

How You Can Prevent Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment may involve the following circumstances:

- You feel your job depends on going along with the unwelcome behavior.
- You feel your employment or benefits (pay, vacation, promotion) depend on you going along.
- The harassment creates an environment in which you cannot do your job.

In many cases, harassment can be resolved within the workplace without legal action. No matter what the situation, sexual harassment is always wrong. The best way to keep sexual harassment out of the workplace is to prevent it from happening altogether.

Find out about your employer's sexual harassment policy. A sound sexual harassment policy does the following:

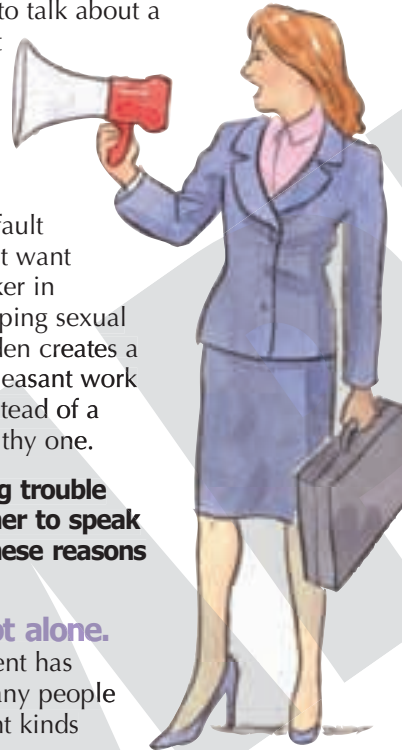
- Clearly communicates to all employees that sexual harassment will not be tolerated
- Establishes steps for action if sexual harassment does occur

SPEAK UP ABOUT SEXUAL HARASSMENT

It can be tough to talk about a sensitive subject such as sexual harassment. You might feel as though the harassment was somehow your fault or that you don't want to get a co-worker in trouble. But keeping sexual harassment hidden creates a hostile and unpleasant work environment instead of a productive, healthy one.

If you're having trouble deciding whether to speak up, consider these reasons to do so:

- **You are not alone.** Sexual harassment has happened to many people in many different kinds of workplaces.
 - **Most harassers won't stop** harassing unless they are challenged.
 - **Taking action not only helps yourself,** it improves the environment for all your co-workers.
- You have the right to a harassment-free workplace.** Work with your co-workers and supervisors to maintain a healthy and productive work environment for everyone.



Sexual Harassment

Stopping Unwanted Behavior in the Workplace



Crossing the Line

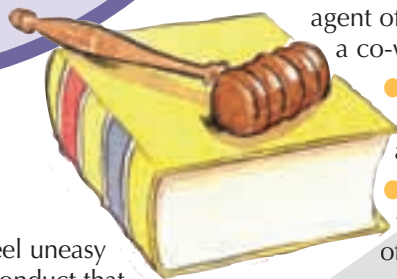
Harassment can take many forms, but it's illegal and damaging in most cases. Sexual harassment generally involves unwelcome or inappropriate references to gender and appearance. How do you know if it's happening where you work? Could you be crossing the line and not even realize it? Raise your awareness and remember that appropriate behavior helps maintain a healthy, productive workplace for everyone.

Understand Harassment

Behavior that makes others feel uneasy or embarrassed — even if it's conduct that could be seen as "joking around" among friends in a social situation — has no place in a work setting. This doesn't mean people can't share a laugh in the lunchroom or give each other a congratulatory hug. In order for behavior to be termed "harassment," it has to be unwelcome and offensive.

Sexual harassment isn't just inappropriate physical contact or lewd remarks. Any comment or action that makes a person feel uncomfortable and threatened is harassment. It could be inappropriate pictures posted on a bulletin board or in an e-mail, an off-color joke, or an inappropriate touch or remark.

The bottom line: If you witness sexual harassment or if it happens to you, tell a supervisor or an employee assistance counselor. And if your actions resemble sexual harassment, realize that whether intended or not, you may be creating uncomfortable and stressful situations for others. Most companies have sexual harassment policies and will take action.



Sexual Harassment: The Legal Definition

Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 defines sexual harassment this way:

- The victim and the harasser may be male or female.
- The victim does not have to be of the opposite sex.
- The harasser can be the victim's supervisor, an agent of the employer, a supervisor in another area, a co-worker or a nonemployee.
- The victim does not have to be the person directly harassed, but could be anyone affected by the offensive conduct.
- Unlawful sexual harassment may occur without economic injury to or discharge of the victim.
- The harasser's conduct must be unwelcome.

UNWANTED BEHAVIOR

Sexual harassment can include many forms of offensive behavior in a variety of circumstances. If you engage in the following activities or if you or someone else has experienced these unwanted behaviors at work, it is sexual harassment.

- Suggestive comments about a person's appearance or questionable compliments ("nice legs")
- Unwelcome touching or other physical contact
- Sexual jokes or comments
- Sexual advances
- Exposure to sexually explicit materials

If someone harasses you, ask him or her to stop — make it very clear that the behavior is unwelcome and offensive to you.

If it persists, tell a supervisor, an employee assistance counselor or a human resources representative.

Steps to Take

Sexual harassment is more than offensive — it is against the law. **The facts:** Sexual harassment is illegal even when the harasser isn't your boss.

Steps you can take:

Explore company channels. Find out whether your company has a formal grievance procedure. If you are a member in a union, involve the union representative. Tell your supervisor about the harassment, including when it occurred and all important details.

Write a memo. If speaking to the harasser is too difficult, write a hard-copy memo (rather than an e-mail) asking him or her to stop. Be specific about the behavior you would like stopped, and keep a copy for yourself.

Keep a record. Describe each incident of harassment, including the time, date and place.

Get emotional support. Sexual harassment can be emotionally devastating, which can lead to depression, lost time at work and difficulties at home. Talk to friends and family about what you have been through.

Get help. Most sexual harassment cases can be resolved without outside help. But if you have exhausted all possible channels and continue to have an issue, try your state's antidiscrimination agency or the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

Sexual harassment usually isn't about sex. It's about power. Harassers use this behavior to humiliate and control others.

HARASSMENT ALONE Comments or actions that focus on ethnicity, socioeconomic class, physical or psychological impairments or limitations, age or religion (if they result in discomfort or distress to another) define harassment. **Best advice:** Avoid sarcasm or jokes at another person's expense ... they can be deemed harassment if they happen on more than one occasion.

Say no.

Tell the harasser to leave you alone. Be firm and make sure he or she knows the attention is unwanted. Don't apologize and don't smile.

