



WORKING TOGETHER TO PREVENT SEXUAL VIOLENCE

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TALKING POINTS: SEXUAL HARASSMENT

OUR VIEW

Sexual harassment is a form of sexual violence. Sexual harassment is not primarily about sex, but it's about power – and the abuse of that power. While people who sexually harass have many power-based tactics they use in order to defend their behaviors, the following are most common: cover-up the action, devalue the [victim], reinterpret the events, use official channels to give the appearance of justice or intimidate and bribe [victims], witnesses, and others (Scott & Martin, 2006).

WHAT IS SEXUAL HARASSMENT?

In addition to physical forms of assault, forms of sexual harassment can include inappropriate statements, lewd gestures, leering behavior, and sexually explicit jokes, emails, or texts. These behaviors can occur anytime or any place including businesses, schools, workplaces or public places. People who sexually harass do so in an effort to belittle, humiliate, and control others by using sex or sexually-explicit materials and language to make another person feel uncomfortable and fearful. Sometimes their motive is to have power over that person or to use the power they already have in order to coerce others into sexual activities. Their actions, although sexual in nature, are essentially about exerting power over another person.

COMMON FORMS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

*In Latin, **quid pro quo*** is defined as “this for that.” In other words, the harasser implies or demands sexual activities in exchange for a service or condition. Examples include not being hired or promoted at work, or not getting a good grade in class unless the person submits to sexual activities.

A **hostile work environment** *is created* when the actions of those who are sexually harassing become so pervasive that they affect an individual's work performance or create an offensive environment. Hostile work environments can exist in workplaces, academic settings and the military. Examples include sexual jokes or innuendoes, as well as displaying or viewing pornography and degrading images.

Street harassment occurs when someone directs unwanted sexually-explicit comments to others in public spaces, such as streets, parks or mass transit. It is propelled by a sense of entitlement and disrespect, and is used to intimidate and bully others.

STATISTICS

- In a survey of 1,965 students (grades 7-12), 48 percent reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment at school during the 2010-2011 school year. (Hill & Kearl, 2011).
- Reports show 56 percent of people who sexually harass in the workplace are coworkers, while the rest are supervisors, vendors, or customers. (Fineran & Gruber, 2009).

STATISTICS CONTINUED

- Victims of sexual harassment are predominantly women. In 2010, there were nearly 12,000 charges of sexual harassment received by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, of which 83 percent were filed by women (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, n.d.).
- In a 2008 survey of women, 95 percent reported being targets of leering while in public, 82 percent reported being the target of vulgar gestures, and 57 percent reported being touched or grabbed in a sexual way by a stranger in public (Stop Street Harassment, n.d.).

RESOURCES, HELP & PREVENTION

- **Get involved.** **Hollaback.org** is a movement dedicated to ending street harassment by giving tips to people on how to confront harassment when it occurs. **Stopstreetharassment.org** is a resource center where visitors can access lists of statistics, articles, films, and campaigns around street harassment as well as ideas for action to stop street harassment in their community.
- **Educate.** The National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) has several resources for employers and victims of sexual harassment. Visit **www.nsvrc.org** for more information on how to promote respect at work.
- **Engage bystanders.** Speaking up against sexist jokes or questioning disrespectful behaviors is an important step in creating safe environments. This is commonly referred to as the “bystander approach” and engages everyone in the prevention of sexual harassment.
- **Work together.** Partnering with local rape crisis centers is an important step in creating a community response to sexual harassment. To find local rape crisis centers in Pennsylvania, please visit the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape at **www.pcar.org**. To find a rape crisis center outside of Pennsylvania, please visit the National Sexual Violence Resource Center at **www.nsvrc.org**.
- **Create safe workplaces.** For more information, resources and sample policies specifically about sexual violence in the workplace visit Workplaces Respond to Domestic and Sexual Violence: A National Resource Center at **www.workplacesrespond.org**.

REFERENCES

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