

FACT SHEET: Sexual Harassment

WHAT DOES “SEXUAL HARASSMENT” MEAN?

“Sexual harassment” means that someone is bothering you by saying or doing unwanted or unwelcome things of a sexual or gender-related nature. For example, someone who makes unwelcome sexual or gender-related remarks and gestures by:

- touching you inappropriately
- making offensive jokes or remarks about women or men
- making sexual requests or suggestions
- staring at or making unwelcome comments about your body
- displaying sexually offensive pictures
- being verbally abusive to you because of your gender

Sexual harassment does not have to be sexual in nature. It can also mean that someone is bothering you simply because you are a man or a woman. Making stereotypes about one gender or the other can be a form of sexual harassment. Sexual harassment happens most often to women, but it can also happen to men or between members of the same sex.

Usually sexual harassment is a pattern of behavior that happens frequently over a period of time. However, a single incident can be serious enough to be considered harassment as well.

WHEN IS IT HARASSMENT?

Sexual Harassment in Employment and Housing:

Someone says or does something to you of a sexual nature that you do not welcome. This includes behavior that a person knows or ought to know you do not welcome. Your boss, landlord, or other authority figure uses their position of power to sexually harass you. By being in a vulnerable situation, it is difficult for you to speak out about the situation. The person in authority uses the position to help them get away with unwelcome sexual comments or actions.

Sexual Solicitation or Advance:

A person suggests that if you become sexually involved with him or her, he or she will give you a better grade or some other type of incentive.

Sexual Harassment and Reprisal:

A person who has authority or power denies you something important, punishes or threatens you for refusing a sexual request, or for complaining about inappropriate sexual behavior or comments.

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Sexual Harassment and a “Poisoned Environment”:

Sexual harassment can have a bad effect on, or “poison”, the places where you live, work or receive services. Even if the harassment is not directed at you, it can still poison the environment for you or others. How do you know if the environment is poisoned? One way is to look at the effect of negative comments or actions. For instance, if certain sexual or gender-related comments or actions make you or others feel uncomfortable in the workplace or unwilling to return to work, this could indicate that the work environment is poisoned.

WHAT CAN I DO?

If you have been harassed, you could try to tell that person to stop. If it happens at work, one thing you can do is speak to the person’s boss or tell your union representative. If it happens in your building, you can notify your landlord. Although you can try to make the harassment stop, it is not your responsibility alone. Employers, contractors, professional associations, unions, and people who provide rental housing accommodation and other services, have to make sure that sexual harassment does not occur on their property, in their workplaces or in their facilities.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT CAN LEAD TO VIOLENCE

Silence or doing nothing will not typically make sexual harassment go away and sometimes such behavior can lead to violence. If you feel uncomfortable or threatened, speak to a person in authority about it (a supervisor, the owner of the store, etc.). You can choose to contact the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario to file an application. Where harassing behavior makes you feel like you’re in danger or leads to violence, you should call the police. You may also contact the Assaulted Women's Helpline, a 24-hour crisis line, at 1-866-863-0511, TTY Toll Free 1-866-863-7868, or visit www.awhl.org for more information.

Source: The information in this fact sheet has been developed by the Ontario Human Rights Commission, and can be found at the following web site http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/issues/sexual_harassment