



How to Effectively Deal with a Bully in a Community Association

MULCAHY Community Association Cheat Sheet®

**BRINGING ANSWERS
TO COMMUNITY
ASSOCIATIONS**

This publication discusses significant points of law as they apply to community associations and is not intended to offer specific legal advice or responses to individual circumstances or problems.

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DEALING WITH A BULLY IN A COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

Most members in an Association understand that rules and social decorum dictate how they are to interact with Board members, Association employees, and other members. However, there are a small percentage of people that do not abide by rules and social decorum and they are always looking for a fight. These people need to be dealt with differently than usual bullies because they are simply looking to create an altercation and they will not respond to a positive approach to their “problem.”

- The bullies discussed in this cheat sheet are more difficult than bullies who are periodic “gadflies.” These bullies are people who always respond negatively, even when a board member or manager interacts with them positively and politely.
- Board members and managers need to respond to these bullies with strength. These kinds of bullies will not respond to common reasoning.
- When a bully creates an issue, the situation needs to be addressed as soon as possible. The bully needs to be informed, expressly or impliedly, that their behavior will not be tolerated and they will not be rewarded for making the Board’s/manager’s life difficult.
- Try to be clear and concise when defusing a situation with a bully. Clarity will give you more confidence in your/the Board’s position and it will make it harder for the bully to prolong the confrontation.
- One way to deal with a bully is to call them out on their behavior. Tell them that you know they are purposefully trying to escalate a situation. They may be shocked that you have actually called their bluff.
- Make sure that you and the Board enforce reasonable boundaries. Bullies love to push and invade boundaries so make sure that you clearly inform the bully of the boundaries established and make sure that they are strictly enforced.

Example: Announce rules for meeting etiquette at the beginning of an annual or board meeting so the bully can’t claim ignorance of the rules.

- Be as calm as possible while still being forceful. A bully is looking to get a dramatic reaction when they create confrontation. Take a breath and try to remain level-headed; this will give you the upper hand in the exchange.
- Try to make sure that you always interact with the bully around other people. Being around others may force the bully to tone down their behavior.
- Remember that if you feel that the bully may get physical or is placing you in a dangerous situation you need to remove yourself and others from the situation and call the police if necessary.

If you feel that the bully is going to continue to present a physical threat avoid any conversations in person and have a security guard or police officer present at future meetings.

Remember that it is okay to adjourn a meeting if the bully is taking over the meeting and won't let the Board proceed with other business.

Stay positive! Usually an Association only has one bully. Don't let that bully dampen your outlook on serving the Association. The homeowners appreciate what the Board and managers do for them!