



## Sexual harassment in the workplace It's time for change

**Over half of women experienced workplace harassment in 2017, according to the Trades Union Congress.**

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) thinks it's time for change.

### The EHRC wants to force employers to:

- > publish their sexual harassment policy
- > show the steps they take to implement the policy in their business
- > follow a statutory code of practice when dealing with a harassment allegation

## 8 ways to get yourself ready for change

1

### Have an anti-harassment policy and make sure employees know about it

Familiarise yourself with your policies so that you can take swift action. Employees will feel that the policy has integrity if you demonstrate familiarity and stick to the steps. Train your employees on your anti-harassment stance and train your managers on dealing with allegations.

2

### Understand what sexual harassment is and know the signs

Sexual harassment occurs when a person is subjected to unwanted conduct of a sexual nature. Be wary of "banter" - one person's banter is another person's harassment. Make sure you can recognise the signs - is someone more withdrawn than normal? Avoiding social events? Performance dipping? Suddenly having more time off sick?

3

### Break the "culture of silence"

Be visible to your staff and encourage frank conversations. Don't wait for a complaint to be made. If you think you spot the signs of harassment, sensitively approach the employee. Consider allocating one named person to receive harassment complaints.

4

### Take all complaints seriously

Laughing off a complaint could be damaging. If informal comments are made, sensitively probe the employee further. Remember male employees can be victims of harassment too.

5

### Thorough investigation

Complaints should be investigated thoroughly. Consider separating the parties during the investigation. Don't assume guilt; a complaint does not always mean that harassment/bullying took place.

6

### Discipline where necessary

Take disciplinary action against those found to have harassed others, up to an including dismissal.

7

### Don't use yourself as a yardstick

Harassment is about individual perception; there is no standard benchmark. It doesn't matter that you wouldn't have been offended by the same comment/behaviour towards you.

8

### Just because it happens outside of work does not mean it is not your problem

Work social events are an extension of the workplace. Harassment that takes place during these events needs to be dealt with as if it happened at work.

# Examples of sexual harassment



Jokes and gestures of a lewd/sexual nature



Language of a sexual nature, whether spoken or written



Office gossip about employees' private lives



Sexual advances, lewd banter, graphic discussions/humour



Touching or other unwelcome physical contact



Sexually suggestive or sexually explicit material displayed in the workplace

## KEY FINDINGS AND QUOTES FROM EHRG REPORT ON HARASSMENT

### “Turning the tables – ending sexual harassment at work”

The most common perpetrator of sexual harassment was a senior colleague

A quarter of people surveyed were harassed by customers, clients or service users

A number of responses showed harassment occurred before employment began i.e. in the recruitment stage

People believe senior colleagues are seen as “untouchable” by HR and so do not report harassment

One respondent “felt too intimidated to go to senior management as all were male and colluded with harassment”

My employer laughed off the incident as “boys being boys”

In around half of the cases where individuals did report an incident, respondents said that employers took no action as a result

In October to December 2017, 1300 sex discrimination claims, including sexual harassment were made to employment tribunal.

Claims relating to sex discrimination and harassment have increased by 94.8% since last year.