



HAPPY HOLIDAY SEASON & HAPPY NEW YEAR



CANADIAN INSTITUTE OF WORKPLACE HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE

This resource was created by Linda Crockett, a trauma therapist and recognized expert in workplace psychological injury and recovery. Please share this with your treatment providers; they know your history and they can support you as you go through these difficult times.

HOLIDAY TIPS FOR WORKERS EXPERIENCING WORKPLACE BULLYING

We wish you a peaceful and healthy holiday season. We know this time can be especially hard for anyone affected by workplace bullying, harassment, or psychological harm. Many strong people go through this, as research on workplace trauma shows. You are not alone. Your experiences and well-being matter. We hope you find moments of rest, connection, and care, and that you can support yourself in ways that feel right for you.

1. Name what is happening without minimizing it

If you are being bullied, harassed, excluded, or harmed at work, your feelings are real. Feeling distressed does not mean you are weak or too sensitive. It is a normal response to being treated badly over time.

This is about breaking the habit of downplaying what you have been through just to cope or keep the peace. Many people think, "Others have it worse," "It was not that bad," or "I should be able to handle this." These thoughts might help for a moment, but they often lead to more self-blame and slow down healing.

Naming what is happening does not mean you have to dwell on it, relive every moment, or let it take over your holidays. It is not about confronting anyone or making decisions right now. It simply means being honest with yourself that what you went through caused harm, and your reactions make sense. When you name harm clearly, your body can start to settle because you stop fighting yourself. Try placing a hand on your heart and telling yourself, 'This is hard, and I'm doing my best.' This can help you feel safer and show yourself kindness.

Dealing with the reality while giving yourself a break

It is tough to ignore what you are dealing with, even over the holidays. Set aside a small, structured amount of time each day to name what you are feeling, afraid of, frustrated with, or struggling with. Use a timer and stick to it. Your time off includes time off from stress. That matters right now. You deserve to enjoy parts of the holidays.

Step one: release some of the pressure during your set time

- Journal
- Paint how you feel
- Write a story, a poem, or a song
- Use clay to sculpt how you feel
- Meet a safe friend for coffee and talk it out

Step two: Do a transition ritual when the timer ends

Put your materials away and close your notebook. Take a moment to notice your senses as you move on. You might shower or wash your hands and face, feeling the warmth of the water. If you smudge as part of your practice, do that. As you make a warm drink, enjoy the smell, then wrap up in a soft blanket or sit by a window, your tree, or a fireplace, and feel the comfort.

Step three, return to the here and now

- Walk on a treadmill, stretch, or do yoga
- Go outside for fresh air
- Have a snowball fight, build a snowman, or do something playful with your kids.

Choose a simple activity that is calming or enjoyable.

The goal is not to analyze what happened. Instead, notice what is real, let go of some pressure, and return to the present so your time off is not taken over by work stress.



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2. Lower the bar and focus on stabilization

Capacity is a finite resource, especially when it is temporarily drained by trauma. By recognizing this, you give yourself permission to embrace simpler expectations through the holiday period.

This advice is for anyone affected by workplace bullying during the holidays, whether you are working, taking a break, or both. The goal is to protect your energy and lower stress while support is limited.

You are not required to perform holiday joy. Permit yourself to do less, simplify plans, and rest more. Survival seasons call for gentle expectations.

Practical examples

Say no without explaining. You are allowed to decline invitations, requests, favors, or conversations without providing a reason. When you are already depleted, explanations can lead to pressure, debate, guilt, or people trying to convince you. A simple response like "No, I cannot make it" or "Not this time" is enough. If you want to be polite without getting pulled into details, you can add "Thank you for understanding." For example, you might say, "I'm focusing on rest this season and won't be available, thanks for understanding."

If you have time saved and can leave early, do so. If your workplace allows it and you have the hours, leaving early can protect your energy and reduce exposure to stressful interactions. Save your energy for what matters most to you, including rest, family, and recovery.

Pick quiet time whenever you can. Quiet helps your body and mind settle. This could mean staying home, limiting social time, stepping away from noise, or making a calm space for yourself. Quiet time is not avoiding things—it is recovery.

If you are already feeling anxious or having trouble sleeping, try to use less alcohol or other substances. They might help for a short time, but usually make things worse later. Cutting back can help your body feel steadier during the holidays.

3. Support your nervous system daily,

When your body feels threatened, logic and pep talks often do not help. Your nervous system is just trying to protect you. Small, repeated actions can help you feel safer and lower stress over time.

Daily options

Slow breathing with a longer exhale than inhale. Try breathing in for a count of three or four, then out for a count of five or six. Do this for one to three minutes. You do not need to do it perfectly. You need to do it gently. Take a warm shower or bath to help you feel present. Pay attention to how the water feels on your skin and the warmth in your body. Let this be a reset, not a time to think about what happened.



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Try gentle walking, yoga, or stretching. Moving your body helps release stress. Pick slow, easy movements that feel good to you, even ten minutes is enough.

Massage, reflexology, or other body care can help release tension and help you feel supported. If you can, book a session. These are not luxuries during stress—they are ways to help your body recover. Try meditation, coloring, or painting. Quiet, focused activities can calm your mind and help stop repeating thoughts. Pick something that keeps your hands busy without any pressure to do it perfectly.

Time in nature or with pets. Step outside for fresh air and notice what you see, hear, and feel. If you have a pet, spend a few minutes focused on their presence and rhythm.

Play simple games. Card games or other easy games can help your mind shift out of stress and into the present. Laughter and light distraction can help you feel more grounded. Time with people who care about you. Book time with people who make you feel safe and supported. This might be a short visit, a walk, a phone call, or sitting quietly together. Connection does not have to involve talking about what happened.

Nourishment and hydration, even if appetite is low. Stress can reduce appetite or increase cravings. Aim for steady, simple nourishment and enough water. Choose what is easy and gentle on your body. Give your mind and body time to rest. Plan time to do nothing, and do not feel guilty about it. Rest can mean naps, lying down, quiet time, or less mental activity. Rest is an important part of healing. Make meals and tasks simpler. Order food instead of cooking if you can. Ask others to help instead of doing everything yourself. Doing less helps your body recover and saves energy for healing. Try to keep a regular sleep and wake schedule. Wake up at the same time, use fewer screens before bed, and pick a calming routine to wind down. If sleep is hard, just resting quietly still helps your body recover.

4. Reduce re-injury while work is closed

Limit the time you spend on things that remind you of harm. If you keep checking or thinking about what happened, your body keeps reacting as if it is still going on. If work is closed or you are off, use this time to give yourself a break. Taking time away from work stress can help you recharge and think more clearly when you return. By caring for yourself now, you set yourself up for better work later. Stop checking work email and messages. Unless you are on call or required to monitor messages, this is a choice you can make. If you are off work, you are off work. Stepping back is not avoidance. It is protection.

Avoid rereading painful threads unless necessary. Rereading emails, texts, or chat threads can pull you right back into the harm. Detach as much as possible. If you genuinely need to document something, set a timer, take what you need, then close it and step away.

Mute work chats or notifications if you can. This is not being irresponsible, it is about protecting what you let into your mind and body during your time off. If you cannot mute everything, reduce notifications as much as possible.



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Create a short window to deal with necessary tasks, then stop. If there is something you must handle, choose a short window and keep it contained. When that time is done, stop and shift back into your holiday time. Your recovery requires separation from the workplace.

5. Choose safe people, not curious people

Taking care of yourself means sharing your story only with people who listen without trying to fix things, believe you, and do not defend your employer. Choose someone who is non-judgmental and keeps things private. Your choices matter.

If you need to talk about your story, choose carefully. Venting helps when someone listens with care and support. It can hurt if the listener judges, questions, or makes you feel worse. Pick people who help you feel calmer, not more upset.

If there is no one safe to talk to right now, you still have options to release what you are carrying in ways that protect you.

Options to release without putting yourself at risk

- Journal
- Paint how you feel
- Write a story, a poem, or a song
- Use clay to sculpt how you feel
- Scream into a pillow or scream underwater

Use movement to release, such as a brisk walk, a treadmill session, or a short workout.

If it is accessible for you, use a punching bag and gloves to release built-up stress. For some people, this feels good and helps the body discharge stored energy.

Protect your energy

Do not waste your energy on people who increase your self-doubt, anxiety, shame, or confusion. Also, be cautious with people who respond with bias. Do not spend energy on people who make you feel more self-doubt, anxiety, shame, or confusion. Be careful with people who react with anger or bitterness and leave you feeling worse. If you feel worse after sharing, that person may not be safe for your healing. Your story belongs to you. You choose who deserves to hear it. It's stuck in a loop. Looping is when the same thoughts, conversations, images, or fears replay repeatedly without resolution. Your mind is trying to protect you by looking for answers, control, or a way to prevent future harm. The problem is that looping keeps your nervous system activated as if the threat is still happening.

Looping is not just over-thinking, it is a stress response. Each time the loop repeats, your body feels tension, anxiety, exhaustion, or even shuts down. Over time, this can leave you feeling tired, irritable, foggy, or unwell.

Containment can help break this cycle. It means giving your thoughts a place to go so your body does not have to hold them all day. Unlike rumination, which keeps you stuck, containment gives your thoughts a start, a middle, and an end.



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How to dump the loop

Set a short, planned time to get your thoughts out. Use a timer and keep it brief. Write things down once, then stop. You could make a list of incidents, describe symptoms, write a letter you do not send, or list what you need to feel safer at work. The goal is not to analyze or solve the story, but to get it out of your mind so your brain can rest. When the timer ends, close the notebook or document and put it away. This signals to your nervous system that the task is complete.

How to distract and return to the present

After you get your thoughts out, shift your attention. Distraction is not avoiding the problem—it is a way to help yourself. Pick something that uses your body or senses, like walking, stretching, yoga, a shower, a warm drink, music, a show, a simple game, cleaning, cooking, organizing, spending time with a pet, or going outside for fresh air. If the loop comes back, gently remind yourself that looping is a symptom of your injuries. Notice it, be kind to yourself, and then return to your current activity. Over time, the looping will get weaker as your body learns there are safe breaks.

7. Prepare for returning to work when resources reopen

As you get closer to returning to work, you might sleep less and feel more anxious. You may feel a knot in your stomach, have racing thoughts, or feel dread. These are common reactions when going back to a place where harm happened. Gentle preparation can help you feel calmer and more supported. Try to picture one positive moment waiting for you at work, like seeing a trusted colleague or getting a friendly smile. This can help you feel more prepared. Do not let this take away all your time off. Prepare, then let it go.

Preparation is not about expecting the worst. It is about giving yourself structure and options. Prepare once, then put it aside and return to your time off.

Gentle preparation checklist

Identify your first two supports to contact when offices reopen. Decide in advance who you will reach out to first, such as a therapist, union representative, trusted colleague, or advocate. Knowing who to contact reduces the feeling of being alone when the workday begins again.

- Bring a symbolic reminder of care and self-commitment. Choose something small you can bring with you that reminds you of people who care about you or of the self-care commitments you are making. This reminder could be a photo, a miniature painting, an ornament, or another meaningful object that offers comfort and grounding.
- Write down your boundaries in plain language. Prepare a short list of safe but firm responses you can use if you feel pressured or caught off guard. Examples include “Sorry, that does not work for me,” or “I am not available right now, please email me so I can schedule it.” If possible, work on this list with your therapist or a trusted support person. Consider creating a wallet-size affirmation card with these phrases, making it a convenient tool to prompt real-time use when needed. If you need more examples, additional options can be developed.
- Decide what you will do if something happens again. Write out the steps you will take if you experience harm or feel unsafe. Keep this note in your wallet or purse, not at your desk. Knowing you have a plan can reduce fear and help you feel more in control.
- Plan one grounding practice before and after work. Choose a straightforward practice to use at the start and end of each workday during your first week back. This might include breathing exercises, a short walk, using your breaks intentionally, closing your door for a few minutes, or stepping outside for fresh air. Consistency matters more than duration.



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The goal of preparation is to help your body feel less afraid of the unknown and to remind yourself that you have support, boundaries, and choices as you go back.

Boundaries are not about making speeches. They are small choices you stick to. They show, “I matter to me.” Micro boundaries help during the holidays by lowering stress in small, realistic ways, one choice at a time.

Self-soothing and grounding tip

Pick one boundary for the day and write it on a sticky note or in your phone. Each time you keep it, your body learns you can protect yourself. If you feel guilty or unsure, put your hand on your chest, take a slow breath, and say, “This is me taking care of me.”

Examples

- I will not respond to work messages during the shutdown
- I will not attend conversations that become blaming or shaming
- I will leave when my body signals danger
- I will speak to myself with respect

9. Watch for signs you need immediate support

Sometimes, the effects of workplace harm feel heavier during quiet holiday times. Take warning signs seriously. Reaching out is not dramatic; it is responsible self-care. Please get urgent help if you have thoughts of self-harm, feel trapped or hopeless, have severe panic, cannot sleep for several days, or have serious physical symptoms. If regular services are closed, crisis lines and emergency supports are still there for you. You deserve care during the holidays too. You matter. You are not alone.

Self-soothing and grounding tip

If you feel yourself getting more upset, focus on staying safe and taking the next right step. Move to a safer place, drink some water, and breathe slowly with a longer exhale. Then reach out for help right away, like a crisis line, emergency services, or a trusted person who can stay with you. Do not try to handle a crisis alone.

10. Closing note

You are not struggling just because this is hard. It is hard because workplace harm is serious, and shutdowns can leave people without support. Your job over the holidays is to protect yourself, find stability, and take small steps to make returning feel possible. End each day with a small moment that reminds you that you are still here and deserve peace. It could be a warm drink, a short walk, a quiet prayer, music, a game, a candle, a bath, or time with someone who cares. Small moments matter. They help your body recover and remind you that you are more than what happened at work.

We hope this gift offers you something of support, care, and comfort over the holidays.

Best Wishes from the CIWHV Board Members



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