

What is Sexual Harassment?

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) defines sexual harassment as:

"Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when:

submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment,

submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as a basis for employment decisions affecting such individual, or

such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive working environment."

Five Types of Harassment:

1. Peer to Peer Harassment – People who have equal authority, such as supervisor to supervisor or employee to employee. Peer to peer harassment is often easy to stop by giving a clear request to the offender to discontinue the behavior. If the offender continues the behavior, it is advised to notify a supervisor.

2. Subordinate Harassment of a Supervisor – In some cases, a subordinate harasses a supervisor. Although this is not common, it may occur when the offender is intimidating. This form of harassment is taken seriously and if the behavior continues after requesting the offender to stop, the target is advised to seek the help of a higher level of management.

3. Same Sex Harassment – Unwelcome sexual behavior can also come from members of the same sex. The same laws against sexual harassment apply for same sex harassment as it does for persons of the opposite sex, if the behavior is unwelcome and sexual in nature.

Five Types of Harassment: (Con't)

4. Third Party Harassment – Persons could be sexually harassed by third parties at the work place. In some cases, the harasser could be:

- A guest speaker
- A volunteer
- An employee of another business
- A person affiliated with the business

5. Quid Pro Quo – *Quid pro quo* is Latin for an exchange such as "this for that" or "something for something". In the case of sexual harassment, quid pro quo takes place between supervisors and subordinates, where a sexual favor is asked in exchange for favorable treatment in work assignments, recommendations, pay or promotion. An example of quid pro quo is "I will give you a pay raise when you have sex with me."

Other examples are:

- Ted offers his assistant, Mary, a ride home after work one day and attempts to kiss and fondle her, even as Mary refuses and tells Ted that she feels offended. After a couple of weeks, Ted decides to reorganize the department and requires Mary to move to a less responsible position.
- During a job interview, a manager tells Rosy that she can have a permanent job at the work place if she sleeps with him.

Risky Verbal Behaviors:

The following verbal behaviors may contribute to a hostile work environment if unwelcome:

1. Derogatory comments based on gender, that carry a sexual nature
2. Comments or inappropriate compliments about clothing or a person's body, such as "You look hot!"
3. Jokes or teasing based on sex or gender.
4. Requests for dates, even after multiple rejections.
5. Terms of endearment such as "honey", "dear", or "sweetheart"
6. Referring to an adult as "girl" or "boy," "doll" or "hunk"
7. Sexual innuendoes or sexual stories
8. Inappropriate grunts, wolf whistles, catcalls, lip-smacks and animal noises
9. Stories of sexual exploitation
10. Obscene phone calls or emails
11. Lies or rumors about a person's sex life

Risky Non-Verbal Behaviors

The following non-verbal behaviors may contribute to a hostile work environment if unwelcome:

1. Staring at a person longingly
2. Looking at a person up and down
3. Making derogatory gestures
4. Making sexual facial expressions such as winking or licking lips
5. Posters, cartoons, calendars, and pictures of a sexual nature
6. Electronic bulletin boards/computer graphics of a sexual nature
7. Inappropriate, sexually expressive or revealing clothing

Risky Physical Behaviors

The following physical behaviors may contribute to a hostile work environment if unwelcome:

1. Leaning over and invading a person's personal space
2. Inappropriately touching a person or their clothing
3. "Accidentally" brushing sexual parts of a person's body
4. Indecent exposure or flashing a person
5. Blocking someone's path with a sexual advance
6. Massaging a person's neck without consent
7. Deliberate sexual touching, brushing up, or pinching
8. Pressing or rubbing up against a person
9. Stalking
10. Grabbing
11. Kissing, hugging, patting or stroking

How you can Avoid Unwelcome Behavior

Unwelcome behavior is behavior that is not welcome and unwanted by the offended person. You may perceive your behavior to be friendly, but a co-worker may actually find the behavior offensive. Before you act, it is important to think about the other person's reaction and if the act could possibly be perceived as sexually offensive.

These tips can help you avoid committing behavior that is unwelcome.

1. Respect the people you work with
2. Think before acting, speaking, or saying a joke
3. Be considerate to cultural differences
4. Practice common courtesy

If you Experience Sexual Harassment...

Keep in mind that sexual harassment in a work environment is illegal and not acceptable. An employer needs to ensure that the work environment is comfortable and free of harassment.

If you encounter sexual harassment at work, consider the following:

1. Firmly, clearly and directly notify the harasser to stop the harassment. If you feel comfortable enough to confront the harasser yourself, make sure you make it clear that you find his/her behavior offensive. You can say "thank you for helping me, but please remove your hand from my arm" or "please stop commenting about my body because I find it offensive."
2. If you cannot confront the offender personally, you may put your request in writing, making sure you keep a copy of what you wrote and the date it was written. If you choose not to confront personally or write a letter, contact your supervisor.
3. If the harassment is on-going, document the conversations, incidence and occurrences of the behavior. Keep a written record of the locations, dates, times, places, comments, actions and witnesses.