

## MYTHS

**Myth:** Women make false charges of sexual harassment.

**Fact:** Those who speak out against harassment are met with many negative reactions. They range from disbelief to ridicule. Women who report often run the risk of losing their jobs and damaging their career future. There is little to gain from false charges.

**Myth:** Only bosses are in a position to harass others at the work place.

**Fact:** Co-workers and clients can also be harassers. Co-workers can make the work environment virtually intolerable. Clients may threaten to withdraw their business, putting on added pressure to comply.

**Myth:** If people don't speak up about sexual harassment, it must not be happening.

**Fact:** Sexual harassment goes unreported because the victims feel guilty, isolated, or afraid of losing their jobs.

### HOPE Center offers:

- Advocates on call 24 hours a day; call 1-800-607-2330. Well trained volunteers provide support and advocacy for survivors.
- A drop-in center open from 9-5 on weekdays at Depot Square: 303 1<sup>st</sup> Ave. NE, Suite 365, Faribault, MN 55021.
- Support groups for survivors.
- Educational programs for groups on topics related to sexual assault and harassment.
- And more services! Call 507-332-0882 for more info!

## WHAT TO DO

### in a Sexual Harassment Emergency

1. **Know:** If something that is said or done to you makes you feel uncomfortable, know that respectful flirtation and compliments don't make you feel uncomfortable, but sexual harassment does.
2. **Say:** Simply tell the person, "what you are doing makes me uncomfortable." Perhaps describe in words what is happening while it is happening. For example, "You have your hands on my shoulders" or "This is the third time today that you have brushed against my body when you walked by."
3. **Find:** Obtain a definition of sexual harassment, circle the part that describes what the harasser is doing to you, and leave it in the harasser's mailbox; or write a description of what the harasser is doing and deliver it to the harasser's office.
4. **Tell:** Your co-workers should be told what is happening to you because most harassers have more than one victim.
5. **Report:** Find out if your workplace, institution, or employee association has a sexual harassment officer and report the incident to them.

These suggestions come from the Women's Student's Sexual Harassment Caucus at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.



# SEXUAL HARASSMENT

## An Issue of POWER

What if  
it happens  
to you



## SEXUAL HARASSMENT

We define sexual harassment as any attention of a sexual nature in the context of the work situation which has the effect of making a person feel uncomfortable, impeding their ability to do work, or interfering with employment opportunities. Examples include such things as verbal sexual suggestion or jokes and constant leering, “accidentally” brushing up against someone’s body or putting an arm around someone. Sexual harassment may also be as direct as explicit propositions backed by threat of losing one’s job or forced sexual relations. When a person engages in these behaviors without the consent of the other party, the behaviors are sexual harassment. The employee is left feeling ashamed, embarrassed, cheap, humiliated, degraded, or angry.

Harassment is not an issue of sex, but rather an abuse of power. Sexual harassment is a form of dominance used against those who are vulnerable. While both men and women are victims, the majority of cases involve women being harassed by men.

Sexual harassment is more strictly defined by the law. Briefly, it is defined as:  
Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature:

- When submission to that conduct is a condition of employment, or
- When it influences the evaluation of a person’s performance on the job, or
- When it has the effect of interfering with an individual’s work performance or creates a hostile, intimidating, or offensive work environment.

Harassing behavior must meet one of two conditions before it meets the legal definition of sexual harassment. The first condition is “when sexual compliance is exchanged, or proposed to be exchanged, for an employment opportunity.” This means that sexual favors are a prerequisite for obtaining a promotion, a better account, or something else that would enhance your working career.

The other condition is when “sexual harassment is a persistent condition of work.” In this case, the work environment is made virtually unbearable but there may be nothing promised or denied the employee directly connected to the job. For example, you are not promised a raise or a promotion for sexual favors. Instead, you are made to feel uncomfortable in your everyday working environment.

Sometimes it can be hard to tell whether a particular behavior meets the legal definition of sexual harassment. You should know, though, that you should not have to put up with sexual language or behavior or displays that make you feel uneasy or threatened. It is unprofessional behavior and does not belong in the workplace. Every worker has a right to be treated with respect.



## WHAT YOU CAN DO

If you feel that you have been sexually harassed, there are many things you can do. First of all, know your rights, and know that help is available. Some companies have established their own policies. Familiarize yourself with these and other laws.

If possible, you should speak up at the time of the harassment; if you can, make your feelings about the harasser’s actions clearly known. This can be very difficult, but often it is the best first step. In many cases, the longer you wait to speak up, the harder it will be and the less impact it will have on the harasser.

Keep records of what is taking place. Include such things as the date, time, place, the type of harassment, and your response. You should also tell someone else. This may also be difficult to do. You may, however, find out that you are not alone. Co-workers and managers may be able to help in putting a stop to the harassment. Keep track of the responses that they make in your records.

Taking legal action (by filing a civil suit) may be an option you want to consider. You will need to weigh out your feelings about the harassment, the potential response of your employer and co-workers, and the reaction of the harasser. You will also want to consider your feelings about dealing with the court system. You have a right to take legal action but you are the only one who can decide if that is the best option for you. We can help you find more information about this and other options.

Find support! Even though sexual harassment is hard to talk about, sharing with friends or family or a sexual assault counselor can break your isolation and help you through!

**Support is available to you as you deal with these issues!**

You can reach a HOPE Center Advocate by calling 1-800-607-2330 (that’s 1-800-60-SAFE-0). Trained advocates are available 24-hours a day to listen, support you, and provide you with more information about your options.

Our services are provided free of charge.