Suggestions for Supervisors/Administrators About Talking with an Alleged Bully

1. Indicate that you want to talk with her/him about allegations that s/he has been engaging in what might be described as “bullying behaviors” toward colleagues (or others as appropriate), describe the behaviors specifically and behaviorally, and ask if s/he has engaged in them.

2. If s/he acknowledges engaging in bullying behaviors . . .
   - explain that this is unacceptable and must stop immediately;
   - convey that you view bullying others as a performance problem;
   - provide information about how her/his behavior is affecting others;
   - tell her/him you will give her/him an opportunity to change (if you believe it is appropriate to do so) because you want her/him to be successful;
   - indicate that, if the problem continues, it could affect her/his future raises, work assignments, and/or continued employment; and
   - ask her/him to consider how s/he might repair any harm s/he has done to relationships with those harmed by her/his bullying behaviors.

3. If s/he denies engaging in bullying behaviors . . .
   - tell her/him you have heard allegations to the contrary and that IF they were true they would be of great concern to you because you want employees to feel safe at work and not be subjected to a “hostile work environment;”
   - differentiate bullying from establishing and maintaining high performance expectations or being “direct” in ones communication style
   - if there is an unusually high turnover and/or absenteeism rate in her/his area, mention this and suggest that it is a concern to you if people are leaving because of being bullied;
   - ask if s/he would feel comfortable having you observe video of her/his interactions with supervisees when s/he is angry;
• explain that employees who feel bullied often fail to tell the alleged bully due to fear of retaliation or escalation of the problem;

• convey that you will gather data (e.g., with exit interviews of staff who left and/or by asking current staff to provide feedback directly to you about each another) and tell her/him you plan to invite staff who have concerns about anything to speak to you;

• convey that you intend to document your findings and, if it appears bullying has been occurring, speak with her/him again about this by a given deadline.

• explain that if your data gathering leads you to conclude bullying has been occurring, you will treat the issue as a performance problem in her/his evaluation.

4. Regardless of whether s/he admits or denies engaging in bullying behavior . . .

• make it clear that retaliation against anyone perceived to be making complaints they believe to be valid will not be tolerated and

• provide voluntary counseling opportunities (and document the offer as well as whether s/he uses these services) to help her/him find more appropriate ways to express her/himself.

Some Additional Ways Institutions Can Deal With Bullying

1. If bullying behavior does occur, make sure it affects performance reviews – even for those who, otherwise, exhibit outstanding performance.

2. Use exit interviews and, periodically, review exit interview feedback.

3. Use 360-Degree evaluations.

4. Ask the HR department to keep track of – and flag to administrators’ attention – any departments where there appears to be unusually high turnover and/or absenteeism (seemingly excessive use of sick and/or vacation leave).

5. Include the topic of “workplace bullying” in supervisory and/or staff conflict management training to raise awareness (or encourage that this be included if you do not conduct this kind of training).

6. Encourage bystanders and peers (especially senior faculty) to appropriately confront and/or report bullying behavior.