

Clarion Office
415A Wood St
Clarion, PA 16214
(814) 226-7273

Brookville Office
18 Western Ave Suite E
Brookville, PA 15825
(814) 849-5303

Dubois Office
90 Beaver Dr Suite 212D
Dubois, PA 15801
(814) 371-9677

www.passages-inc.org

About Sexual Harassment: An Overview

What is Sexual Harassment?

Sexual harassment includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal and physical harassment of a sexual nature. It can also include inappropriate statements or questions, lewd gestures, and sexually explicit jokes, comments, emails, and texts. These behaviors often occur in the workplace, but can also occur in any setting including schools, businesses, and public places. While sexual harassment is usually a tactic to coerce another into sexual activity, it is also used to humiliate and control others by using sex or sexually explicit material.

Forms of Sexual Harassment

- In many cases, the harasser initiates or demands sexual activity in exchange for a service or condition. For example, if a manager suggests sexual activity with an employee in exchange for a promotion (or not being fired), that is sexual harassment. If a teacher suggests sexual activity with a student in exchange for a good grade (or not receiving a bad grade), that is sexual harassment.
- We refer to work environments where sexually harassing behavior is pervasive as hostile work environments. Hostile work environments occur primarily in workplaces, academic settings, and in the military. In addition to soliciting sexual activity, harassers may also create a hostile work environment by making sexual jokes or innuendos or by showing pornography or other degrading images.
- Finally, street harassment is also a form of sexual harassment. Also known as cat-calling, street harassment occurs when a harasser directs unwanted sexually-explicit words or actions towards others in a public setting including streets, parks, and mass transit. As with all other forms of sexual harassment, street harassment is a tactic used to bully and humiliate others.

Other Considerations

- In many cases, the harasser is the victim's supervisor. However, a harasser can also be a supervisor in another department, a co-worker, or a client or customer.
- Studies conducted by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission show that victims of sexual harassment are predominantly women. It is not uncommon, however, for men to report sexual harassment as well.
- Young people are also at risk for sexual harassment. According to a 2005 study, 2/3 of university students surveyed reported sexual harassment either by their peers or by academic faculty including their instructors.
- Just because a specific incidence of sexual harassment isn't illegal -- cat-calling, for example -- does not mean that it is not serious or not potentially-traumatizing for the victim.

How You Can Help

- **Get Involved.** Volunteering with your local sexual violence victim advocacy center (such as PASSAGES, Inc.) is a good way to make your community safer and more supportive for survivors of sexual violence. For more information about volunteering with PASSAGES, please visit www.passages-inc.org/volunteering or email passages_outreachadvocate@verizon.net.
- **Learn More & Educate Others.** The National Sexual Violence Resource Center (www.nsvrc.org) has several resources for employers and victims of sexual harassment. Additionally, Hollaback.org has many tips for how to confront sexual harassment when it happens. Finally, Workplaces Respond to Domestic and Sexual Violence: A National Resource Center has many sample sexual harassment policies specifically designed to combat sexual violence in the workplace. Visit www.workplacesrespond.org for more information.
- **Be a Good Bystander.** Speak up against sexist jokes, disrespectful behavior, and other forms of verbal and physical harassment. This helps to create safer work environments and lets survivors know you're an ally if they need support.

References:

- Hill, Catherine and Elena Silva. 2005. Drawing the Line: Sexual Harassment on Campus. AAUW Educational Foundation.
PCAR & NSVRC. (n.d.) Talking Points: Sexual Harassment.
U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. (n.d.). Sexual harassment charges: EEOC & FEPAs combined: FY 1997-FY 2000.



PASSAGES, INC

1(800)793-3620