

# 10 HARASSMENT AND DISCRIMINATION IN THE WORKPLACE



## PURPOSE

The purpose of this activity is to introduce young workers to the concepts of harassment and discrimination in the workplace. Knowing how to recognize inappropriate behavior in the workplace is an important factor in successful and professional communication at work. Young workers will also learn where they can seek help should they encounter harassment and discrimination in the workplace.

## ACTIVITY TIME

Approximately 15 minutes

## PREPARATION

- Print PUSH Cards.

## DIRECTIONS

Supervisor reads out loud

**Supervisor reads out loud**

## SUPERVISOR READS QUESTION

- ✘ Do not read out loud*



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## BACKGROUND

Today we will be discussing harassment and discrimination at work. **Harassment at work is behavior directed at an individual that makes them feel uncomfortable or degraded and interferes with their ability to do their job. Harassment is unwelcome conduct that can include intimidation, threats, coercion, and sexual advances.** It can be based on gender, race, age, religion, disability, national origin, sexual orientation, age, or genetic information. Harassment tends to be repeated, meaning the conduct occurs more than once.

Sexual harassment is a very common type of harassment that occurs in the workplace. There are two main forms of sexual harassment:

- ☉ The first form is **quid pro quo**, a Latin term for “**This for that.**” This type of harassment is perpetrated by a person in a position of power; for example, a supervisor who promises a promotion in exchange for sexual favors.
- ☉ The second form is a **hostile or offensive work environment**. This arises when a perpetrator’s conduct is so severe and pervasive that it negatively affects a person’s job performance. This type of harassment can be perpetrated by anyone in the work environment. Examples might include:
  - ☉ Degrading words, jokes, or unwanted comments
  - ☉ Physical contact or offensive gestures
  - ☉ Asking, demanding, or any attempt to get sexual attention from another person

Sexual harassment is not something that only affects women in the workplace. **People of all gender identities can be sexually harassed.**

By law, employers must investigate complaints of harassment. **Managers and supervisors have a responsibility to treat all complaints seriously and follow through to make sure that the staff member is not punished for reporting harassment.**

There are many things a victim of harassment can do, and they all involve communicating effectively. Some tips to dealing with harassment include:

- ☉ Speak up: Tell the harasser to stop.
- ☉ Put it in writing: Record details of the events.
- ☉ Report the incident: Send your written reports to a supervisor or human resources.
- ☉ Find a witness: Ask for a written statement from anyone that observed the harassment.

## DOES ANYONE KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HARASSMENT AND DISCRIMINATION?

- ✘ *Let staff answer and read the following definitions when they are done.*

**Discrimination is biased or unequal treatment of someone because of a characteristic of the person including their age, color, disability, gender identity or expression, genetic information, marital status, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or veteran status.** Examples of workplace discrimination include refusing to hire someone because of their religion or denying someone a promotion because of their sexual orientation.

Harassment, on the other hand, deals with the social environment. For example, a co-worker makes derogatory jokes about certain religious beliefs. Sexual harassment would be any verbal, physical or visual communication in the workplace that is unwelcome, inappropriate or offensive—for example a co-worker touching another co-worker’s bottom.

**Reporting discrimination is important.** Not only is it unfair, it is illegal! In many cases, discrimination is something perpetrated by a person with status, like a supervisor, hiring official, or manager. Discrimination can be reported outside of your workplace to organizations like the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, or EEOC. They have a website and staff that will help you file a complaint.

## ACTIVITY

For this activity, I'll read statements regarding harassment and discrimination. Some of these statements are true; others are false. We'll discuss why you think the answer is true or false, and then I'll read it out loud to see if you were correct.

## QUESTIONS

- ✘ *Read each question and facilitate a conversation about the topic when possible.*

*After calling on staff, read the entire answer.*

### 1. THE BEST WAY TO STOP HARASSMENT IS BY IGNORING IT.

- ✘ *Call on staff.*

**False.** Many harassers repeat their behavior and do not stop just because their actions are ignored. Speak up. Tell the harasser to stop the behavior, write down the details and witnesses and report it to a trusted adult or supervisor.

### 2. SEXUAL HARASSMENT MUST INVOLVE TOUCHING OR PHYSICAL CONTACT.

- ✘ *Call on staff.*

**False.** Physical contact is only one type of sexual harassment. Other types can include verbal, visual or written actions.

### 3. WOMEN MAKE 79 PERCENT OF WHAT MEN MAKE IN THE WORKPLACE.

- ✘ *Call on staff.*

**True.** Studies show that women often make less than their male counterparts for the same job, despite similar education and experience. Women of color are often affected most by wage gaps. Women everywhere should feel empowered to negotiate their salary and wages. Don't feel afraid to use professional communication skills and speak up if you feel you deserve more. Do research and ask coworkers. Tips for negotiating salary can be found online.

### 4. MEN ARE NEVER VICTIMS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT.

- ✘ *Call on staff.*

**False.** Although studies suggest that victims are usually females, 10–20% of men have also been victims. Additionally, the number of harassment claims filed by men have almost tripled in the last 15 years.

**5. IF THE HARASSER IS A CUSTOMER OR CLIENT, THEIR BEHAVIOR IS NOT CONSIDERED HARASSMENT.**

✘ *Call on staff. If they get the answer correct, give them a prize.*

**False.** It is your employer's responsibility to protect its staff from the actions of customers, vendors, and clients. Just as you would with a co-worker, speak up, document, and report.

**6. IN THE 1980s, PEOPLE WERE FIRED FROM THEIR JOBS BECAUSE THEY WERE DIAGNOSED WITH AIDS.**

✘ *Call on staff.*

**True.** Sadly, several landmark lawsuits took place in the late 80's and early 90's that drew attention to the fact that individuals were being fired from their jobs because of their health status and the stigma surrounding the disease. Today, no employer can discriminate against a staff member based on disability or sexual orientation.

**7. HARASSMENT AND DISCRIMINATION ARE THINGS THAT OLDER WORKERS DO TO YOUNGER WORKERS, BUT NOT THE OTHER WAY AROUND.**

✘ *Call on staff.*

**False!** You can be the victim or the perpetrator of harassment and discrimination at any age.

**GREAT JOB EVERYONE!**

Knowing how to identify harassment and discrimination is only half the battle. Over the past 25 years, the workplace has changed dramatically.

**Today, the law protects people from unfair treatment because of who they are as a person.**

Unfortunately, it was not always this way and if it weren't for people that spoke up when they were victims of harassment and discrimination things would not have changed!

Talk to your manager if you are uncomfortable with someone's behavior. If you feel like your employer is unresponsive, contact your state's OSHA or Bureau of Labor to get help.

**PUSH FORWARD**

✘ *Pass out PUSH cards.*

On your card is a link to the Promoting U through Safety and Health page ([www.promotingusafetyhealth.com](http://www.promotingusafetyhealth.com)). If you follow this page you can learn about other ways to stay safe at home and at work.