

# Sexual Harassment

What is sexual harassment? What can you do if it happens to you? Copy this article and keep it at home to



help you if you experience sexual harassment at a job. Follow the steps to help you solve the problem before it causes you to quit your job. Don't let a sexual harasser stand in your way of a profitable job and good career.

**What is sexual harassment?** Sexual harassment is defined as unwanted sexual advances or visual, verbal, or physical conduct of a sexual nature by a person of the opposite or same sex. The law does not prohibit (consider illegal) simple teasing, offhand comments, or isolated (one-time) incidents that are not serious. Harassment is illegal when it is so frequent (happens often) or severe (bad) that it: a) Creates hostile, offensive, or uncomfortable work environment, or b) When harassment

results in victim being fired or demoted. The harasser can be the victim's supervisor, supervisor in another area, co-worker, or someone who is not an employee of the employers such as a client or customer. Sexual harassment include the following behaviors that create a hostile work environment:

**1) Frequent verbal comments:** Remarks, even joking ones, can be considered harassment. Sexual harassment occurs when words, jokes, questions, or comments are about a person's sex, body, or body parts. Some people may try to pass off a harassing statement as a compliment such as, "I wish my wife's legs were as pretty as yours." This is not a compliment. It is a statement about a person's body which can make the person feel uncomfortable. Using endearing words as "honey," "sweetheart," and "baby doll" can be considered harassment.

**2) Physical acts:** In a work situation, touching, hugging, restricting a person's movement, assault, or rape are considered sexual harassment. A supervisor teasing an employee by standing at a doorway and not allowing the employee to pass could be defined as sexual harassment.

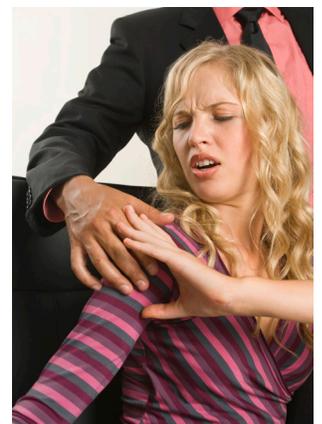
**3) Gestures:** Outlining a person's body with the hands or looking someone up and down with "elevator eyes" can be defined as sexual harassment.

**4) Visual objects:** Sexually offensive calendars, cartoons, posters, notes, invitations, or pictures as well as having nude dancers at office parties can be defined as sexual harassment.

**5) Sexual advances:** Requiring favors such as hugs, kisses, and even more as basis for employment benefits, transfers, or promotions is sexual harassment.

**6) Threats:** Threatening an employee who tries to report (or reports) sexual harassment with loss of employment or physical harm is sexual harassment.

U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) handles sexual harassment cases. The EEOC knows if your state has an agency that also helps with sexual harassment. EEOC also handles discrimination related to age, disability, pregnancy, race/color, and religion.



1. **Confront the harasser:** **First**, firmly tell the harasser that you will not tolerate any more harassment. **Second**, explain what behavior you think is offensive. **Third**, have a trusted coworker or friend present to serve as a witness to your conversation. It is best if another person has seen the sexual harassment — so that it is not just your word against the harasser's word. **Fourth**, document (keep a written record) in a notebook or on a computer: a) date and time you confronted the harasser, b) name of witness that was present, c) what you said, and d) what the harasser said.
2. **Tell a supervisor or Human Relations (or Personnel) Office staff:** If the behavior continues, tell a supervisor or Human Relations office staff. **First**, explain that the harasser has been told by you in front of a witness what behavior is offensive. **Second**, tell the supervisor or HR office staff the name of your witness. Most sexual harassment behaviors are stopped at this point by the supervisor or HR staff. Most employers will not tolerate this behavior in their business because it can lead to expensive legal cases. Document (write down) the date of your meeting, which person you told, and their answer to you.
3. **Continue to document the sexual harassment:** If the behavior continues, continue to document: a) what behavior is still occurring, b) date and time of situation, c) witnesses, d) your response to behavior, e) harasser's response. Keep this document at home since your proof may disappear if your document notebook is kept at the work site or on a computer at work. Next, write a letter to the harasser telling him or her: 1) What behaviors you want stopped. 2) You will file a complaint with a government agency if the behaviors continue. Date, sign, and copy the letter. With a witness present, give copy of the letter to harasser. Keep a copy.
4. **File a complaint:** Harassment complaints are filed with EEOC ([www.eeoc.gov](http://www.eeoc.gov)). EEOC will help you find your state's agency that also handles sexual harassment. You will be given papers to file a complaint. If sexual harassment is proven, action will be taken against the harasser to prevent further harassment and to remedy your loss.




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### QUICK CHECK:

1. a) Define sexual harassment. b) What 3 things does the law not consider illegal? c) Harassment is illegal when it is so often and bad that it results in what 2 things?
2. Give an example of a sexually harassing: a) verbal comment, b) physical act, c) gesture.
3. List 6 visual objects that may be considered sexually harassing.
4. What may employers **not** require as a basis for employment benefits or promotions?
5. If an employee reports sexual harassment, what 2 threats are illegal for the employer to make?
6. a) Which U.S. agency handles harassment claims? b) What else will this agency know?
7. List 5 types of discrimination EEOC handles.
8. List 4 steps you take to confront the harasser.
9. Why is it important to have a witness?
10. a) Define "document." b) List 4 things to document after you confront the harasser.
11. What 2 things should you tell the supervisor?
12. Why will most employers not tolerate this type of behavior in their business?
13. If the behavior continues, what 5 things should you continue to document in your notebook?
14. a) Where do you keep your document? b) Why?
15. What 2 things do you tell harasser in a letter?
16. What is the EEOC web site address?
17. If you were a manager of a restaurant, what will you do if the cashier came to you with a sexual harassment complaint against the cook? Give your answer in an essay of 25-words or more.
18. a) If you have high paying enjoyable job, will a sexual harasser make you feel like quitting this good job? b) Give a reason for your answer.