

Definition

Unwanted or uninvited remarks, gestures, sounds, and actions of a sexual nature that make you feel unsafe, degraded, or uncomfortable is sexual harassment. Sexual harassment creates an intimidating or hostile school/work environment. Women and girls are usually targets of harassment. Some examples are:

- Unwanted physical contact like touching, grabbing, or patting
- Pushing you to go out on a date
- Rude jokes or sexual comments
- Someone calling you names (e.g., chick, bitch, slut, fag, or babe)
- Catcalls, comments on your body, or embarrassing whistles
- Insulting remarks about a person's sexual orientation or gender identity
- Sexually insulting remarks about a person's race, culture, ability, and/or income
- Writing about someone in a sexual way (e.g., "For a good time, call...")
- Stalking (constant unwanted

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following or contact)

Sexual harassment can make you feel uncomfortable or scared. It's not wanted, deserved, and it doesn't go both ways. It's not genuinely caring behaviour between friends.

Jokes that degrade you, constant requests for dates, name-calling that embarrasses you, pictures posted on the web without your permission, sexual emails or text messages - all of these can be sexual harassment.

It's Not Your Fault

Sexual harassment can happen to anyone, but women are more often harassed by men. People sometimes blame the victim and say that s/he dressed inappropriately, flirted, or overreacted to a "compliment." It's not true. No one deserves or asks to get harassed. The harasser is responsible for his own behaviour.

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Why People Might Not Report

Sometimes people don't report getting harassed because they might:

- Blame themselves, feel guilty, or be embarrassed
- Feel helpless, hopeless, and/or powerless
- Not know who to tell and what to say
- Think their complaint won't be listened to or taken seriously
- Want to ignore the problem and hope it goes away
- Not want to cause problems at school or at work
- Feel afraid of the harasser or the harasser's friends and family
- Not feel that their own friends and family will be supportive
- Not want to get the harasser into trouble
- Feel afraid of other people's reactions to reporting

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What You Can Do About It

If you've been harassed, here are tips you can use.

1. Believe your own feelings. It's normal to feel:
 - Unsafe and/or embarrassed
 - Worried that you are the only one this has happened to
 - Nervous that you are exaggerating or overreacting
 - Afraid to go to school, work, or out with friends
2. Don't ignore it. It might get worse. It may start off with joking or teasing, but it can turn into stalking, threats, and/or assault.
3. Identify what is happening to you as sexual harassment. It's important to name the abuse for what it is.
4. Tell someone you trust (e.g. parent, teacher, counsellor, friend, union steward, supervisor). You can also call a helpline. Keep trying until you find someone who will

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help you.

5. Tell the person harassing you to stop, if you can. You may want to bring a friend with you or you may want to write a letter. Tell the person firmly and directly that you don't like or want what they are doing and that it must stop immediately.

6. Write down everything, including when and where the harassment happens, what happens, and how long it continues. Make sure to record who's around when it happens to you.

7. Try to stay safe. If you said no and the behaviour doesn't stop, if you think saying something will make it worse, or you are too afraid to say no, it's important to get help. Schools and workplaces should be safe for students and workers. Most places have policies and procedures to deal with harassment complaints. Find out what they are.

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Remember: you have the right to be free from harassment. It's important to get help and support.

How You Can Help a Friend

1. Listen to your friend's story and try not to blame or judge. You can be there and give your friend comfort and support. It's not helpful to try to solve the problem for your friend and it's not always helpful to give advice.

2. Let your friend know you want to support her. Try to be patient and understanding and let your friend make her own decisions. Ask how you can help. You can listen and offer suggestions, but your friend has to choose what she wants to do. You can encourage your friend to get help if she wants and give helpful telephone numbers.

3. Respect your friend's right to privacy. She needs to be in control of what she wants to tell you. Don't repeat your friend's story without permission. If you need help on

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how to assist your friend, you can ask for help without sharing her identity.

4. Know your limits. You are not a counsellor. Your friend may need help from a counsellor or trusted adult. If the harassment gets worse, she could be in danger. You can help your friend get appropriate help somewhere else.

5. Know your legal responsibilities. Let your friend know what you can't keep private (e.g. if someone under 16 is being abused, the law says you have to call the Children's Aid Society; if someone is planning to hurt themselves or others, the law says you have to call the police).

6. Get help for yourself. Helping a friend in trouble is hard. You may need to talk with a trusted adult, friend, or counsellor. Remember, it's important to respect your friend's privacy.

(Adapted from "The Joke's Over - Student to Student Sexual Harassment in Secondary Schools", 1995, A Change Agent Project of the Secondary School Teacher's Federation, the Ontario Women's Directorate, and the Violence Prevention Secretariat, Ministry of Education and Training.)

Friends can help. Remember, as you help out your friend, you'll need to take care of yourself too.

Resources

Emergency: 911 or local police

The Assaulted Women's Helpline:
1-866-863-0511
1-866-863-7868 (TTY)
(anonymous, confidential, and services provided in up to 154 languages)

Kids Help Phone:
1-800-668-6868
kidshelpphone.ca

Femaide (French crisis line)
1-877-336-2433
1-866-860-7082 (TTY)

Community Connection (Niagara Region, Georgian Bay, Toronto): 211

Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (info on how and when to report child abuse):
www.oacas.org

Lesbian Gay Bi Trans Youthline:
1-800-268-9688

The 519 Anti-Violence Program:
416-392-6878 x117

Ontario Human Rights Commission: www.ohrc.on.ca

Sexual Assault Centres: ocrcc.ca

Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence Treatment Centres:
satontario.com

Shelters: shelternet.ca

Sexual and reproductive health information: spiderbytes.ca



158 Spadina Road, Toronto, ON, M5R 2T8
1-877-558-5570 | 416-392-3031 (TTY)
info@metrac.org
More info and statistics:
www.metrac.org | www.owjn.org



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Adapted from "Sexual Harassment",
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about sexual harassment