



Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is unwelcome behavior of a sexual nature. It is a behavior that degrades, ridicules, and/or intimidates others of the opposite or the same sex. Sexual harassment can occur in any environment. It can occur at school, at work, walking down the street, in the grocery store, anywhere. It may occur between a male and a female, two males, or two females, regardless of sexual orientation. Although exact statistics are unavailable due to lack of research and failure to report incidences, experts estimate 3-4% of all sexual harassment cases are males harassing other males. Although males are often regarded as the primary perpetrators of sexual harassment, females can also be harassers.

We may run into **subtle sexual harassment** or **illegal sexual harassment**. **Subtle sexual harassment** is an “everyday” form of harassment in which unwelcome sexual or sex-based behavior is expressed. This may include unwelcome sexual comments, sexual jokes, overtly scanning someone’s body, catcalls, etc. Typically, this type of sexual harassment occurs among peers. **Illegal sexual harassment** is a legal term used to describe behaviors that occur in the workplace or school environments, which could have serious consequences such as suspension from work or school. There are two types that the law recognizes. They are **quid pro quo** and **creation of a hostile work environment**. **Quid pro quo** literally means “this for that”. This type of harassment involves a person in power basing his/her rewards and/or punishments on whether or not an employee/student complies with his/her sexual requests. **Creation of a hostile work environment** is more often created by peers but can be fostered by a person in power. This type of harassment involves unwelcome sexual or sex-based behavior that is offensive, hostile, and/or intimidating that negatively impacts a person’s ability to perform in school or on the job.

Sexual harassment may include, but is not limited to, the following forms. Verbal sexual harassment may include sexual innuendos, comments about a person’s body, clothing, or sexual activities, jokes, teasing, whistling, suggestive or insulting sounds, sexual propositions, and implied or overt threats. Nonverbal sexual harassment may include insulting sounds, leering, obscene gestures, sexual drawings or pictures, derogatory pictures or pin-ups, sexually offensive cartoons, “nudie” calendars, messages of a sexually derogatory nature. Physical sexual harassment may include pinching, intentional inappropriate touching, making obscene or offensive gestures, attempted or completed kissing or fondling, coerced sexual intercourse, or sexual assault.

You can protect yourself from being charged with sexual harassment by remembering some important tips.

- Keep your hands to yourself.
- Avoid gestures with sexual meaning.
- Respect the personal space of others.
- Don’t display potentially sexually offensive items in the workplace.

- Look for cues from others that might indicate they are uncomfortable with some element of your communications with them.
- Assume people are friendly, not promiscuous.
- Don't respond to sexual or seductive behavior. Don't let someone else get you into trouble.
- Don't tell off-color jokes or make suggestive comments to others.

Information adapted from The Aurora Center of the University of Minnesota,
Anne Thorsen Truax of the Minnesota Women's Center, and
Dating: Peer Education for Reducing Sexual Harassment among Secondary Students by Toby Simon and Bethany Golden

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