

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

What is Sexual Harassment?

Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination that violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitutes sexual harassment when submission to or rejection of this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects an individual's employment, unreasonably interferes with an individual's work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment.

Sexual harassment can occur in a variety of circumstances, including but not limited to the following:

- The victim as well as the harasser may be a woman or a man. 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 non-employee.
- The victim does not have to be the person 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.

The defining characteristic of sexual harassment is that it is *unwanted*. It is important to clearly let an offender know that certain actions are unwelcome. (Source: US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission)

Types of Sexual Harassment

GENDER HARASSMENT (most common): Generalized sexist statements and behavior that convey insulting or degrading attitudes about women or men. Examples: insulting remarks, obscene jokes or humor about sex, etc.

SEDUCTIVE BEHAVIOR: Unwanted, inappropriate and offensive sexual advances. Examples include repeated and unwanted sexual invitation; insistant requests for dates/dinner/drinks; persistant letters, phone calls, etc.

SEXUAL BRIBERY: Solicitation of sexual activity or other sex-linked behavior by promise of reward; the proposition may be either overt or subtle.

SEXUAL COERCION: Coercion of sexual activity or other sex-linked behavior by threat of punishment; examples include negative performance evaluations, withholding of promotion, threat of termination.

SEXUAL IMPOSITION: Gross sexual imposition (such as forceful touching, feeling, grabbing), or sexual assault/battery. (Source: American Psychological Association)

Any of the following unwanted behavior may constitute sexual harassment:

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| • leering | • tales of sexual exploitation | • sexually explicit gestures |
| • wolf whistles | • pressure for dates | • unwelcome touching/hugs |
| • discussion of one's partner's sexual inadequacies | • 'accidentally' brushing sexual parts of the body | • comments about women's/men's bodies |
| • sexual innuendo | • sexual sneak attacks | • sexist jokes/cartoons |
| • lewd & threatening letters | • obscene phone calls | • public humiliation |
| • graphic descriptions of/displaying pornography | • inappropriate invitations (e.g. hot tubs) | • sabotaging women's/men's work |
| • stalking | • sexual assault | • soliciting sexual services |
| • leaning over, invading a person's space | • insisting that workers wear revealing clothes | • inappropriate gifts (ex. lingerie) |
| • indecent exposure | • pressing or rubbing up | • hooting, animal noises, etc. |

(Source: Feminist Majority Foundation)

Reactions/Effects:

Being sexually harassed can impact psychological health, physical well-being and vocational development. Psychological and physical reactions to being harassed may include:

PHYSIOLOGICAL REACTIONS

- Headaches
- Lethargy
- Sexual problems
- Gastrointestinal distress
- Dermatological reactions
- Phobias, panic reactions
- Sleep disturbances, nightmares
- Weight fluctuation

PSYCHOLOGICAL REACTIONS

- Depression, anxiety, shock, denial
- Anger, fear, frustration, irritability
- Insecurity, embarrassment, feelings of betrayal
- Confusion, feelings of being powerless
- Shame, self-consciousness, low self-esteem
- Guilt, self-blame, isolation

CAREER-RELATED EFFECTS

- Decreased job satisfaction
- Unfavorable performance evaluations
- Loss of job or promotion
- Change in career goals, jobs, educational programs, academic majors, etc.
- Absenteeism
- Withdrawal from work or school
- Drop in academic/work performance due to stress

(Source: American Psychological Association)

How to Confront and Stop Sexual Harassment:

In *Back Off! How To Confront and Stop Sexual Harassment and Harassers*, Martha Langelan recommends taking these steps:

- Do the unexpected: Name the behavior. Whatever the harasser has just done, say it, and be specific.
- Hold the harasser accountable for his/her actions. Don't make excuses for the harasser; don't pretend it didn't really happen. Take charge of the encounter and let people know what the harasser did. Privacy protects harassers, but visibility undermines them.
- Make honest, direct statements. Speak the truth (no threats, no insults, no obscenities, no appeasing verbal fluff and padding). Be serious, straightforward, and blunt.
- Demand that the harassment stop. Make it clear that all people have the right to be free from sexual harassment. Objecting to harassment is a matter of principle.
- Stick to your own agenda. Don't respond to the harasser's excuses or diversionary tactics.
- The harasser's behavior is the issue. Say what you have to say, and repeat it if the behavior persists.
- Reinforce your statements with strong, self-respecting body language: eye contact, head up, shoulders back, a strong, serious stance. Don't smile. Timid, submissive body language will undermine your message.
- Respond at the appropriate level. Use a combined verbal and physical response to physical harassment.

Resources:

- US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
<http://www.eeoc.gov/index.html> or 1-800- 996-EEOC
- US Dept. of Ed – Office of Civil Rights
www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/sexharassresources.html
- 9to5, National Association of Working Women
<http://www.9to5.org/> or 1-800-522-0925
- National Ed. Assoc. (Student Sexual Harassment)
<http://www.nea.org/index.html>
- Shevolution
<http://www.shevolution.com/>
- Bully Online
<http://www.bullyonline.org/>
- Working to Halt Abuse Online
<http://haltabuse.org/>
- Feminist Majority Foundation
<http://www.feminist.org/>
- National Victim Center
1-800-FYI-CALL

Center for Victim Advocacy and Violence Prevention

Victim Helpline: (813) 974-5757

www.sa.usf.edu/advocacy

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