

I NEED HELP WITH A
SEXUALIZED WORKPLACE

DATE

I am disclosing to you, my employer, that I believe I am experiencing sexual harassment in our workplace. The issue is not one person's behaviour, but a workplace culture that has become heavily sexualized — with frequent sexual jokes, comments, and materials.

I need your help. The sexualization of our workplace is making it harder for me to do my job, and I'd like you to take steps to make things better.

A WHAT I NEED FROM YOU — MY PRIVACY PREFERENCE

- ☐ I want this complaint to be anonymous — please don't try to find out who I am
- ☐ I am okay with you knowing it's me who complained, but please don't tell anyone else
- ☐ I am okay with you knowing it's me who complained, and I am okay with you telling other people
- ☐ I would prefer it if nobody ever knows there was a complaint

B WHAT I WANT YOU TO UNDERSTAND

- ☐ A sexualized workplace is inappropriate
- ☐ Sexual jokes, comments, and materials are not acceptable at work
- ☐ People who object shouldn't be mocked, excluded, or punished

C WHAT I WANT YOU TO DO

- ☐ Investigate the situation
- ☐ Hold off on an investigation for now
- ☐ Make it clear to everyone that sexual jokes, comments, and materials are not acceptable here at work
- ☐ Ensure that people who object to it aren't mocked, excluded, or punished
- ☐ Talk with me about what's happening
- ☐ Talk with me about how to repair opportunities I may have lost because of this problem
- ☐ I'm not sure yet — I would like to talk about options.

Thank you for reading this request and taking it seriously.

Workplace sexual harassment is often handled badly simply because people misunderstand each other. That's why we made this handout — to help workers explain what's wrong, and to help employers understand and respond in ways that make things better.

WHAT A SEXUALIZED WORKPLACE LOOKS LIKE

Sexualized work environments can develop in many ways.

- ◆ **Male-dominated settings:** Groups of men create an atmosphere of joking, teasing, or objectifying women.
- ◆ **Queer-majority settings:** Sexual openness becomes part of the culture — open talk about sex, sexualized art, or sexual humour — often rooted in a desire to destigmatize queer sexuality.
- ◆ **Blurred-boundary settings:** Youth-dominated teams, alcohol-heavy or travel-heavy jobs, very small or “family-like” workplaces, and creative or lifestyle sectors such as fitness, entertainment, fashion, or beauty.

In any of these settings, sex can become “in the air,” and anyone uncomfortable with it may feel pressured to join in or risk exclusion.

WHO IT AFFECTS

A sexualized workplace can be uncomfortable for anyone — but especially for:

- ◆ Women in male-dominated environments
- ◆ Religious or socially conservative people
- ◆ Younger workers who see sexual talk without consent as coercive
- ◆ Introverts or neurodiverse people who find sexual banter exhausting
- ◆ Members of sexual-minority groups who don’t wish to disclose their sexuality at work
- ◆ People who are reserved, want to come across as professional, or are simply uninterested in sexual topics

These workers aren't uptight or humourless — they just want a professional environment.

THE IMPACT ON WORKERS

- ◆ Those who don’t join in may be labelled “not team players,” leading to exclusion, stress, diminished performance, and lost opportunities.
- ◆ Some end up leaving because the environment feels unpleasant or unsafe.

THE IMPACT ON EMPLOYERS

- ◆ A sexualized culture is never appropriate, even if most say they’re okay with it.
- ◆ It can hurt recruitment and retention, worsen performance, and create legal and reputational risk.
- ◆ Under Canadian law, a sexualized workplace can constitute harassment.

WHAT EMPLOYERS SHOULD KNOW AND DO

1. **Draw clear lines:** Fun and lively is fine; sexualized is not.
2. **Act quickly to shut down inappropriate behaviour:** don’t wait for a formal complaint.
3. **Protect people who object:** Make sure they aren’t mocked, excluded, or punished.
4. **Ensure confidentiality:** Handle complaints discreetly and respectfully.
5. **Repair harm:** If someone has lost opportunities for opting out, ask how to make it right.