Preventing Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment takes place all too often. However, measures such as showing respect, using effective communication, asking for help when needed, and evaluating your actions can do much to prevent sexual harassment from continuing, or even happening in the first place.

This article provides preliminary measures you can take to help stop someone from sexually harassing you, as well as ways you can avoid inadvertently becoming a harasser.

What should I do if I’m sexually harassed?

Take these steps to help put an end to sexual harassment:

Communicate:
- Name the behavior that is offensive, how you feel about it, and what you want to see happen—be specific about the behaviors
- Be assertive but not confrontational—a harasser will be less receptive to the idea of change if he or she feels under attack
- Realize that the harassment is not your fault—it’s the harasser’s behavior that’s an issue and you don’t have to tolerate it
- Do not assume it will go away on its own—remaining silent or going along with the harassment usually encourages a harasser

Record:
- Keep a record about the harassment, including keeping a log of incidents and saving any emails and other written media related to the harassment
- In the log, write the dates, times, places, names of witnesses to, and nature of the sexual harassment at issue, in case further action is required.

Report:
- Always try to resolve the issue at the lowest level—many times, an issue can be resolved by speaking to the harasser or asking a supervisor to help out.
- If that does not work or is not a possibility, however, there is an established complaint process—your supervisor or an Equal Opportunity Advisor/Equal Opportunity Specialist (EOA/EOS) can guide you through this.

What do I do if I feel I can’t confront the harasser?

Many victims find themselves in such a situation, because of intimidation, a desire to avoid conflict, the severe nature of the harassment, or other reasons. Strategies to help you are:
- Direct approach: talk to the harasser and tell them to stop
- Indirect approach: send an email to the harasser and tell them to stop
- Third party approach: ask a friend or coworker to approach the harasser instead
- Report approach: notify his or her supervisor and ask for help in resolving the harassment

How do I avoid being a sexual harasser?

You can avoid being viewed as a sexual harasser by doing the following:
- Cease and desist when you are told that your behavior is offensive or unwelcome
- Strive to be approachable so others can feel that they can tell you when your behavior needs to change
- Show respect to those around you. For example:
- not viewing or posting off-color or pornographic materials in public
- not sharing sexual humor or details of your sex life in public
- allowing others their personal space and privacy
- not asking for a date from a person who has already said no to you a couple of times
- refraining from complimenting coworkers on their bodies

- Periodically evaluate how you behave and how others react to you
- Communicate—if you have questions about appropriate behavior, ask and actively listen

What are some ways I can evaluate my behavior?

In determining whether your behavior is appropriate or not, try these methods:

- Imagine what someone you deeply care about (a child, sibling, significant other, parent, etc.) would think of your behavior. If you would be embarrassed having them witness you doing it, reconsider the behavior.
- Imagine your loved one being treated by a stranger or slight acquaintance in the way that you’re treating others. If you would not want it happening to them, do not do it to others.

Myth

"Sexual harassment is really just flirting."
Fact: Flirting is wanted, mutual, and shows interest in the other person as an individual. Sexual harassment is unwanted, one-sided, and often motivated by power.