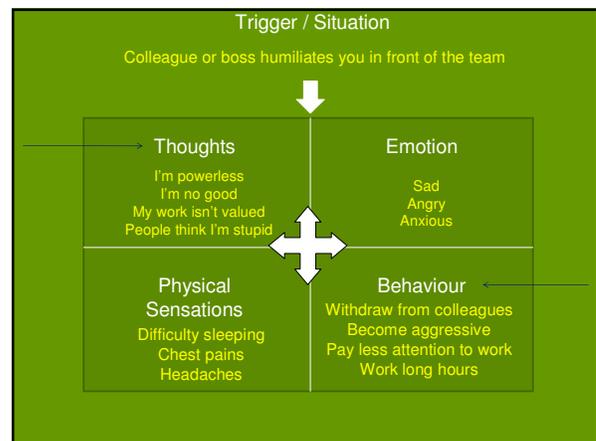
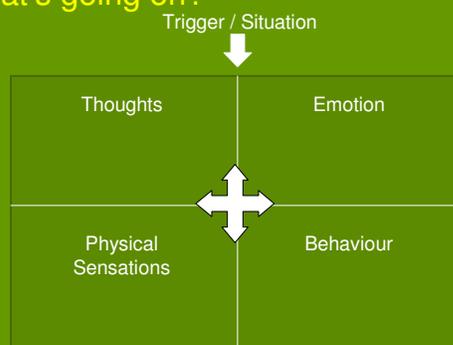
Decrease the triggers

Increase your resources

## What to do about the psychological effects



## What's going on?



## Negative Thoughts

- Automatic – arise spontaneously without reflection or deliberation
- People often more aware of the associated emotion than the thought
- Training → more aware of thinking
- Often brief, fleeting and in shorthand form
- Verbal and imagery forms
- Usually accepted as being true without evaluation

## Identifying Negative Thoughts:

Some key questions

- When you notice a shift in your mood, what went through your mind?
- When you talk about this now, what emotions do you notice?
- Where in your body do you notice the emotion?
- When you noticed bodily sensations (e.g. palpitations), what thoughts went through your mind, what images went through your mind?

## Addressing Negative Thoughts

- Thoughts are emotionally loaded and not necessarily factual
- What is the evidence for this belief?
- What is the evidence against this thought?
- How helpful is this thought / belief?
- What are the advantages of this thought? What are the disadvantages?
- What is an alternative belief that allows you to keep the advantages but won't hold you back?
- What would a friend / partner say in response to your negative thought?
- Thought Records

## Addressing Negative Thoughts

→ So if it's not true and / or not helpful, it's time to let it go  
→ Develop an alternative, more balanced, fairer thought.

Some examples of alternative thoughts and images:

I am a worthwhile person who deserves to be treated with respect

I will aim to be good enough, perfection is not possible to maintain

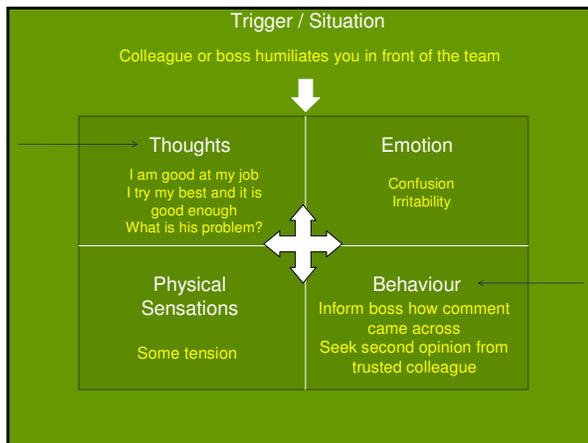
Image of yourself talking assertively to your boss

## Addressing Behaviour

- **Look after yourself** – relaxation, regular meals, sleeping enough
- **Work a decent amount of hours**
- **Invest in relationships that help you feel good about yourself**

## Addressing Behaviour

- **Start behaving in a way that is in accordance with your alternative thoughts.** If you believed your alternative thought, what would you be doing differently?
  - Schedule a meeting with your boss to outline your concerns
  - Respond to a humiliating comment in a way that reflects your belief that you are a worthwhile person
  - Aim to be good enough, not for the mythical concept of perfection
  - Engage in contact with colleagues you value and who value you
  - Keep your boundaries – protect your own time and say what you're able to do and what you're not able to do
  - Feedback to your colleague why you find their behaviour unacceptable



## Some Dos and Don'ts (or some try not to's)

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- **Don't take your feelings out on friends and family.**

If we're feeling powerless or not good enough, this can manifest itself in how we treat others. We may over assert ourselves in our other relationships which can be damaging

## Some Dos and Don'ts (or some try not to's)

- **Do think about why your boss or colleague is behaving like this.**

Understanding this helps to demystify the situation

Bullies are often insecure themselves and often:

- Behave aggressively to defend against their own beliefs about being powerless / not good enough
- Project their insecurities onto others. Pay attention to how you feel – this may reflect your boss' feelings

## Some Dos and Don'ts (or some try not to's)

- **Do confide in others.**

There is no shame in sharing how someone makes you feel and you may learn you're not alone

## Some Dos and Don'ts (or some try not to's)

- **Do things that help protect your self esteem**

...So you're better equipped and resourced to deal with threats to esteem.

Spend time with people who make you feel good about yourself.

Do things you know you're good at.

## Some Dos and Don'ts (or some try not to's)

### ■ Do keep the balance to life

The less work dominates your whole life, the less the problem will feel all encompassing

## Summary

- Stress *per se* isn't a bad thing
- It is when stress becomes too much that it can become a problem
- Maintaining a balance between triggers and our resources is key



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